



**INDUSTRY
SCIENCE
RESOURCES**

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Mr Ian Dundas
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Primary Industries
and Regional Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dundas

Inquiry into Primary Producer Access to Gene Technology

I refer to your letter of 1 February 2000, to the Secretary and CEO of the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Mr Russell Higgins, requesting a submission on activities relating to gene technology, carried out by this portfolio subsequent to our previous submission to the above-mentioned Inquiry. The Secretary has asked that I reply on his behalf.

You requested a brief submission covering, in particular:

- matters relating to the final term of reference of the inquiry, this being: 'opportunities to educate the community of the benefits of gene technology'; and
- any assistance provided to assist with the commercialisation of gene technology research.

Biotechnology Australia was established in July 1999 by the Federal Government to ensure that, consistent with safeguarding human health and ensuring environmental protection, Australia captures the benefits of biotechnology for the Australian community, industry and the environment.

This agency is the focal point for policy measures to facilitate the development of biotechnology. It reports to a Commonwealth Biotechnology Ministerial Council consisting of the Ministers for Industry, Science and Resources (Chair); Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Health and Aged Care; the Environment and Heritage; and Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and operates from within the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

Its key tasks are to work closely with other Commonwealth Departments and stakeholders to:

- develop a national strategy for biotechnology;
- develop a public awareness program to provide information about biotechnology and gene technology;
- support developers and managers of biotechnology intellectual property (IP) with training and other measures; and
- secure better access to biological and genetic resources.

Under the public awareness program Biotechnology Australia is undertaking a two year Public Awareness Strategy, assisted by a consultant, to provide factual and balanced information to

consumers to enable them to better understand and make informed decisions about the uses of biotechnology and gene technology.

Activities to date have included:

- a point-of-sale brochure on genetically modified foods that has been distributed through all major supermarket chains (attached);
- the establishment of the Gene Technology Information Service hotline;
- several community forums on gene technology; and
- the development of dedicated web-sites on biotechnology and gene technology.

There will also be special educational and rural strategies developed.

Currently, Biotechnology Australia is not providing any assistance for the commercialisation of gene technology research. However, measures to assist with the commercialisation of research are being assessed in the context of the National Biotechnology Strategy which will be released in May 2000.

Also, under the intellectual property (IP) management program, Biotechnology Australia is developing a number of initiatives to raise awareness, and improve the IP management skills, of biotechnology stakeholders. These initiatives include:

- the conduct of IP management awareness seminars;
- the production of a CD-ROM on IP management; and
- the development of a professional training course in IP management.

Further, although the Department of Industry, Science and Resources does not have any specific programs that assist with the commercialisation of gene technology research, assistance may be available through R&D Start, Innovation Investment Fund, Pooled Development Funds, COMET, Pharmaceutical Industry Investment, and Technology Diffusion programs.

Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely

Dr Joe Hlubucek
General Manager
Biotechnology Australia

May 2000