



For Immediate Release 21 May 2010

GM flowering eucalypts approved for planting

The United States Department of Agriculture has approved the environmental release of GM Eucalypts at seven sites in the USA. Of greatest concern is the trial of a genetic construct (barnase gene – one of the 'Terminators') that is hoped to restrict the fertility of the trees. If the trials are successful they will pave the way for large-scale plantings of limited fertility eucalypts in the USA. One of the purported benefits of the limited fertility construct was to minimize the chance that the eucalypts would become an invasive pest.

Apart from the serious concerns related to the consumption of pollen and nectar from the trees by insects and bees, the action of this limited fertility gene is variable - sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, and the purpose of these trials is to test how well it works in the trees.

The concern for Australia is that as a result of this field trial, and subsequent plantings if sufficiently successful, the genes may find their way to Australia, with a **potential impact on our entire indigenous biodiversity**.

MADGE is asking if Australian environmental departments were consulted before these trials were approved in the USA.

According to The New York Times, the permit has been issued to ArborGen, a biotechnology company owned by three big forest products companies: International Paper and MeadWestvaco of the United States, and Rubicon of New Zealand.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/13/business/energy-environment/13tree.html>

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USDA Completes Environmental Assessment for Genetically Engineered Eucalyptus

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has completed an environmental assessment for a controlled field trial of a genetically engineered eucalyptus hybrid. The purpose of this release is to continue research on the efficacy of genetic constructs intended to confer cold tolerance, alter lignin biosynthesis and alter fertility.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/content/2010/05/ge_eucalyptus.shtml

Risk Assessment documents: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/biotech_ea_permits.html