

Gene Technology Ethics Committee Meeting

14-15 March 2007, Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) held its fourteenth meeting in Canberra on 14-15 March 2007.

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').

The 14-15 March meeting included a combined session with the Gene Technology Community Consultative Committee (GTCCC).

The main items discussed were the further promotion of the *National Framework for the Development of Ethical Principles in Gene Technology* and developments in the area of biopharming. During the combined session with GTCCC, the Committees discussed the *State, Territory and Australian Governments' Response to the Recommendations of the Statutory Review of the Gene Technology Act 2000 and the Gene Technology Agreement 2001*, and the GTCCC working group project on the current community consultation practices of the OGTR. Members of both Committees also received reports from the Chair regarding relevant events he has attended since the last GTEC and GTCCC meetings, and from the Regulator regarding the ongoing and completed work of the Office. Members were informed of relevant work from other national committees via cross-member reports.

Key outcomes from the fourteenth meeting are reported below.

GTEC's Work Plan

National Framework for the Development of Ethical Principles in Gene Technology

Members considered feedback on the Framework which has been received since the official public launch of the document on 15 November 2006. Members agreed to attend meetings within their States, which will be arranged later in the year, to discuss the Framework with IBCs and researchers.

Biopharming

GTEC was given an overview of the current state of the technology for using genetically modified plants to produce therapeutics, often referred to as 'biopharming'. The Committee discussed ethical issues that may be associated with the technology and technical aspects of the research, with reference to US research recently reported in the media.

The Committee agreed to consider the relevant literature and the development of a scoping paper on the topic.

Review of the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (the Act) – All of Governments’ Response

GTEC and GTCCC were given a presentation outlining the Governments’ response to the recommendations of the Review of the Act. In particular, the members noted the recommendation to combine the roles of the two Committees.

‘Community Consultation and Participation’

GTEC and GTCCC discussed the working group paper on ‘Community Consultation and Participation’, which was initiated by the original membership of GTCCC and further developed by the new membership.

The Committees agreed that the OGTR already has good systems in place for community consultation and suggested methods for evaluating the existing systems and identifying possible areas for improvement.

GTEC and Relationships with Other Committees

The Committee received reports from the Chair, the Gene Technology Regulator, the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC), the Gene Technology Community Consultative Committee (GTCCC) and the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC).

GTEC noted that the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) *Guidelines for the generation, breeding, care and use of genetically modified and cloned animals for scientific purposes* would soon be published and would be co-badged by GTEC.

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