ePhyto Update

1. This document has been prepared at the request of the CPM Bureau representative from the Southwest Pacific and is intended to provide an update on the IPPC ePhyto Solution Project.

Recent Developments

1. The award winning ePhyto Solution project continues to make great strides. More than 40 countries are at some stage of participation in either the ePhyto Hub or the GeNS system. Since the Bureau meeting in June a number of training and implementation events have taken place. The first took place in the Caribbean region. This training focused on presenting and training attendees on the GeNS System. Following this event, a number of regional NPPOs began the onboarding process for ePhyto including Jamaica, Barbuda, the Cayman Islands, Grenada, Guyana, and St. Lucia. Subsequent to this event, another regional workshop for the Pacific Plant Protection Organization was also held in Fiji with several countries beginning the onboarding process for the GeNS from that region, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and the Marshall Islands. Regional partner Samoa had already been a GeNS pilot country and is completing the onboarding process.
2. As mentioned above, the ePhyto Solution Project has been recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as well as the Asian Development Bank for the innovative and positive trade facilitation effort the project embodies. As a result the project received the 2019 Trade Facilitation Innovation Award from the Asia Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum in September. Following that event, ePhyto experts met with the Indian government NPPO, which subsequently began the onboarding process for ePhyto followed by an intensive week of training in Sri Lanka to assist that GeNS pilot country in finalizing implementation of the GeNS.

Funding Issues

1. In advance of the SPG a paper was presented concerning long term funding for ePhyto. In the opinion of the ePhyto Steering Group, this is a necessary discussion, but it may be considering that the IPPC Secretariat currently has approximately enough funding for the next two years. In addition, based on if IPPC Contracting Parties continue to contribute what they have already said they would, then we likely have enough for at least three years and probably more.  It is documented that the UNICC consistently has been able to deliver on the project at a significantly lower cost than anticipated. UNICC has also indicated that if other organizations were to utilize the Hub for their certificates, costs could additionally be lowered to level much less than current expense. UNICC has presented information on a similar project for other UN agencies (the UN Partner Portal) which would be the prototype for the ePhyto Hub.
2. In keeping with what has been one of the background goals of ePhyto, and closely related to the topic above, there has been a significant push from other government’s agencies and international organizations to investigate utilizing our solution for their certificates. These organizations include Codex, OIE, WCO and the International Maritime Organization. UNCEFACT has also approached the IPPC with strong interest in partnering on a specific project and will be presenting their ideas to the upcoming ESG meeting in November. Piloting is expected to take place later this year with veterinary certificate exchanges between Australia and New Zealand, as well as between Paraguay and Chile. Adding new certificates streams through the will not have an increase in costs to IPPC but instead may lead to may lead to additional funding streams as in the case of the UN Partner Portal managed by the UNICC.  The Hub can easily handle any other type of certificate based on the nature of the system, but until there is a real understanding of how many other agencies/certificate types will be utilized, then a funding model is hard to predict.
3. The ESG has also expressed some concerns for the Bureau that some NPPOs see a “fee” mechanism as a way to fund/support other initiatives within IPPC.  While this is certainly an attractive idea, at least for the near term, ePhyto should not be the driving factor for funding other things within IPPC. One of the key reasons for this is that historically the IPPC has not been considered to be a very good steward of Contracting Party contributions, and only recently has the Secretariat established a clear and transparent reporting system. Should outside organizations believe that a primary objective of the project is to become a money stream for the Secretariat, there could be a reluctance to support the project.
4. In addition, the ESG in coordination with UNICC is also in the process of expanding the HUB to allow industry solutions (i.e., blockchains) to be connected, thereby preventing industry from having to expend significant amounts of resources to establish technical exchanges with each NPPO.  Two significant international industry organizations (grains and sea containers) have already expressed very strong interest in piloting this concept as soon as possible. The ESG considers this a mechanism through which industry funding would be obtained to help support the ePhyto Solution, possibly on a “subscription” basis.  This mechanism can also ensure that the HUB could be integrated with countries single window solutions, which has been a big question until now.
5. With the amount of money currently available and anticipated, along with the current commitments from some IPPC Contracting Parties, as well as additional funding from the FAO budget, the required amount of resources required is not significant.  With a commitment from a few other Contracting Parties, it will be possible to support this initiative for the foreseeable future.  Setting up mechanisms that charge by certificate will dramatically increase costs because of the administrative burden that it creates.  As there is enough money for at least two years, we should try to get commitments for enough funding to cover the next 5-7 years and then as the system matures and we have more participants (NPPOs, OIE, Codex, CITES, Industry, others) then we should be able to identify a fair cost recovery mechanism to implement.

Upcoming Events

1. A number of significant events are being planned and will take place before the end of the year as well as others possible in 2020. The STDF Working Group will be meeting the week of October 14 and on the agenda is a discussion on the establishment of an electronic certification advisor group as a follow-on to the Project Advisory Group becoming defunct as the STDF ePhyto Project concludes. The IPPC has been invited to participate an IMO eCertification working group on November 4 to familiarize that organization with the ePhyto Hub. The Eurasian Economic Commission will be hosting an electronic certification seminar/workshop on November 13-14 in Moscow and have requested IPPC participation in the event. Five countries will be represented in this event. The ESG will be meeting the week of November 11 in the Washington, DC area, with the participation of UNCEFT vice Chair Harm Jan van Burg and Codex CCFICS Chair Erik Bosker. The following week there will be an Africa region ePhyto workshop (co-funded by the IPC and USDA APHIS) with 22 countries participating. To close the year there will be a Mideast regional ePhyto workshop in Egypt during the first week of December (number of participants unclear at this time) as well as ESG/UNICC support to a Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation project in Morocco.
2. For 2020, there will be two meetings of the ESG. The first will be in conjunction with a hoped-for Global ePhyto Symposium in Singapore and ePhyto Industry Advisory Group meeting.