

Press Release:

AusBiotech Welcomes New National Regulations on BioProspecting

On the eve of the AusBiotech National Conference in Perth (November 20-23) the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell has released new environmental regulations to control the use of Commonwealth genetic resources.

The regulations – aimed at preventing the unauthorized commercialization of Australia's biological resources – have been developed after consultation with various sectors including AusBiotech, the nation's peak industry body for the biotech sector.

Bioprospecting is the search for new chemicals in living things that will have some medical or commercial use and Australia is a potential gold mine for bioprospecting because it is one of the world's most biodiverse nations.

On announcing the release of the new regulations Senator Campbell said: "Australia is home to more than two million species of plants and animals, with more than 80 per cent found nowhere else in world," Senator Campbell said.

"These new Regulations will not only protect the environment, but they will prevent the unauthorised commercialisation of valuable biological resources from Commonwealth lands and waters. They will ensure that it's no longer possible to use our genetic resources for R&D without permission and an equitable return to Australia."

Dr Anna Lavelle, CEO of AusBiotech, welcomed the new measures. "These regulations provide Australia's biotechnology industry with legal certainty." She also applauded the government's commitments to minimise transaction costs for companies seeking to discover new products from Australia's genetic resources from Commonwealth areas.

"Legal certainty is essential for the substantial investment needed to develop new biotechnology products derived from our native genetic resources. We are pleased that government has responded to this need and we will represent our members interests to ensure that the implementation of the new regulations proceeds smoothly and government continues to take our concerns and interests into account".

The regulations implement existing Government policy and Commonwealth commitments under the 2002 agreement between all Australian governments on the management of Australia's genetic resources. The regulations also implement Australia's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Regulations will come into force on 1 December 2005.

For further conformation contact Tania Ewing on 0408 378 422