

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DECISION DIR 096 FOR LIMITED & CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED SUGARCANE

What is this application for?

BSES Ltd has received approval to trial, under limited and controlled conditions, 6,000 lines of genetically modified sugarcane (a line means plants derived from a single plant which contains the original genetic modification). The field trial would take place on six BSES stations in the Queensland shires of Moreton Bay, Bundaberg, Mackay, Burdekin and Cairns, on a maximum area of 26 ha, between November 2009 and November 2015.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the trial is to evaluate agronomic properties of the GM sugarcane lines grown under field conditions. Promising lines will be selected for crossing under controlled conditions to non-GM sugarcane cultivars for possible future commercial development (subject to additional approvals). The GM sugarcane will not be used for human food or animal feed.

How have the GM sugarcane lines been modified?

A number of the GM sugarcane lines will contain two genes conferring tolerance to specific herbicides. The introduced genes are derived from a common food plant and a bacterial species. The remainder of the lines will function as controls to which the agronomic properties of GM sugarcane lines will be compared. Some of the GM sugarcane lines, including the control lines will contain a widely used reporter gene that codes for a non-toxic protein which provides a visual indication of which plant tissues express the gene. The gene is derived from a jellyfish. Some of the GM sugarcane lines, including the control lines will contain antibiotic resistance selectable marker genes derived from a common gut bacterium. These selectable marker genes were only used to identify GM cells and GM plants during early stages of development of the GM sugarcane in the laboratory.

What controls have been imposed for this release?

The Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) for this application concluded that the release poses negligible risks to people and the environment. However, licence conditions have been imposed to restrict the release to the size, locations and duration requested by the applicant as these were important considerations in the assessment process. As well as limits on the scale of the release, control measures have been imposed to restrict the spread and persistence of the GMOs and their introduced genetic material. These include ensuring that the GM sugarcane plants in the field are isolated from non-GM sugarcane plants; that transport and storage of the GM plant materials are in accordance with the Regulator's guidelines or as otherwise specified in the licence; and monitoring for, and destroying, any sugarcane plants on the release site for at least one year after final harvest and until no volunteers are observed for a continuous six month period.

Want more information?

A number of documents relating to this decision are available on the OGTR website (<<http://www.ogtr.gov.au>> under "What's New") or via Freecall 1800 181 030. These documents include the finalised RARMP, an Executive Summary, a Technical Summary and a copy of the full licence.