

Gene Technology Ethics Committee Meeting

30 March 2006, Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) held its eleventh meeting in Canberra on 30 March 2006.

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 March 2006 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 the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) on horizontal gene transfer. In addition, members were informed of relevant work from other national committees via cross-member reports and received a report on the operations of the OGTR. Relevant members reported back to the Committee about the Working Group meeting with the Independent Review Panel and the Victorian Biotechnology Ethics Advisory Committee launch of the *Statement of Ethical Principles for Biotechnology in Victoria*. Key outcomes from the 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 latest round of consultation and the presentation on the Framework given to the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC). The Working Group suggested a number of changes to improve and clarify the Framework and discussed options for publication and ongoing development of the document.

The Committee resolved that the Working Group should edit the Framework in light of the comments received during the consultation and from GTTAC, and explore options for publication, prior to finalising the Framework and referring it to the Regulator.

Ethical Issues Associated with Trans-species Gene Transfer

The Working Group presented the revised document for GTEC's consideration. The Committee identified some minor editorial changes and agreed that, subject to the editorial changes, the document is ready to be finalised.

Environmental Ethics and Gene Technology

The Working Group presented the Committee with a preliminary draft discussion paper on environmental ethics and the implications for gene technology. The Committee discussed the ways that different environmental philosophies and the specifications of the Act influence its deliberations.

The Committee resolved to develop the paper further, taking into consideration differing viewpoints and the context provided by the Act. The Working Group was invited to develop a map of issues which warrant further discussion.

Future Projects

The Committee considered a number of subjects as possible future working group projects. These included applicant suitability, possible dual or malevolent uses of gene technology and the current state of knowledge of gene technology. The Committee decided to invite guest speakers on each of these topics to the next meeting to provide members with further information.

GTEC and Relationships with Other Committees

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

The Committee agreed to consider and comment on the AWC's draft paper *Minimising pain, distress and suffering in animals in research*.

Next Meeting

The next GTEC meeting will be held in July 2006.

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