



Australian Academy of  
Technology & Engineering



**Australian  
Academy of  
Science**

Senator Janet Rice  
Australian Greens Spokesperson for Transport and Infrastructure,  
Forests, LGBTIQ, Agriculture and Rural Affairs,  
Sport, Science, Research and Innovation  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: [senator.rice@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.rice@aph.gov.au)

Cc. Mr Adam Bandt MP, Australian Greens Spokesperson on Climate Change and Energy, Employment and Workplace Relations, Science, Research and Innovation and Public Sector  
Cc. Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, Australian Greens Spokesperson for Environment and Biodiversity, Water and Murray Darling Basin, Arts, Media and Communications and Nuclear Issues

20 August 2019

Dear Senator Rice

### **Re: Amendments to Australia's Gene Technology Regulations**

The Australian Academy of Science and the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (jointly, "the Academies") wish to write in support of the *Gene Technology Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Regulations 2019* instrument ("the Amendments"), tabled in Parliament in April of this year. This instrument is the subject of a disallowance motion, tabled by the Greens on 1 August this year. The Academies do not support the disallowance motion.

As noted in our joint submission to the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator's (OGTR) consultation on the draft amendments to the regulations,<sup>i</sup> the Academies consider the amendments to offer clarity in the scope of genetic modifications regulated under the *Gene Technology Act 2000* without unduly suppressing gene technology research and development. The Amendments were arrived at after an extensive, considered and transparent program of consultation by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. The Amendments are small in scope, cautious and conservative. They are consistent with international jurisdictions. Except for site-directed nuclease type 1 (SDN-1) techniques, all gene modification techniques currently in use in Australia would remain regulated under the Gene Technology Scheme.

With respect to SDN-1 techniques, the OGTR Questions and Answers document<sup>ii</sup> on the regulation changes states:

The technique known as SDN-1 will be excluded because, based on the scientific evidence, SDN-1 organisms present no different risk than organisms carrying naturally occurring genetic changes. Organisms modified using SDN-1 cannot be distinguished from conventionally bred animals or plants, and there is no evidence that they pose safety risks that warrant regulation.

The Academies support this statement, which reflects a clear scientific understanding of the SDN-1 technique. Regulating SDN-1 as a gene modification technology would not be commensurate with risk, would run counter to the intention of the Gene Technology Regulatory Scheme, and is not scientifically supportable.

The Academies also support the OGTR's statement in the same document that trade risks that might arise from non-alignment between regulatory schemes in different international jurisdictions are known, familiar and manageable. The Academies do not consider this risk to be a sufficient reason to disallow the regulations, especially in the light of the OGTR's extensive consultation with industry and other groups. Genetic modification technology is an area of rapid development and extensive economic interest to Australia, and it is important the regulatory scheme is examined regularly, with rigour and based on the most current scientific evidence. The Academies consider the Amendments to have met this requirement. The Amendments should be allowed to pass into law.

The Academies would be happy to meet with you should you wish to discuss this matter further. Please contact Mrs Jessica Casha (02 6201 9450 ; [jessica.casha@science.org.au](mailto:jessica.casha@science.org.au)) should you wish to do so. Given the Academies' interest in this area, please note that we are sending this letter to the relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers, as well as the crossbench Senators, and intend to publish this letter.

Yours Sincerely



Professor John Shine AC PresAA  
**President**  
The Australian Academy of Science



Professor Hugh Bradlow FTSE  
**President**  
The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering

---

<sup>i</sup> [Joint submission to the consultation on updating gene technology regulation in Australia](#), Australian Academy of Science and Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering, February 2018

<sup>ii</sup> [Questions & Answers on the Technical Review of the Gene Technology Regulations 2001](#), Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, July 2019.