Questions & Answers on licence application DIR 166 – field trial of genetically modified (GM) chickpea

What is this application for?

The Queensland University of Technology is requesting a licence to grow GM chickpea modified for drought and other abiotic stress tolerance. The field trial would be conducted at a single site at Walkamin Research Station in Queensland, with a maximum planting of 3 hectares each year. The trial would run from July 2019 until December 2024.

How has the GM chickpea been modified?

The GM chickpeas would contain one of two genes that provide increased tolerance to drought and may provide increased tolerance to other environmental stresses such as cold or salinity. The researchers are studying drought tolerance in the GM chickpeas. The genes come from plants – one that is commonly used as a model plant in research and one that is a native grass that grows in dry, rocky areas. The genes are expected to enable plants to survive periods where conditions are very dry and to produce good yields following drought stress.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The trial is to assess the performance of the GM chickpeas under field conditions. The GM chickpeas 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 negligible risks to people or the environment. However, as this is a field trial, a range 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 chickpea from spreading outside the trial sites. For example, there are conditions to isolate trial sites from other chickpea crops, to securely transport and store the GMOs, and to inspect the sites 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 166 are available on the 'What's New' page of 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 release. Comments must be received by the close of the consultation period on **29 April 2019**.

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

OGTR Website

Tel: 1800 181 030 E-mail: ogtr@health.gov.au