

Gene Technology Ethics Committee Meeting

19-20 July 2004, Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) held its seventh meeting in Canberra on the 19th and 20th of July 2004.

GTEC was established by the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (the Act) as a statutory advisory committee to the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) and the Gene Technology Ministerial Council. All committee members and expert advisers hold office on a part-time basis. (A reference to 'members' in the communique includes 'expert advisers').

At its July 2004 meeting, the current GTEC working groups reported on their progress since the previous GTEC meeting. In addition, members received presentations from Biotechnology Australia and the Office on of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR). Members were also informed of relevant work of other Gene Technology Advisory Committees via cross-members reports, and received reports from the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) and the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC). A Chair's activity report and a report from the Gene Technology Regulator on activities of the OGTR were also provided to members for their information. Key outcomes from the meeting are reported below.

GTEC's Work Plan

GTEC's first communique from its inaugural meeting in December 2001 detailed a number of priority areas that would form the basis of the Committee's future work plan and result in the provision of advice to the Regulator. Since that time the working groups have been developing and refining their ideas out-of-session and at each subsequent meeting of the Committee. Details of the status of a number of the current working groups are provided below for information.

Ethical Guidelines in Relation to Genetically Modified Organisms

The working group presented a revised report which had been amended out-of-session to incorporate comments from the previous GTEC meeting. The Committee recommended a number of amendments to the working group. The working group informed the Committee that the guidelines are of interest to other government agencies. The working group will circulate a revised version of the guidelines to the Committee out-of-session later this year.

Ethical Issues Associated with Trans-species Gene Transfer¹

Since the previous GTEC meeting, GTEC sought further comment from the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC) and the Gene Technology Community Consultative Committee (GTCCC). GTTAC and GTCCC first commented on the paper in

¹ Previously titled *Ethical Issues Associated with Transkingdom Gene Transfer*. 'Trans-species' more accurately reflects the matters discussed in the paper.

November 2003 and December 2003 respectively. GTEC valued these additional comments and resolved to incorporate them where possible. A revised draft paper will be considered by GTEC out-of-session later this year.

Once finalised, the paper will be published on the Committee's page on the OGTR website.

Managing Risk Ethically

GTEC considered comments received from GTTAC and GTCCC. GTEC resolved to make minor amendments to the paper in light of these comments. GTEC also resolved to refer the paper to the OGTR as part of the review of the Risk Analysis Framework. Once finalised, the *Managing Risk Ethically* paper will be available on the OGTR website.

GMOs, Lay Understandings and Civic Ethics (A History of Ideas about Environmental Precautions)

This paper was discussed in detail by the Committee and several amendments were suggested to the working group. The Committee noted the paper would provide further background information to other GTEC papers. The working group will revise the paper and it will be considered by GTEC again later this year.

GTEC and Relationships with Other Committees

The Committee welcomed an observer from the AWC who provided a report on relevant AWC activities. GTEC also heard a report from the AHEC, including a discussion of the progress of the development of animal-to-human transplant guidelines to which GTEC provided two submissions.

A representative from Biotechnology Australia presented the outcomes of the third stage of a tracking study titled *Biotechnology Public Awareness Survey 2003*. The study aims to determine the level of knowledge in the community regarding gene technology and attitudes towards this technology. Further information about Biotechnology Australia and the survey is available from the Biotechnology Australia website www.biotechnology.gov.au.

GTEC also received a presentation from a representative of the OGTR updating members on the progress of the review of the Risk Analysis Framework. GTEC was advised that its members, Australian Government agencies and the public would be invited to comment on the revised draft in August 2004.

GTEC provided comment on two draft papers from the GTCCC. Further information about the activities of the GTCCC is available from the OGTR website.

The Regulator reported on the operations of the OGTR. This information is publicly available in the Quarterly Reports of the Gene Technology Regulator on the OGTR website, or by request by phoning the number below.

Next Meeting

The next GTEC meeting is scheduled for late 2004.

**For all inquiries, please contact the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on
1800 181 030 (free-call)**