

Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 199 – commercial release of genetically modified banana plants

What is this application for?

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is seeking approval for commercial cultivation of genetically modified (GM) banana plants. The GM banana plants have been modified for resistance to the fungal disease Fusarium wilt tropical race 4 (TR4), also known as Panama disease. This is a serious banana disease that attacks nearly all banana varieties, including Cavendish and Lady Finger.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has also received an application, A1274, and will assess the food safety of the GM banana and its products as food for human consumption.

How have the GM banana plants been modified?

The GM banana plants contain an introduced gene from wild banana *Musa acuminata* ssp. *malaccensis*. The gene was introduced into the Cavendish banana cultivar Grand Nain using *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation, a commonly used method for GM plants.

The GM banana plants also contain a selectable marker gene from common bacteria. This gene was used to select GM banana plants during initial development in the laboratory.

What is the purpose of the release?

The purpose of the proposed release is to allow commercial production of the GM banana plants Australia-wide, subject to restrictions in some Australian States and Territories for marketing or biosecurity reasons. The GM banana plants and their products would enter general commerce, including use in human food and animal feed. The applicant indicated they do not intend the GM banana plants to replace the current Cavendish banana cultivars growing in Australia, but rather to provide a safety net to the Australian banana industry should it be heavily impacted by Panama disease.

What is the process for considering this application?

The licence application will be subject to comprehensive, science-based risk analysis. The process includes two rounds of stakeholder consultation. In the first round, the Regulator will seek advice from prescribed experts, agencies and authorities prior to preparing a consultation Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP). The RARMP focuses on identifying risks to people and to the environment that may be posed by the commercial cultivation of the GM banana plants. Following public release of the consultation RARMP, submissions will again be sought from stakeholders, this time including the public. The RARMP will then be finalised taking into account submissions received and inform the Regulator's decision whether or not to issue a licence.

FSANZ will consider the application it received from QUT for the sale and use of food derived from the GM banana plants in a separate process in accordance with its legislation.

How can I comment on this application?

The consultation RARMP for this application is expected to be released for public comment in **August 2023**. Its release will be advertised in newspapers, and it will be available on the OGTR website along with a range of supporting information. While comment is not being sought from the public at this stage, you can obtain a copy of the full application by contacting the OGTR. Please quote the application number DIR 199. A summary of the application is available on the [OGTR website](#) or by contacting the OGTR.

You can access information relating to the GM food application, A1274, and to food labelling, on the [FSANZ](#) website.