



Australian Government

Department of Health

Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

**Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee
Meeting of 12 June 2018
Communiqué**

This Communiqué covers matters considered at the 11th meeting of the Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee (12 June 2018, Canberra)

Background

The Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee (GTECCC) is a statutory advisory committee established under the *Gene Technology Act 2000* to provide advice on the request of the Gene Technology Regulator (Regulator) or the Legislative and Governance Forum on Gene Technology, on issues of ethical or community concern relating to gene technology.

The purpose of this Communiqué is to provide a brief overview of the key matters considered by GTECCC and resolutions of the Committee at its meeting on 12 June 2018.

GTECCC Work Plan

Exploring solutions to ensure a future for coral reefs

The Committee welcomed a representative from the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the University of Melbourne, and a representative from the University of Queensland, to present on the rationale and biology behind some of the approaches being explored to protect coral reefs, and the associated social and regulatory issues.

GTECCC discussed current research assessing the feasibility of using gene technology to enhance stress tolerance and fitness of corals. GTECCC covered a range of topics in addition to those addressed in the resolutions below, including:

- the long-term consequences of not intervening to protect coral reefs from increasing ocean temperatures
- the wide range of factors that may affect public acceptance of broad environmental releases of GM organisms
- that the aim of the research is to develop a suite of tools, noting they would not be used unless and until there was social acceptance and all necessary approvals were in place.

Resolutions:

- **GTECCC notes** the information provided by the guest speakers and in the background papers
- **GTECCC agrees** that the broad release of GMOs for the conservation of marine environments does raise social and ethical issues when compared to terrestrial GMOs, some of which are familiar and well documented, and others that may be less well explored. Examples of the latter include:
 - The role of UNESCO in the study and regulation of GMOs released on the reef
 - Containment and monitoring of a GMO in a marine environment
- **GTECCC agrees** to further discuss this project at future committee meetings, including consideration of the relevance of the *National Framework of Ethical Principles in Gene Technology 2012* to the consideration of broad environmental releases of a GMO
- **GTECCC recommends** OGTR continues engaging with researchers, other relevant regulatory agencies and other interested groups as this work progresses

Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme

GTECCC received an update on the Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme (the Review). The Review has been progressing since July 2017. A [Preliminary Report](#) presenting findings for stakeholder comment was released 28 March 2018. GTECCC discussed which key findings the Committee could contribute to if they were carried forward in future work.

Communication Items

Public engagement

GTECCC was provided with information on recent relevant communication and engagement activities. Members agreed that in the current climate of 'fake news', it is important for the government and regulators to be transparent and to continue providing accurate and truthful information. Education is crucial to people being able to differentiate between credible and non-credible material by evaluating the source of information and the quality of the evidence.

Engaging Millennials

GTECCC heard a presentation on social research relating to engaging millennials in communication activities. GTECCC discussed the relevance to the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) engagement strategy and agreed that the OGTR should continue to use a range of communication tools aimed at a variety of audiences to provide factual information about the regulation of gene technology.

Reports

GTECCC was provided with an update of activities of the Australian Health Ethics Committee. GTECCC also received reports from the Regulator and the cross-member with the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC) on recent activities of the OGTR and GTTAC, respectively, since the last meeting.

For all inquiries, please call the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on 1800 181 030 (free-call) or email ogtr@health.gov.au