

GENE TECHNOLOGY MINISTERS' MEETING

COMMUNIQUÉ

20 July 2021

The Gene Technology Ministers' Meeting (GTMM), met virtually on Tuesday 20 July 2021. The GTMM, chaired by Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck, comprises Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers responsible for overseeing a national scheme for gene technology.

A national Gene Technology Agreement (the Agreement) establishes a Ministers' meeting to assure intergovernmental collaboration and decision making for a nationally consistent approach to the regulation of gene technology. It recognises shared 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 for the meeting held 20 July 2021 include:

Action Plan

The GTMM considered an updated Action Plan to implement recommendations of The Third Review (the Review) of the National Gene Technology Scheme (the Scheme). Ministers supported a number of updates to the Action Plan, including referencing the three GTMM priorities for 2021 advised to the National Cabinet following Peter Conran's *Review of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums* (the Conran Review). The Action Plan now links associated Review recommendations to the three GTMM priorities and includes a summary of focus activities for the year ahead.

The updated GTMM Action Plan will be published on the Scheme web pages on the Australian Government Department of Health website.

Regulatory Framework for updating and enhancing the operation of the Scheme

Acknowledging the collaborative approach to development, GTMM Ministers considered and endorsed a Decision Regulation Impact Statement (Decision RIS) and endorsed the preferred option to address key recommendations of the Scheme Review.

Following stakeholder feedback in response to consultation on potential regulatory impacts earlier this year, Option B - a Risk-Tiering Model - was identified as the preferred policy option to give effect to Review recommendations.

The endorsed Decision RIS will inform the preparation of legislation, expected later this year. The Decision RIS will be published on the Australian Government Department of Health and the Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) websites, with stakeholder submissions also to be made available on the Scheme web pages.

Work towards a National Gene Drive Framework

The GTMM noted early work to inform the development of a national gene drive policy framework. While still some years away, Ministers agreed that as a new and emerging technology, gene drives require a clear policy framework to guide application in Australia. Further policy framework development (including consultation) is required prior to any future GTMM consideration and approval.

National consistency of the Scheme

Acknowledging the importance of a continued role for the GTMM, Ministers agreed to minor administrative amendments to the intergovernmental Agreement to address findings of the Conran Review. A full review of the Agreement is currently scheduled for 2023, following update to the broader regulatory framework in response to the most recent review of the Scheme.

Next Meeting

Ministers with responsibility for gene technology will continue to meet, as required, to make decisions on gene technology matters.