

Welcome to the first edition of ISBR Network News!

The ISBR Network News is a periodic circular that aims to highlight significant achievements by ISBR stakeholders. We'd love to hear from you, so if you have something to share, please send brief articles (one-page, photos welcome) to admin@isbr.info

20 YEARS OF INNOVATIVE GENE TECHNOLOGY REGULATION IN AUSTRALIA



Department of Health Secretary, Prof Brendan Murphy; Gene Technology Regulator, Dr Raj Bhula; and ISBR President, Dr Joe Smith, celebrate 20 years of Australia's National Gene Technology Scheme (Photo courtesy OGTR).

Australia's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) is celebrating 20 years since the National Gene Technology Scheme (the Scheme) commenced in 2001 with the implementation of the Gene Technology Act 2000. ISBR President, Dr. Joe Smith – a former Gene Technology Regulator – was honoured to join current Regulator, Dr. Raj Bhula, and current and previous OGTR staff to help mark the occasion.

The Scheme was introduced following widespread consultation with the States and Territories, researchers, industry and the general public, and continues to be underpinned by a strong commitment to transparency and consultation. Importantly, the Scheme and the OGTR have shown a strong commitment to regulation that is practicable and outcome-focused, while being soundly based in good science and best-practice risk assessment.

While the primary focus at the beginning of the Scheme was the application of gene technology in agriculture, activity related to human and animal therapeutics has increased substantially over the last twenty years.

Genetically modified (GM) cotton and canola are now widely grown in Australia, and approvals have been given over the years for field trials with an extensive range of plants, including rice, wheat, barley, clover, oilseed crops, sugar cane, grapes, bananas, papaya, pineapple and flowers. Traits have ranged from enhanced pest and disease control and abiotic stress tolerance through to improving nutritional qualities of crop plants. This period has also seen a major increase in the non-agricultural application of gene technologies, and the Gene Technology Regulator has approved applications in human therapeutics ranging from GM virus therapy for melanoma treatment through to vaccines using GM viruses for COVID-19.

Since inception, the OGTR has striven to keep pace with best practice, contemporary approaches to risk assessment and to evolve to accommodate new developments in technology. There have been several public reviews of the Scheme and the Gene Technology Regulations since 2001, the most recent of which, among other things, provided clarity about whether and how certain site-directed nuclease techniques would be regulated.

ISBR congratulates OGTR on its first [20 Years of OGTR](#) and looks forward to its continuing contribution to enabling safe access to the benefits of GM technologies.

