Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 160 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) perennial ryegrass

What is this application for?

The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources in Victoria is seeking approval to grow perennial ryegrass plants that have been genetically modified for fructan biosynthesis. It is proposed that the trial will take place between May 2018 and June 2020 in one site in south-west Victoria on a maximum area of 160 m^2.

How will the GM perennial ryegrass be modified?

The GM perennial ryegrass plants contain two introduced genes derived from perennial ryegrass. The genetic modifications lead to increased plant nutritional quality and biomass production.

All GM perennial ryegrass plants will also contain an introduced antibiotic resistance gene from a common gut bacterium. This was used as a selectable marker during development of the GM plants in the laboratory.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the field trial is to assess the agronomic characteristics of the GM perennial ryegrass plants under field conditions and to multiply seed for future trials. The GM perennial ryegrass grown in this field trial would not be used in human food or 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 GM perennial ryegrass and the introduced genetic material. Control measures include conditions to minimise dispersal of the GMOs or GM pollen from the trial site, to securely transport and store the GM seed, 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 160. 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 **18 January 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.

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