

Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee

Meeting 18th February 2010

Canberra

COMMUNIQUE

The Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee (GTECCC) held its third meeting of the Triennium in Canberra on 18 February 2010.

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 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 third meeting on 18 February 2010.

Professor Michael Burgess

Michael Burgess, Professor and Chair in Biomedical Ethics at the University of British Columbia, was an invited guest speaker. He gave an interesting and informative talk on his work with a GE³LS (Genomics, Ethics, Economics, Environment, Legal and Social Issues) research project funded by Genome Canada. Professor Burgess explained the deliberative democracy methods used in his research and gave some insights into different models of community engagement.

GTECCC's Work Plan

GTECCC reviewed progress in the following key areas, which had been identified as priorities at the previous meeting:

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

The Working Group established to undertake consultation with stakeholders to obtain feedback on the usefulness of the Framework's nine principles reported that they had agreed on a list of stakeholders to be targeted and some questions to be asked, and that a research company had been contracted to carry out a survey within these terms of reference.

Representatives from the survey company presented their survey plan to the committee. GTECCC suggested some additional questions to be included and noted that the survey results were expected to be available by the end of April 2010.

Environmental Ethics and Gene Technology

GTECCC noted that the final editing of the background paper on Environmental Ethics had now been completed. They recommended that the paper should be submitted for inclusion in the program of the inaugural conference of the Australasian Association of Bioethics and Health Law, to be held in Adelaide from 1 to 4 July 2010. They also recommended that three independent experts from relevant fields be invited to attend the workshop session at which the paper is presented and provide commentary on the paper. Following any further editing indicated by the reviewers the paper will then be published on the OGTR website.

Community Consultation

The Committee received an update on the Australian Government's New and Enabling Technologies Strategy (NETS) and noted that part of the strategy involved the continuation of a series of surveys designed to track changes in public attitudes to biotechnology over time. GTECCC resolved to pursue input to future NETS biotechnology surveys and asked to be kept informed of activities and results.

GTECCC were informed about the work of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and noted that the organisation is working towards the establishment of standards for best practice in stakeholder engagement. They noted that one of the key messages is that different types of consultation or engagement may be appropriate in different circumstances, depending on the issues under discussion.

Do-it-Yourself Biology

GTECCC were informed that concerns had been raised that some individuals and groups may be conducting biological experiments outside of the containment and control of an institutional framework. The committee also noted that some school classes may involve gene technology techniques and that concerns had been raised that the disposal of waste may not always be appropriately carried out. The Regulator confirmed that there was no evidence to suggest that any unlawful activities were being carried out, and that information for schools and for individuals interested in DIY biological research was published on the OGTR website.

Request for Advice from the Regulator

The Committee considered a request for advice from the Regulator relating to licence application DIR 098. The application was for the commercial release of a live GM vaccine against Japanese Encephalitis (JE). GTECCC were informed about the consultation process normally undertaken by the Regulator for DIR applications and were asked to advise on whether any additional consultation should be undertaken in this case. GTECCC recommended several professional medical groups for inclusion in the consultation process. They also recommended that steps be taken to ensure that non-technical summary information is included in the public consultation.

Reports

The Committee received a report from the 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).

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