

GENE TECHNOLOGY MINISTERS' MEETING COMMUNIQUÉ

13 April 2023

The Gene Technology Ministers' Meeting (GTMM) met via video conference on Thursday 13 April 2023. The GTMM is chaired by the Hon Ged Kearney MP and comprises of Australian Government, state, and territory Ministers responsible for overseeing the Nation Gene Technology Scheme (the Scheme).

The GTMM is established under the intergovernmental [Gene Technology Agreement 2001](#) (the Agreement). It governs the operation of the Scheme and the activities of the Gene Technology Regulator.

Members represent all portfolios with an interest in gene technology within their jurisdiction. They are responsible for agreeing a 'whole of government' position on issues the GTMM considers. This is to ensure that the Scheme is robust and represents multiple policy and stakeholder perspectives.

Key outcomes from the meeting include:

Progress of legislative amendments to give effect to recommendations of the [Third Review](#)

In 2018, through the *Legislative and Governance Forum on Gene Technology Action Plan 2018-23*, Ministers committed to implementing Recommendations of the Third Review, including those requiring legislative amendment, by 2023.

Ministers acknowledged factors impacting on delivery of the new gene technology legislation by 2023, including the complex and technical nature of, and the need for significant legal advice to inform, the proposed amendments.

Ministers noted the need for revised timeframes for implementation of the new gene technology legislation. The GTMM agreed to a revised timeline, in which, the new legislation is expected to be introduced into the Commonwealth Parliament in 2024 after a period of extensive jurisdictional, targeted and public consultation.

National Gene Drive policy approach

At the GTMM in July 2021, Ministers agreed that as a new and emerging technology, gene drives, requires a clear policy framework to guide applications for broader environmental release of Genetically Modified (GM) gene drive organisms in Australia.

Today, Ministers noted the continuing development on a draft National Gene Drive Policy Guide (the Guide), to assist proponents with understanding their regulatory obligations under the *Gene Technology Act 2000*, and associated Commonwealth, state and territory legislation that underpins the Scheme.

Ministers also noted and agreed the timeframes to progress the Guide, which refers to a process of consultation with impacted governments, agencies and regulators due to commence shortly, prior to a public consultation process in the second half of 2023. It is then expected that the policy guide will be published in late 2023.

Fourth Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme

The Agreement that supports the Scheme calls for a review to be undertaken at least every five years.

Ministers acknowledged that a number of recommendations from the Third Review are in progress, and these require legislative amendment that is both complex in nature and representative of a significant program of work involved to modernise and futureproof the Scheme that has now been in place for over 20 years.

Ministers agreed to delay commencement of the Fourth Review of the Scheme for a period of 2 years to allow for legislative reforms arising from the Third Review to be implemented.

Action Plan

The GTMM endorsed a new Action Plan 2023-25 and agreed to five priorities:

- **Legislative amendments** - Finalise the proposed legislative amendments to the Scheme.
- **Planning for the next Review of the Scheme** - The next review will commence in 2025 and seek to complement the extensive legislative reforms underway and will identify areas which require further consideration. A review

of the intergovernmental agreement will occur prior to the commencement of the next review.

- **Providing guidance for potential environmental release of GM Gene Drive Organisms** - Development of appropriate guidance material will increase clarity and understanding of proponents' regulatory obligations and strengthen compliance.
- **Sustainable funding** - Investigating sustainable funding options for the Scheme will ensure it continues to operate more sustainably into the future.
- **Development of a suite of educational materials and updating existing resources** - increase public understanding of matters relating to gene technology and its regulation under the Scheme.

Next Meeting

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

For more information on gene technology please visit www.genetechnology.gov.au