Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 162 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) wheat

What is this application for?

CSIRO is requesting a licence to grow bread wheat and durum wheat plants that have been genetically modified to improve their resistance to rust disease. Rust diseases, including stem rust, leaf rust and stripe rust, can reduce the yield and quality of wheat crops. If approved, the proposed trial would take place between August 2018 and September 2023, in the ACT and the Hilltops Council area in NSW. The trial would be small, with a maximum area of 40 m^2 in each growing season.

How will the GM wheat be modified?

The GM wheat plants would contain either a single introduced disease resistance gene or a combination of up to eight introduced genes for disease resistance. Some of these genes provide enhanced resistance to stem rust and some confer enhanced resistance to a combination of rust diseases and powdery mildew, another important disease of wheat. The genes come from crops – rye or bread wheat – or from plant species closely related to bread wheat.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The trial is to assess the performance of the GM wheat plants under field conditions. This assessment would include factors such as how well the GM wheat plants resist rust disease and important agricultural characteristics such as plant growth and grain yield. The GM wheat grown in this field trial would not be used in human food or animal feed.

What controls are proposed for this release?

A consultation Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) has been prepared for this application. This assessment concluded that the field trial poses negligible risks to people or the environment. However, as this is a field trial, a range of licence conditions have been drafted that the applicant would have to fulfil. These conditions would limit the size, location and duration of the trial, as well as restrictions on any wheat leaving the trial site. For example, there are conditions to minimise dispersal of the GMOs and GM pollen from the trial site, to securely transport and store the GMOs, and to inspect the site at the end of the trial to check that all GM plants are destroyed. Full details of the draft licence conditions are available in the consultation RARMP. This RARMP is now available for comment.

How can I comment on this application?

You are invited to submit your comments on the consultation version of the RARMP for application DIR 162. The full consultation RARMP and a summary are available on the What's New page of the OGTR website or via the Freecall number below. Your comments would be appreciated on any risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment from the proposed release. Please note that the consultation period closes on **12 June 2018** and written submissions are required by that date.

What are the next steps in the evaluation process?

The RARMP will be finalised, taking into account submissions received about the protection of people or the environment. The RARMP will then be used by the Regulator to decide whether or not to issue a licence for the trial.

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