Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 178 – commercial release of genetically modified canola

What is this application for?

BASF Australia Ltd (BASF) is seeking approval for commercial cultivation of the genetically modified (GM) canola lines MS11 × RF3 and MS11 × RF3 × MON 88302. The GM canola lines contain introduced genes for herbicide tolerance and a hybrid breeding system.

The GM canola lines and their products would enter general commerce, including use in human food and animal feed.

Where will the GM canola be grown?

The purpose of the proposed release is to allow commercial production of the GM canola lines in all canola growing areas in Australia, subject to restrictions in some Australian States and Territories for marketing reasons. Commercial canola production occurs mainly in Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, with sporadic plantings in Queensland and Tasmania. Currently, the commercial cultivation of GM plants is prohibited by State law in Tasmania and parts of South Australia.

How has the GM canola been modified?

The GM canola lines were developed by conventional breeding between the individual GM canola lines MS11, RF3 and MON 88302. MS11 is the subject of BASF's commercial release application DIR 175 (currently under evaluation) and RF3 has been authorised for commercial release under the licence DIR 021/2002. MON 88302 was authorised for commercial release under licence DIR 127.

Both GM canola lines contain two introduced genes for a hybrid breeding system and a gene that confers tolerance to herbicides containing glufosinate. A hybrid breeding system allows different types of parent canola to be crossed to make hybrid GM plants with desired properties, and prevents the parent canola plants self-fertilising. One of the GM canola lines also contains a gene that confers tolerance to herbicides containing glyphosate. Thus farmers can use two herbicides to kill weeds without damaging their crop.

The introduced genes are all derived from common bacteria.

What is the process for considering this application?

The licence application will be subject to comprehensive, science-based risk analysis. The process includes two rounds of stakeholder consultation. In the first round, the Regulator will seek advice from prescribed experts, agencies and authorities prior to preparing a draft Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP). The RARMP focuses on identifying risks to people and to the environment that may be posed by the commercial release. Following public release of the draft RARMP, submissions will again be sought from stakeholders, this time including the public. The RARMP will then be finalised taking into account submissions received, and inform the Regulator's decision whether or not to issue a licence.

How can I comment on this application?

The RARMP for this application is expected to be released for public comment in **June 2021**. Its release will be advertised in newspapers, and it will be available on the OGTR website along with a range of supporting information. While comment is not being sought from the public at this stage, you can obtain a copy of the full application by contacting the OGTR. Please quote the application number DIR 178. A summary of the application is available on the OGTR website (under 'What's New') or by contacting the OGTR.

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