Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 203 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) cotton

What is this application for?

Monsanto Australia Pty Ltd is requesting a licence to grow GM cottons modified for herbicide tolerance and insect resistance. The field trials would be conducted at up to 25 sites with a combined total area of 10 ha in 2024, 50 ha per year in 2025-2027 and 100 ha per year in 2028-2029. Sites are proposed in VIC, NSW, QLD, WA and NT. The trial would run from September 2024 – September 2029.

How have the GM cottons been modified?

Up to 10 different GM cottons are proposed to be trialled. Some of the GM cottons contain introduced gene(s) that provide protection again certain insect pests of cotton, including caterpillars, bollworm, aphids and thrips. Some of the GM cottons contain introduced gene(s) for tolerance to glyphosate, glufosinate, a HPPD inhibiting herbicide, dicamba, and PPO-inhibiting herbicides. This enables the GM cotton plants to grow in the presence of these herbicides, which can be used to control weeds in the GM cotton crop.

Some of the GM cottons also contain selectable marker gene(s) derived from a common gut bacterium. These genes confer selective antibiotic resistance or expression of a reporter gene. They were used to select plants during laboratory development of the GM cotton and do not have any function when plants are grown in the field.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The trial will assess the performance of the GM cottons under field conditions. The GM cottons grown in this field trial would not be used in human food or animal feed.

What controls are proposed for this release?

The consultation Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) prepared for this application concluded that the field trial poses negligible risks to people or the environment. However, as this is a field trial under limited and controlled conditions, a number of licence conditions have been drafted to restrict when and where the trial can take place, limit the size of the trial, and stop the GM cottons from spreading outside the trial sites. For example, there are conditions to isolate trial sites from other plant crops or sexually compatible species, to securely transport and store the GMOs, and to inspect the sites at the end of the trial to check that all GM plants are destroyed. Full details of the draft licence conditions are available in the consultation RARMP.

How can I comment on this application?

The full consultation RARMP and a summary of the RARMP for application DIR 203 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 **10 April 2024**.

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

OGTR Website

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