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Media Release

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Ethics in the gene technology debate

The role of ethics in the genetically modified (GM) food and crop debate will be addressed by a leading international speaker in Canberra on Monday (8 November).

Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited will host Dr Sandy Thomas, Director of UK-based, Nuffield Council on Bioethics, to outline the organisation's approach in considering the ethical and social issues in relation to GM products.

"The Nuffield Council on Bioethics is recognised as a world-leader in the area of ethics and gene technology, and we are pleased to present this opportunity to hear their perspective," said Ms Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited.

"This presentation will make a welcome contribution to broadening the gene technology debate which in Australia has focused to-date on environmental and economic factors," she said.

"Dr Thomas' gene technology experience within the UK context is also of interest, as understanding various policy, regulatory and ethical approaches around the world is vital in considering this issue," she said.

The Council has produced several reports on the use of gene technology in developing countries and believes there is a moral imperative to pursue GM crop research where it reduces malnutrition cost-effectively.

"The impact of this technology in countries where regulatory regimes and infrastructure are still being finalised needs to be considered, and the Nuffield Council is ensuring that this remains on the global agenda," said Ms Fitzgerald.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics was established in 1991 to identify, examine and report on the ethical questions raised by recent advances in biological and medical research. The Council has achieved an international reputation, providing advice that assists policy-making, addresses public concerns and stimulates debate in bioethics. Membership of the Council includes clinicians, lawyers, philosophers, scientists and theologians.

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Dr Thomas' seminar will commence at 9.30am on Monday 8 November 2004 at the CSIRO Discovery Lecture Theatre, Clunies Ross Street, Black Mountain, Canberra. (Dr Thomas will also present at the AusBiotech conference in Brisbane on Tuesday, 9 November - contact: Paris Brooke on 0407 715 574).

For further information: Larissa Mullot on 02 6273 9535 or 0418 160 943.