



Australian Government

Department of Health
Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee
Meeting of 30 August 2017
Communiqué

This Communiqué covers matters considered at the 10th meeting of the Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee (30 August 2017, 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 30 August 2017.

GTECCC Work Plan

New technologies

Members were asked to provide advice on the ethical and social issues in relation to new technologies. GTECCC suggested that new technologies pose some similar ethical and social issues to older types of gene technology. However, GTECCC acknowledged that new technologies enable changes to organisms in a way that is cheaper, more scalable, more accessible and quicker, and this may raise new ethical or social issues.

Members noted that some social and ethical issues posed by the technology are addressed through existing legislation including the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (GT Act), animal welfare legislation and legislation relating to human ethics.

GTECCC discussed the importance of consumer awareness and understanding of the technology in terms of ensuring engagement in legitimate debate about some of the social and ethical issues.

GTECCC agreed to form a Working Group to prepare a draft paper on new technologies, for input from the full committee.

Benefits of Gene Technology

Members discussed the benefits of gene technology to science, farmers, the broader community and the development of world class scientists. The committee then discussed how the benefits of gene technology are considered in the regulatory context. In the context of the Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme, members agreed that incorporation of benefits into the legislative scheme would raise a number of issues, including potentially undermining public confidence, increasing pressure on resources, and complicating the decision-making process.

GTECCC also discussed whether benefits of gene technology in the food and agriculture areas should be better communicated, and by whom. Members noted a range of parties may play a role in communicating information about GMOs depending on the type of information. The committee agreed it remains appropriate that it is not the role of the Regulator to promote gene technology. Information provided by the Regulator should be factual and relevant in the context of the role of the Regulator, such that the Regulator remains a trusted source of information.

Resolution: GTECCC agreed that:

- The legislative scheme should not be amended for the Regulator to consider the benefits of gene technology.
- The legislative scheme should continue to focus on assessment of the risks to human health and the environment posed by dealings with GMOs.
- The Regulator should not engage in education about the benefits of gene technology nor promote gene technology. The focus should continue to be on providing factual information about the regulation of GMOs.

Information and Reports

GTECCC was given presentations on: community attitudes to gene technology; work being done by the Australian Council of Learned Academies; and the 2017 Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme. In the context of the Review, members discussed the role of the committee, observing that GTECCC allows differing views to be discussed and plays an important role in the regulatory scheme.

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**