

Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee

Meeting 27th & 28th May 2008
Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee (GTECCC) held its inaugural meeting in Canberra on 27th and 28th May 2008.

GTECCC is a statutory advisory committee to the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) and the Gene Technology Ministerial Council. All Committee members hold office on a part-time basis.

The independent *Statutory Review of the Gene Technology Act 2000 and the Gene Technology Agreement* (the Review) conducted in 2005-06, recommended that the roles of the Gene Technology Ethics Committee (GTEC) and the Gene Technology Community Consultative Committee (GTCCC) be combined to form the GTECCC. The Review had also recommended that the functions of GTECCC include providing advice on community consultation in respect of the process for applications for licences covering dealings that involve the intentional release (DIR) of a genetically modified organism (GMO) into the environment, and risk communication matters in relation to those dealings.

The recommendations of the Review were given effect by the *Gene Technology Amendment Act 2007* which was passed in June 2007. The commencement date for the establishment of GTECCC was 1 January 2008. The terms for GTEC and GTCCC expired on 8 December 2007 and 30 June 2007 respectively.

The function of GTECCC is to provide advice to the Regulator (and the GTMC) on request, 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 at its inaugural meeting on 27th and 28th May 2008.

GTECCC's Work Plan

GTECCC reviewed the work done by its predecessors, GTEC and GTCCC, and agreed to continue work on the development of unfinished projects. The following were identified as the main objectives for GTECCC in the short term:

National Framework for the Development of Ethical Principles in Gene Technology (the Framework)

This document was produced by GTEC and is intended to provide guidance to Institutional Biosafety Committees and to stimulate debate and ethical reflection in the research community. GTECCC agreed that this remains an important project and that the review and further development of the document should be a major focus for discussion at their next meeting.

The committee suggested that copies of the Framework be sent to coordinators of undergraduate biotechnology courses in Australia with a letter asking them to consider incorporating it into their course.

GTECCC noted that the OGTR was about to launch a Service Delivery Survey and asked that a question be added concerning awareness and use of the Framework.

Environmental Ethics and Gene Technology

A GTEC working group had prepared this discussion paper, which remained unfinished. GTECCC appointed a working group to develop the paper further.

Community Consultation

GTECCC reviewed the GTCCC discussion paper *Public Consultation : Community and Stakeholders* and agreed on some editorial changes to be made before the paper is published on the OGTR website. The committee noted that one of their functions is to provide advice to the Regulator on community consultation and risk communication matters and discussed the need to find out more about community attitudes to gene technology. The possibility of commissioning a survey will be explored further at the next meeting.

GTECCC and Relationships with Other Committees

The Committee received a report from the acting Gene Technology Regulator regarding the activities of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. Reports were also received from the committee's cross-members with the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee (GTTAC) and the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC). It was agreed that the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) should be invited to nominate an Observer to attend GTECCC meetings.

**For all inquiries, please contact the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on
1800 181 030 (free-call)**