

Gene Technology Ethics Committee Meeting

15 November 2005, Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) held its tenth meeting in Canberra on the 15 November 2005.

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 communiqué includes 'expert advisers').

At its November 2005 meeting, the current GTEC working groups reported on their activities since the previous meeting and received feedback and suggestions to further develop their projects. Members received a presentation by a guest from Biotechnology Australia on the bioethics survey series and were informed of relevant work from other national committees via cross-member reports. In addition, members received a report from the Gene Technology Regulator on the operations of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR).

Key outcomes from the tenth meeting are reported below.

GTEC's Work Plan

Details of the current GTEC working group projects are provided below for information.

National Framework for the Development of Ethical Principles in Gene Technology

The working group presented an overview of the development of the Framework noting a number of issues raised during the public consultation. Based on the consultation, the working group suggested a number of changes to improve and clarify the Framework.

The Committee resolved that the working group should hold a face to face meeting to revise the document, taking into account comments provided by GTEC at this meeting and the comments received from the consultation process. The Committee will then conduct another round of public consultation, including specifically inviting comments from those who previously commented on the Framework.

Ethical Issues Associated with Trans-species Gene Transfer

The working group presented the revised document for GTEC's consideration. The Committee identified some editorial changes and agreed that, subject to the editorial changes, the document is ready for finalisation.

Future Projects

The Committee considered a number of possible avenues for future work. The Committee agreed to form a working group to explore how the inclusion of the environment in ethical considerations differentiates GTEC's work from other ethics committees. The committee agreed that the working group should develop a position paper on this matter.

In relation to other matters, GTEC agreed to examine the issue of biodiversity and resolved to maintain a watching brief on plant-made and animal-made pharmaceuticals.

Review of the Gene Technology Act 2000

The Committee considered the issues papers published in October 2005 by the Review Panel. Members discussed the option of possibly combining the functions of GTEC and the Gene Technology Community Consultative Committee and noted some concerns about the effective functioning of a combined Committee. The Committee also considered the suggestion that social, cultural, economic and trade matters should be incorporated into the Act noting that they are not precluded from considering such matters.

GTEC provided a submission in response to the Review Panel's call for submissions. The Committee noted that GTEC representatives would meet with the Review Panel to discuss GTEC's submission and the Issue Papers on 13 December 2005. Further information about the review process is available from the Gene Technology Ministerial Council website <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/gtreview>

GTEC and Relationships with Other Committees

The Committee received reports from the Chair, the Gene Technology Regulator and GTTAC. A written report from the Australian Health and Ethics Committee was also received and tabled.

The Committee agreed to consider and comment on the draft *Guidelines for the creation, breeding and use of genetically modified and cloned animals for scientific purposes* prepared by the Animal Welfare Committee.

Next Meeting

The next GTEC meeting will be held on 30 March 2006.

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