Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 209 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) sorghum

What is this application for?

The University of Queensland is requesting a licence to grow GM sorghum modified for altered reproduction. The field trial would be conducted at a trial site near Gatton in Queensland, with a maximum planting area of 1 hectare each year. The trial would run from March 2025 to March 2028.

How has the GM sorghum been modified?

The GM sorghum contains an introduced gene that is involved in asexual reproduction. There is also an introduced gene editing system that targets 4 sorghum genes involved in sexual reproduction and prevents them from functioning. This causes the GM sorghum to produce seeds asexually. The GM sorghum seeds will grow into plants that are clones of the parent plant.

In addition, the GM sorghum contains two introduced marker genes. These genes were used to select plants during development of the GM sorghum and do not have any function when plants are grown in the field.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The trial is to assess the performance of the GM sorghum under field conditions. The GM sorghum 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) prepared for this application concluded that the field trial poses low risks to people or the environment, and that these risks can be managed by setting conditions on how the trial can be conducted. A number of licence conditions have been drafted to restrict when and where the trial can take place, limit the size of the trial, and stop GM sorghum or its pollen from spreading outside the trial site. For example, there are conditions to isolate the trial site from other sorghum crops or sexually compatible species, to securely transport and store the GMOs, and to inspect the site at the end of the trial to check that all GM plants are destroyed. Full details of the draft licence conditions are available in the consultation RARMP.

How can I comment on this application?

The full consultation RARMP and a summary of the RARMP for application DIR 209 are available on the OGTR website or via the contacts listed below. You are invited to submit your written comments (including email) on the consultation version of the RARMP, related to any risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment from the proposed field trial. Comments must be received by the close of the consultation period on **31 January 2025**.

What are the next steps in the evaluation process?

The RARMP will be finalised, taking into account submissions related to the protection of people or the environment. A de-identified summary of all comments received and consideration of those comments is included in the Appendices to the final RARMP. The finalised RARMP will inform the Regulator's decision on whether or not to issue a licence.

The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

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