

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RDNA MONITORING COMMITTEE

1987-1988 Report of Activities

1. Terms of Reference and Background

The forerunner of the Committee, the University Biological Safety Coordinating Committee, was established by Council as a joint committee to the Boards in 1978. When drafting the Committee's terms of reference Council was concerned to establish controls which could relate to all biologically hazardous research. It was particularly concerned that the then-novel area of recombinant DNA experimentation be overseen by a Council Committee.

Consequently, the Boards and Council devised regulations which required persons carrying out, or proposing to carry out, any activity directly associated with potentially hazardous biological research, to submit the details of their research program to the Committee and to seek approval for the proposed research, and to continue to have that approval during the term of the research project.

Council gave the Committee delegated power to approve such research. It required the Committee to advise on establishment and maintenance of measures necessary to safeguard against dangers of such research and to inform the boards and Council on the following matters:

- a) approvals given to persons to conduct in the University research which is potentially biologically hazardous;
- b) approvals previously given for such research which are now withdrawn;
- c) co-operation with the Academy of Science (or any national committee subsequently appointed to take over the role of the Academy Committee) regarding applications from members of the University to undertake such research;
- d) the establishment and maintenance of a register of such research and any modification made thereto;
- e) the legal implications of such research.

In November 1987 Council considered and approved a proposal that the Committee's responsibilities relating to potentially pathogenic teaching and research other than that involving recombinant DNA be transferred to the University's Occupational Health and Safety Policy Committee.

Council also changed the Committee's name to 'University Recombinant DNA Monitoring Committee' and defined its terms of reference to:

- a) consider proposals for rDNA experiments and approve, not approve, or withdraw approvals, in the same way as did the UBSCC;
- b) co-operate with the Government body established to co-ordinate nationally rDNA research;
- c) maintain a registrar of rDNA research; and
- d) report its activities annually to Council.

2. Membership

- . The Vice-Chancellor (Chairman) or The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Alternate Chairman);
- . A member of Council other than an ex-officio member - Dr W.D.L. Ride;
- . A member of RSBS (a geneticist) - Dr B.G. Rolfe, Plant Molecular Biology Group;
- . A member of JCSMR (a microbiologist with virology interests) - Dr P. Cooper, Dept. of Microbiology;
- . A plant pathologist - Dr G.A. Chilvers, Dept. of Botany, The Faculties;
- . A parasitologist - Dr M. Howell, Dept. of Zoology, the Faculties;
- . A lawyer - Mr J.L.R. Davis, Faculty of Law;
- . A senior technician - Mr N. Gowen, Plant Molecular Biology Group, RSBS.

3. Activities

3.1 The Committee acts as the 'Institutional Biosafety Committee' in fulfilling the University's obligations to the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce's Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC). The presence of such a Committee is required if the institution is to engage in this field of research.

3.2 The Committee has established operating procedure for reviewing proposed experimental work. This normally involves the Alternate Chairman (the Deputy Vice-Chancellor) taking advice from qualified members of the Committee out of session.

The GMAC's guidelines give three categories of experimentation. In general terms they cover work which escalates from that which presents no hazard and can be exempted from the guidelines (Category C), through to that work which requires GMAC's advice before it can commence (category A). Most of the proposals submitted by ANU staff fall into category B OR C.

During the last two years twenty-two new experimental proposals have been assessed (compared with twenty in the two previous years). The distribution has been:

	<u>New Projects</u>	<u>Total Current Projects</u>
JCSMR	7	17
RSBS	10	19
Faculty of Science	4	17
RSC	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	22	54

- 3.3 While the monitoring of laboratory experiments continues to be the Committee's main activity, a set of new issues has emerged during the past year, which are likely to require careful scrutiny. These involve the planned release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. GMAC have published a set of procedures for assessment of proposed planned releases, which the Committee has adopted as its minimum requirement. This year the Committee considered the first proposal for a planned release. The proposal involved a field-trial to extend laboratory experiments on the relationship between plants and naturally-occurring, but genetically 'marked', soil bacteria. The Committee has not yet approved this experiment, not because it considers the experiment presents a noticeable degree of environmental risk, but rather because the Committee wished to carefully scrutinise this, the first proposal of its type, and establish a framework for assessment which can be applied to subsequent proposals.