

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DECISION DIR 101 FOR THE LIMITED AND CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED COTTON

What is this licence for?

Monsanto Australia Ltd (Monsanto) has received approval to trial, under limited and controlled conditions, two genetically modified (GM) cottons. The trial will take place on up to 50 sites per year between October 2010 and October 2014, including summer plantings in current cotton growing regions of Queensland and New South Wales, and winter plantings in prospective cotton growing areas in the north west of Western Australia. The maximum combined area of plantings would be 50 ha in the first year, 100 ha in the second year, and 500 ha per year in the third and fourth years.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the trial is to generate data for future submissions to regulatory agencies, to breed and develop varieties using elite germplasm suitable for use under Australian conditions, and for seed increase. Material from the GM cotton would not be used in human food or animal feed.

How have the GM cottons been modified?

The GM cottons have been modified for insect resistance either alone or in combination with a herbicide tolerance trait. These GM cottons, to be known as Bollgard III cotton and Bollgard III/Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton, will be produced by conventionally breeding GM VIP3A insect resistant cotton with the commercially released GM cottons Bollgard II[®] cotton (insect resistant) and Bollgard II[®]/Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton (insect resistant/herbicide tolerant). The GM cottons also contain marker genes, including antibiotic resistance genes, that were originally derived from common bacteria. These were used to identify transformed plants during initial development of the GM plants in the laboratory.

Is this the first field trial of these GM cottons in Australia?

There has been no previous release of these GM cottons in Australia. However, two of three parental GM cottons, Bollgard II[®] and Bollgard II[®]/Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton, are grown commercially in Australia. Several field trials of the third parental GM cotton, VIP3A cotton, have been authorised in Australia. All parental GM cottons have been commercially released overseas. No adverse effects have been reported from the commercial release or field trials of these GM cottons.

What controls are imposed for this release?

The Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) for this application concludes that the release poses negligible risks to people or the environment. However, a range of licence conditions have been imposed to limit 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 GM cottons and the introduced genetic material. These include ensuring that: the GM cotton plants in the field are surrounded by a 20 m pollen trap or are at least 3 km from the nearest cotton crop; that transport and storage of the GM plant materials are in accordance with the Regulator's guidelines; and release sites are monitored for any cotton plants after harvest for at least one year, and any volunteer cotton destroyed, 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.