

Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 199 – commercial release of genetically modified (GM) 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.

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 to produce 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 cultivation of these GM banana plants in all banana-growing areas of Australia, subject to restrictions in some Australian States and Territories for marketing reasons. Commercial banana production occurs mainly in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The GM banana plants and their products would enter general commerce. 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.

Have products from these GM banana plants received any other approvals in Australia?

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is responsible for food safety. Queensland University of Technology have also made an application to FSANZ, seeking approval to use food derived from these GM banana plants in food. FSANZ are currently consulting on the **safety assessment** that was prepared as part of their decision-making process. **Food labelling requirements** are also addressed as part of this process. You will find more information on the [FSANZ website](#).

What controls are proposed for this release?

The licence application proposes an ongoing commercial release, with no restrictions on how the GM banana plants are grown or used. The Gene Technology Regulator has prepared a consultation Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP), which finds that the proposed commercial release of these GM banana plants poses negligible risk to the health and safety of people or the environment. However, licence conditions drafted in the consultation RARMP would ensure that there is ongoing oversight of the release.

How can I comment on this application?

The full consultation RARMP for application DIR 199 and a summary of the RARMP are available on the [OGTR website](#) or via the contacts listed below. You are invited to submit your written comments (including email) on the consultation version of the RARMP, related to any risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment from the proposed release. Comments must be received by the close of the consultation period on **6 November 2023**.

What are the next steps in the evaluation process?

The RARMP will be finalised, taking into account submissions related to the protection of people or the environment. A de-identified summary of all comments received and consideration of those comments is included in the Appendices to the final RARMP. The finalised RARMP will inform the Regulator's decision on whether or not to issue a licence.

The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

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