

LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNANCE FORUM ON GENE TECHNOLOGY

COMMUNIQUÉ

15 December 2020

The Legislative and Governance Forum on Gene Technology (the Forum) met on Friday 11 December 2020, via video conference, to consider progress to implement the 27 recommendations of the Third Review (the Review) of the National Gene Technology Regulation Scheme (the Scheme). The Forum, chaired by Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck, comprises Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers responsible for gene technology who oversee the national Scheme.

The Forum was established under the Gene Technology Agreement to assure intergovernmental collaboration and decision making for a nationally consistent approach to the regulation of gene technology. It recognises shared national responsibility and the obligation of all Australian governments to provide a regulatory scheme that achieves its objectives of protecting people and the environment by monitoring and managing risks, whilst facilitating innovation and competitiveness for research and industry.

Key outcomes from the meeting include:

Progress to Implement Review Recommendations

The Forum noted substantial progress made towards Review implementation, particularly for those recommendations not requiring legislative change. Building upon stakeholder consultation in late 2019 that recognised the challenges of implementing recommendations individually, Ministers considered revisions to the Forum Action Plan 2018-23 that reflect better grouping of recommendations and changes to implementation timing.

The Forum requested the Gene Technology Standing Committee (GTSC) update the Action Plan for 2020-2023, prior to public release of the updated document.

Regulatory Framework for updating and enhancing the operation of the Scheme

Following a decision earlier this year to explore a revised regulatory model in which to more efficiently and effectively implement Review recommendations, the Forum was pleased to endorse a Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS). This document, together with an accompanying Explanatory Paper, present options to implement a proportionate regulatory model to address key Review recommendations.

Ministers agreed to conduct a public consultation on these two documents from 14 December 2020 to 17 March 2021, to seek stakeholders' views on the potential benefits and costs of the proposed options. This will inform the development of a Decision RIS, which will underpin legislative changes to give effect to Review recommendations. Consultation documents are available on the Australian Government Department of Health's [Consultation Hub](#).

Exploring potential policy approaches for environmental release of gene drive organisms

The Forum considered early background information relating to gene drive technology, including what gene drive organisms (GDOs) are and what opportunities and challenges they pose. Ministers agreed that further work is required to explore possible policy approaches and regulatory mechanisms to assess the risks of GDOs and to manage and guide research, development and deployment of them in Australia.

Ministers agreed the GTSC should work with key stakeholders to further develop policy options and present them for future Forum consideration.

National Consistency of the Scheme

The Forum considered factors impacting national consistency of the Scheme, including changes to maintain corresponding legislative status across all Australian jurisdictions. Ministers agreed the importance of ongoing Forum engagement to facilitate implementation of the Scheme Review and to ensure appropriate oversight of the Scheme.

Ministers noted recommendations arising from the *Review of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums* endorsed by the National Cabinet on 23 October 2020. The Forum (now to be referred to as the Gene Technology Ministers Meeting) expressed a strong view that continued Ministerial oversight of the regulatory system was integral to maintaining the integrity of the national Scheme. Ministers agreed to work with the Australian Government to incorporate views around the reset of priorities and streamlining of the Forum's operations.

The Forum will continue work to progress the implementation of key recommendations through the revised action plan, facilitate discussion to inform decision-making and to oversee the Scheme in collaboration with the Gene Technology Regulator.

Next Meeting

The next Forum meeting is scheduled to be held in mid-2021.