

Gene Technology Ethics Committee Meeting 7 June 2005, Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) held its ninth meeting in Canberra on 7 June 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 June 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 four presentations by invited guests and were informed of relevant work from other national committees via cross-member reports. In addition, members received a report from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) on the recent Institutional Biosafety Committee forum and a report from the Regulator on activities undertaken by the OGTR since the eighth meeting held in March 2005. 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.

Ethical Issues Associated with Transpecies Gene Transfer

The working group presented the revised document and responses to comments that had been received from the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC). GTEC agreed that it is worth progressing this paper further and that additional collaboration with GTTAC should be sought.

The Committee suggested a number of ways to improve the readability and to clarify the purpose and audience of this paper.

Ethical Statement in relation to Genetically Modified Organisms

The working group presented an update on the progress of the ethical statement. GTEC discussed the importance of ensuring that the purpose of the document is applicable across a broad range of audiences and ways of clarifying the values and principles expressed in the document. Once the revised document has been considered by GTEC, it will be circulated to key organisations, industry and international organisations for consultation, as part of a staggered public consultation.

GTEC and Relationships with Other Committees

The Committee welcomed a new observer from the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) to the meeting who gave an overview of the operations of the AWC and how it operated within the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

GTEC also welcomed invited guests representing the following organisations:

- Biotechnology Australia; presented an overview of the organisation including information about the Biotechnology Liaison Committee and ongoing surveys to monitor public opinions about gene technology.
- Department of the Environment and Heritage; presented an introductory overview to the concept of benefit sharing.
- Victorian Biotechnology Ethics Advisory Committee (VBEAC); VBEAC is currently developing an ethical code and a map detailing existing codes and guidelines. GTEC previously provided comments on a draft version of these documents.
- Victorian Department of Health; presented a report on the meeting of the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), held in Thailand 23-25 March 2005.

The OGTR provided an overview of how the new Risk Analysis Framework (RAF) will change the risk assessment process. The risk assessment process is currently going through a stage of transition in the OGTR to conform to the new RAF. The RAF is available on the OGTR website or on request by phoning the number below.

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) was introduced to GTEC and advice was sought in relation to a paper that will be presented to a meeting of technical experts on the BWC, regarding links between gene technology, environmental ethics and the biological weapons.

As a standing item at every GTEC meeting, the Committee receives verbal reports on activities from the cross-members with the Australian Health Ethics Committee, GTTAC and the GTCCC. Communiqués covering meetings for all gene technology advisory committees are publicly available from the OGTR website.

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

Next Meeting

The next GTEC meeting will be held in November 2005.

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