Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 204 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) wheat

What is this application for?

Trigall Australia Pty Ltd is requesting a licence to grow GM wheat modified for increased tolerance to environmental stress. The field trial would be conducted at up to 10 trial sites per year in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia, with a maximum planting area of 20 hectares each year. The trial would run for five years.

How has the GM wheat been modified?

The GM wheat contains an introduced gene for tolerance to environmental stress, particularly water stress. The gene comes from sunflower. The gene is expected to help plants to survive and provide good yields under unfavourable growing conditions, such as during drought.

The GM wheat also contains a selectable marker gene from a common soil bacterium. This gene confers tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate. It was used to select plants during laboratory development of the GM wheat.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The trial is intended to assess the performance of the GM wheat under field conditions in Australia. The GM wheat grown in this field trial would not be used in human food or animal feed.

Has this GM wheat received any other approvals?

The governments of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay have approved growing this GM wheat as a commercial crop in their countries.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is responsible for food safety in Australia. FSANZ has approved the use of food derived from this GM wheat.

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 GM wheat from spreading outside the trial sites. For example, there are conditions to isolate trial sites from other wheat 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 204 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 **16 July 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

Tel: 1800 181 030 E-mail: ogtr@health.gov.au