

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DECISION DIR 095 FOR LIMITED & CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED SUGARCANE

What is this licence for?

BSES Ltd has received approval to trial, under limited and controlled conditions, 12,500 lines of genetically modified sugarcane. The proposed field trial will take place on six BSES stations in the Queensland local government areas of Moreton Bay, Bundaberg, Mackay, Burdekin and Cairns, on a maximum total area of 21 ha, between August 2009 and August 2015.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the trial is to evaluate agronomic properties of the GM sugarcane lines grown under field conditions. Promising lines would be selected for crossing under controlled conditions to other GM sugarcane lines or non-GM sugarcane cultivars for possible future commercial development (subject to additional approvals). The GM sugarcane would not be used for human food or animal feed.

How have the GM sugarcane lines been modified?

The GM sugarcane lines contain one or more genes or gene fragments from 22 genes derived from a range of plant and bacterial species. Some of the GM sugarcane lines have been modified to express proteins encoded by the introduced genes and some contain genes or parts of genes designed to suppress the function of endogenous sugarcane genes. The introduced genes or parts of genes are expected to alter plant growth, enhance drought tolerance, enhance nitrogen use efficiency, alter sucrose accumulation, or improve cellulosic ethanol production from sugarcane biomass. In addition, each GM sugarcane line would contain one or two genes encoding antibiotic resistance selectable marker genes used during their initial development in the laboratory.

What controls have been imposed on this release?

The Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) for this application concluded that the proposed release poses negligible risks to people and the environment. However, licence conditions have been imposed to restrict the release to the size and locations requested by the applicant as these were important considerations in the assessment process. Conditions are also imposed to limit the release to six years, rather than the 15 year duration proposed by the applicant. As well as limits on the scale of the release, control measures have been imposed to restrict the spread and persistence of the GMO and the introduced genetic material. These include ensuring that the GM sugarcane plants in the field are isolated from non-GM sugarcane plants; that transport and storage of the GM plant materials are in accordance with OGTR guidelines; and monitoring for, and destroying, any sugarcane plants on the release site for at least one year after harvest and until no volunteers are detected for at least six continuous months.

Want more information?

A number of documents relating to this decision are available on the OGTR website (<<http://www.ogtr.gov.au>> under "What's New") or via Freecall 1800 181 030. These documents include the finalised RARMP, an Executive Summary, a Technical Summary and a copy of the full licence.