

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-2011, 20 October 2010

Questions: E10-041

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: BUFFER ZONES

Written Question on Notice

Senator Xenophon asked:

- a) When were the criteria into establishing buffer zones for GM crops last reviewed?
- b) Did this review take into account instances overseas where established buffer zones have failed to stop the spread of GM crops?
- c) When will the buffer zones next be reviewed?
- d) Is the OGTR aware of any breaches of buffer zones in Australia?
- e) What are the instances when this has happened?
- f) What action did the OGTR take in these instances?

Answer:

- a) Dealings involving intentional release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the environment require authorisation under the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (GT Act).

Licences issued by the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) authorising limited and controlled releases of genetically modified (GM) crops (eg field trials) impose conditions to restrict the potential spread and persistence of the GMOs and their genetic material in the environment and limit the size, locations and duration of each release, including in some cases measures described as 'buffer zones'. Such containment measures are determined on a case-by-case basis as part of the preparation of the risk assessment and risk management plan (RARMP) required for each application under the GT Act.

To date, for licences issued authorising commercial scale release of genetically modified (GM) crops the Regulator has concluded, based on the relevant RARMPs, that they are as safe, and can be used for the same purposes, as conventional varieties and that no specific segregation conditions are required to manage risks to the health and safety of people and the environment. Segregation measures that may be applied to commercial cultivation of GM crops for marketing purposes are a matter for states and territories and/or industry.

- b) The Regulator's consideration of each application for intentional release of a GMO into the environment involves a thorough review of information provided by the applicant, national and international scientific literature, and the experience of other regulatory authorities internationally, including information relevant to restricting the spread or persistence of the GMO.
- c) Containment measures to be imposed in licences for environmental release of GMOs are considered on an application-specific basis.
- d) Since the commencement of the Gene Technology Act 2000 a small number of minor non-compliances has been identified with some requirements relating to containment measures for field trials. However in each case, the OGTR assessed that the identified non-compliance posed negligible risks to people and the environment, as reported in the Regulator's Quarterly Reports to Parliament.
- e) See d)
- f) See d)