

# Gene technology

## legislation introduced



*New legislation provides for a comprehensive, independent and accountable regulator of genetically modified organisms.*

New legislation regulating gene technology was introduced into the House of Representatives on 22 June 2000 by the Minister for Health and Aged Care, Michael Wooldridge. The legislative package comprises three bills: the Gene Technology Bill 2000, the Gene Technology (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000 and the Gene Technology (Licence Charges) Bill 2000.

Introducing the legislation, Dr Wooldridge noted that the proposed laws are the Commonwealth's component of a national regulatory system for genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

"With the passage of the gene technology bill and mirror legislation in all states," Dr Wooldridge said, "Australia will, for the first time, have a comprehensive, independent and accountable regulator of GMOs."

According to Dr Wooldridge, the regulator will have the sole purpose of protecting the health and safety of the community and protecting the Australian environment by identifying and managing risks posed by, or as a result of, genetically modified organisms.

"To secure such a regulatory system, we must be mindful of the fact that the states and territories must pass legislation that is consistent with the bill," Dr Wooldridge added.

When passed, the legislation will establish a statutory officer, to be known as the Gene Technology Regulator. It also will establish three key committees to provide scientific, ethical and policy advice to the Regulator and/or the Ministerial Council established under an Intergovernmental Agreement on Gene Technology.

The legislation will establish a scheme for the assessment of risks to human health and the environment associated with various dealings with GMOs. The scheme includes opportunities for extensive public input and provides for a centralised, publicly available database of all GMOs and GM products approved in Australia.

The Government has committed \$7.6 million over two years for the development of the gene technology legislation and the establishment of the Regulator. Once the Regulator is established, it is intended that the costs incurred by the Regulator will be recovered fully from the users of the regulatory regime. The fees and charges levied will be prescribed in regulations made under the new legislation.

#### For details

- The progress of bills can be checked from the Daily Bills List on the Internet at: [www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/blist.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/blist.pdf)
- The text of bills and the explanatory notes are available on the Internet at: [www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm)
- The debates on the legislation can be found on the Internet at: [www.aph.gov.au/hansard](http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard)