# Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 156 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) buffalo grass

**What is this application for?**

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University in Victoria is seeking approval to grow buffalo grass plants that have been genetically modified for herbicide tolerance and dwarf growth habit. It is proposed that the trial will take place between April 2018 and April 2019 in one site in Victoria on a maximum area of 200 $m^2$.

**How will the GM buffalo grass be modified?**

The GM buffalo grass plants contain two introduced genes derived from the plants thale cress and spinach. The genetic modifications confer tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate and reduce the growth rate and size of the plants. Tolerance to glyphosate helps weed management, as glyphosate can be applied to a lawn of the GM buffalo grass to kill weeds without harming the lawn. A dwarf variety of buffalo grass would require less water and less frequent mowing which makes lawn maintenance easier.

**What is the purpose of the trial?**

The purpose of the field trial is to assess the agronomic characteristics of the GM buffalo grass plants under field conditions. People do not generally eat buffalo grass and the GM buffalo grass grown in this field trial would not be used as animal feed.

**What controls are proposed for this release?**

The consultation Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) for this application concludes that the proposed release poses negligible risks to people or the environment. However, a range of licence conditions have been drafted to limit the size, location and duration of the release, as well as restrict the spread and persistence of the buffalo grass and the introduced genetic material. Control measures include conditions to minimise dispersal of the GMOs and GM pollen from the trial site, to securely transport and store the GMOs, and to inspect the trial site after completion of the trial to ensure all GM plants are destroyed. Full details of the draft licence conditions are set out in the Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) prepared for the application, which is now available for comment.

**How can I comment on this application?**

You are invited to submit your comments on the consultation version of the RARMP that has been prepared for application DIR 156. The full consultation RARMP and a summary are available on the What's New page of the OGTR website or via the Freecall number below. Your advice would be appreciated on any risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment that may be posed by the proposed release. Please note that the consultation period closes on **1 March 2018** and written submissions are required by that date.

**What are the next steps in the evaluation process?**

Submissions relating to the protection of people or the environment in connection with the proposed release are taken into account in finalising the RARMP, which will then inform the Regulator's decision on whether or not to issue a licence.

**The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator**

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

**OGTR Website**