



IBC Forum 2024

On 16 to 18 September 2024, the 10th National Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) forum was held in Canberra. The Hon Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care and Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health opened the forum with the theme of *Emerging Technology and Horizon Scanning*. We then heard from our keynote speakers. Tony Mahar CEO National Farmers Federation discussed future farming and gene technology in agriculture, followed by Medicines Australia CEO Elizabeth de Somer who asked the question, is Australia ready for the future of advanced therapies?



Caption: (from left to right) Prof Tony Lawler, Deputy Secretary Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG), The Honourable Ged Kearney, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, Elizabeth de Somer CEO, Medicines Australia, and Dr Raj Bhula, Gene Technology Regulator.

Representatives from regulated organisations shared their insights into other exciting developments in the gene technology area as well as their experiences with regulation through the gene technology scheme.

OGTR used the opportunity provided by the forum to introduce some relevant consultations. Dr Rachel Nowak and Paula Fitzgerald from the Gene Technology Ethics Community Consultative Committee (GTECCC) highlighted the importance of strong communication plans and challenged us to test out their draft Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology and provide feedback. Dr Cibelly Goulart gave a talk about the new DNIR application form, which was out for consultation, while Karina Dennis provided an overview on the OGTR Online Services Portal, inviting feedback and suggestions through a recently published survey. Finally, the IBC Forum was wrapped up with a workshop on the implementation of the Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme. Further information on these consultations can be found below.

We would like to extend our thanks to all the guest speakers that provided thought provoking discussions. We would also like to thank all attendees for taking three whole days out of their busy schedules to engage with each other and the OGTR on topics relevant to the regulation of genetically modified organisms in Australia.

Public consultation on the proposed amendments to the *Gene Technology Act 2000*

The Department of Health and Aged Care invites you to provide feedback on the [Exposure Draft of the Gene Technology Amendment Bill 2024](#) which will implement recommendations of the Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme. The consultation will close **8 November 2024 (AEDT)**.

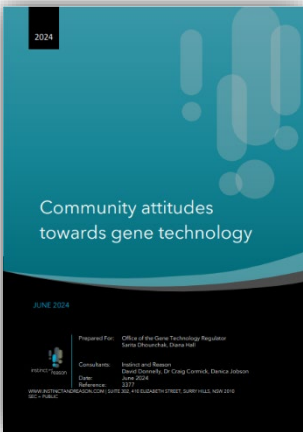
Your consultation response should be provided via the survey in the [Consultation Hub](#). Where possible, reasoning and supporting information should be included. This will ensure that your feedback can be considered against the relevant proposed amendments.

All enquires related to the consultation on the proposed amendments to the Act and the information session are to be directed to the Regulatory Engagement Branch on gene.technology.implementation@health.gov.au or by calling on +61 (2) 6289 2033.





Community attitudes towards gene technology - 2024 report



The Gene Technology Regulator (Regulator) commissions reports to help track community attitudes and behaviours to gene technology. The series commissioned to date are available [on the OGTR website](#).

In 2024, support for genetically modified technologies largely reflects results shown in 2019. After the global COVID-19 pandemic and spikes in support in 2021, attitudes appear to have returned to a new 'baseline.' 38% of the Australian community are in support of its use in general. When it comes to specific uses, 2024 revealed some decreases in support in the community from 2021, for medical uses (down 5%), and for use in food and crops (down 8%).

Please note, these reports are prepared by a consultant and the views expressed in the reports are those of the consultant formed through analysis of the research data. The conclusions expressed in the reports should not be attributed to the Regulator or the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR).



Call for comment on draft Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology

The Third Review of the Australian National Gene Technology Scheme found there is a need to communicate appropriately with the public about gene technology, including its applications and end products. Although the Review recommended that the Commonwealth Gene Technology Regulator continue to lead communication activities on topics related to the evaluation of risk associated with gene technology, it also recognised that numerous parties—including researchers, institutions, companies, and end users—would benefit from guidance on how to communicate about gene technology research and its products.

The Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee is therefore developing Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology. The over-arching aim of the Guidance is to improve gene technology communication outcomes and to foster and support responsible communication about gene technology and the regulatory scheme. The draft Guidance document provides a list of questions to consider when preparing a communication plan about gene technologies, based on a review of guiding principles and global best practices for communicating about technical developments that can have far-reaching or complex effects on people or the environment. It also includes story-telling case studies and a worked example of applying the questions.

The draft Guidance is now published on the OGTR's website and open for public engagement, available at [the OGTR GTECCC committee page](#). GTECCC welcomes comments from stakeholders involved or interested in communication related to gene technology. Members of GTECCC also presented this work at the National Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) Forum on 16-18 September.

Input on the draft Guidance is invited via email to ogtr@health.gov.au. The comment period closes **8 November 2024**. The comments received will inform GTECCC's preparation of the final guidance document.



Revising the application form for a licence to conduct dealings not involving intentional release of genetically modified organisms.

The OGTR is revising the application form for dealings not involving intentional release (DNIR) of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), primarily for work being conducted in OGTR certified facilities. The consultation on this form was open from 4 September to 18 October 2024. Thank you to those organisations who have provided feedback on the form. We will now further revise the form, taking into account the comments received.



Extension of the OECD Unique Identifier to transgenic animals

An [OECD survey](#) is seeking views on the potential extension of the [OECD unique identifier](#) (UI), already used for transgenic (aka GM) plants, to transgenic (aka GM) animals.

The plant UI has been widely adopted and is a 'key' to access unambiguous information about GM plants approved for commercial use (growing and/or as food/feed) in the OECD [BioTrack Product Database](#) (e.g. genetic modification, authorisation status). The plant UI is also used in the [Living Modified Organism Registry](#) (UN Convention on Biological Diversity) and the UN Food & Agriculture Organisation [GM Food Platform](#). The number of GM animals in the LMO Registry has increased recently but there is no equivalent to the plant UI. OGTR includes the OECD UI for GM plants in [commercial release licences](#) and enters approvals in the BioTrack and LMO Registry databases.

The OECD invites feedback from interested groups (e.g. developers of GM animals and other stakeholders) on the need and scope for an UI for animals as well as perceived benefits and/or challenges. The survey closes on **Friday 6 December 2024**.

Stakeholder Survey on OGTR Online Services Portal

In recent years, the OGTR has been working on developing a new information management system. As a part of this process, we have successfully launched the OGTR Online Services Portal to facilitate our interactions with external stakeholders. We are seeking feedback on the portal to improve its design and the services we offer through it.

[The survey](#) is available until **30 November 2024**. You have the option to remain anonymous unless you would like to be contacted regarding your responses.

You may also express your interest in being involved in future User Acceptance Testing (UAT) by emailing ogtr.applications@health.gov.au.

Operations of the Gene Technology Regulator Annual Report 2023-24

[The report](#) describes the roles and responsibilities of the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) during 2023-24.

2025 International Society for Biosafety Research (ISBR) Symposium

The [17th ISBR Symposium](#) 'Cultivating Bio-Innovation for a Sustainable Future' will be held from 2-6 November 2025 in Ghent, Belgium. The Symposium will feature scientific exchange between the leading experts on diverse biotechnology and biosafety topics through a comprehensive program of plenary, parallel, workshop and poster sessions. Information about abstract submission, parallel sessions and workshop proposals, and student scholarships are available [here](#) or **by contacting heidi.mitchell@health.gov.au**.

