Other strategic topics - Expanding the use of the Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool

*Prepared by Australia and New Zealand*

1. Introduction

The Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool is an assessment tool for contracting parties of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Use of the PCE tool aims to provide a comprehensive review of a country’s phytosanitary system, to understand the current state, identify areas of need and provide recommended actions for improvement of the system.

The PCE tool is hosted within an online portal which allows countries to conduct successive phytosanitary evaluations and enables tracking of progress towards addressing gaps in the country’s phytosanitary system.

In the update from the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC) to the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM-15), contracting parties were invited to “agree that the PCE is a useful tool to help evaluate and develop national phytosanitary capacities”.

Australia’s intervention to this at the CPM-15 agreed that PCE could be a useful tool but that the use of the tool would benefit from being more easily accessible and would be improved if the assessments and outcomes better considered the country and regional context.

As members of the Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO), Australia and New Zealand are also aware that a PPPO delegation led by the Chairman engaged virtually with the IPPC Secretariat in February 2021 regarding PCE. The delegation raised similar sentiments and also discussed strategies on how the PPPO could better manage its own PCE in the future in collaboration with the IPPC

2. Benefits of expanding the use of the PCE tool

Without improving access and flexibility, the PCE tool is at risk of becoming irrelevant as countries and regions will seek to use alternate, less intensive, and more affordable ways to make assessments of their phytosanitary capacity. To improve uptake and more regular use of the tool, a much more open access mechanism is sought, without the need to engage through a project arrangement that is external to the contracting party. This will of course remain an option, but currently, there is no other way to access the tool.

3. Current challenges in the use of the PCE tool

In the IC update to the recent regional workshops, the point was made that if contracting parties wanted a PCE conducted, they should find a donor. It is understood the way that PCEs have been conducted to date requires the engagement of the IPPC Secretariat and others which can cost up to US$100,000 per evaluation workshop. This is a large investment and is not feasible for many contracting parties or donors. Additionally, Australia and New Zealand consider that countries’ limited resources should be primarily focused on activities which address the gaps or issues identified by the evaluation, with a smaller proportion allocated to the evaluation itself.

PCE recommendations are not always regionally appropriate, for example, development of legislative instruments or ability to use regionally recognised/accepted terminology and concepts. To ensure that countries have effective phytosanitary systems, the PCE tool would benefit from the input and ability to leverage relevant networks provided by regional expert contractors.

4. Conclusion

To address the concerns that PCEs are out of reach for many and so are not achieving the full potential of the tool to identify and address gaps and issues in phytosanitary systems of contracting parties, a desktop study of the accessibility (including affordability) and implementation options should be conducted, with a view to improving:

* Accessibility and ease of use
* making the tool more openly accessible (perhaps through the IPP) and developing a shorter, summarised version of the questionnaire that could be used as a first step, before launching into a larger application of the PCE tool, or on a more frequent, routine basis to allow countries to track or measure progress as initiatives are rolled out to address findings. Parties should also be able to focus on parts of the system where they have identified a need for review.
* Regional sensitivity of application
* ensuring regional norms are acknowledged and appropriately reflected in findings and recommendations and that RPPOs and donors in the region are able to support implementation of programs to improve regional biosecurity holistically.

It is recognised that the results of PCE projects may be used for a wide variety of purposes, and some purposes may require an external independent consultant to conduct the PCE. However, there are many situations where a less formal PCE is desired and acceptable to the contracting party and donor organisations. It may be desirable to recognise different status’ for PCEs. Options could be developed and tested with the IC or SPG.

Although the PCE tool is an established mechanism for phytosanitary review used by the IPPC, Australia and New Zealand encourage contracting parties to explore continued improvement of this resource so that it can be effectively leveraged to maximum benefit by all contracting parties.

5. Recommendations

Australia and New Zealand invite the SPG to:

1. *Discuss* the significant benefits of improving the accessibility and regional sensitivity of the PCE tool
2. *Agree* to propose to CPM-16 that a desktop review that is focused on improving the accessibility and implementation options for the PCE tool be conducted, with a view to discuss the results of the review and agree on a plan of action at a future SPG meeting.