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# COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

## Sixteenth Session

Virtual Meeting, 5, 7 and 21 April 2022

### Sea Containers Task Force

#### Agenda item 11.3

Prepared by the IPPC Secretariat with input of the IC lead on SCTF

## I. Background

1. The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) and its committees and Sub-group have been active on the issue of pest spread through sea containers contamination since 2008. However, the inherent complexity of sea container logistics operations posed a challenge to move forward. As a result, work on the draft International Standard for Phytosanitary Measure (ISPM) on this issue was suspended in 2016, and the Sea Container Task Force (SCTF) was established to address the issue.

2. The SCTF, a Sub-group of the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC), was established in 2017 to guide the IPPC's four-year work plan on sea containers and associated phytosanitary risks. However, the SCTF's mandate was extended until December 2021 due to the COVID-19 outbreak that prevented many planned activities.

3. Initial SCTF objectives included: measuring the impact of the IMO (International Maritime Organization) / ILO (International Labour Organization) / UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Code of Practice for Packing Cargo Transport Units Code (CTU Code); promoting effective implementation of the Complementary Action Plan for Assessing and Managing the Pest Threats Associated with Sea Containers; Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) concept within the World Customs Organization (WCO)'s SAFE Framework of Standards and the WCO Data Model for sea container cleanliness purposes and raising awareness of pest risks in the sea container pathway.

4. It should be noted that national economies depend on the efficient and smooth flow of trade facilitated by the efficient movement of sea containers through a complex and time-sensitive logistics system. With more than 220 million containers shipped each year, the scale of sea container operations is enormous. Consequently, any changes to the system can have significant consequences. Hence, as the

SCTF worked on its mandate and explored various challenges, opportunities, and considerations, its members felt it necessary to present these considerations to the CPM to ensure that any decisions would be made in light of detailed information.

5. Key considerations include the fact that the type of commodities and their handling and storage before and during packing can affect and result in containers contamination; that there is no way to track all parties involved and therefore, full accountability or custodianship was missing; that contracting parties may lack the capacity to conduct inspections given the high volume of container shipments; and that the costs associated with container inspections would be very high.

6. The SCTF has considered possible ways to address the pest contamination of sea containers and the advantages and disadvantages of each (Section 6.2 of the final report - <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/>). Options include voluntary measures developed and implemented by industry sectors; development of an IPPC Recommendation; development of an IPPC Recommendation and an ISPM, with the revision of the Recommendation being the first and transitional step to the adoption of an ISPM; and development of a new ISPM without updating the existing recommendation. However, the SCTF did not recommend any one option over the others.

7. The SCTF has also considered several targeted measures to address the pest contamination of sea containers and the advantages and disadvantages of each (Section 6.2 of the final report - <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/>). Possible actions include treating containers with pesticides, heat treating or fumigating empty containers, and modifying container design. However, the SCTF has also not recommended any one measure over the others.

8. The final SCTF report is presented at the present IC meeting for approval and subsequent submission to the Sixteenth Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures in April 2022 (CPM-16 (2022)). The report includes possible ways forward and several targeted measures to address specific issues related to pest contamination of sea containers. In addition, through close collaboration between national plant protection organizations and industry representatives, the SCTF has made several recommendations to reduce phytosanitary risk in the sea container pathway.

9. In considering possible courses of action and potential targeted measures, the SCTF noted that the underlying principle should be to achieve a reasonable level of risk reduction with minimal impact on container logistics. Consequently, any guidance, recommendation, or specific solution to reducing phytosanitary risk on the sea container pathway should be practical, feasible, and effective to achieve this objective.

10. The SCTF proposes several recommendations to reduce the phytosanitary risk in the sea container pathway (Section 7 of the final report - <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/>).

11. The IC at its February 2022 virtual meeting approved the report and agreed with the recommendations provided by the SCTF, including the establishment of CPM Sea Container Focus Group and the organization of a global workshop on Sea containers in 2022, provided resources are available.

12. The IC felt that more concrete conclusions were expected from SCTF and that CPM will certainly further discuss this point.

13. Finally, the IC agreed to oversee the work of the SCTF (IC Subgroup) but recognized there are little implementation and Capacity Development implications. The IC considered that since the work of the FG will include the possible drafting of an ISPM or the revision of the CPM recommendation, the oversight should be provided by Bureau/CPM and the work should rather be facilitated by another unit than the IFU.

14. The CPM is invited to:

1) *note* and *approve* the SCTF report (posted on IPP in English only):

<https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/>

2) *agree* with the following SCTF recommendations to CPM-16 (2022):

- to establish CPM Sea Container Focus Group based on the drafted ToR (see Annex 2 of the SCTF final report available in English at <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/> and see CPM 2022/31 - agenda item 8.8.6 “Proposed establishment and draft TOR CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers”). Participation of current SCTF members should be considered to ensure continuity of the work, which is critical.
- to organize a global workshop in 2022, (see Annex 3 of the SCTF final report available at <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/capacity-development-committee/ic-sub-group/ic-sub-group-sea-container-task-force-sctf/sctf-final-report/>), provided resources are available, to discuss the outcomes of the SCTF with representatives of all stakeholders involved and to discuss the best way forward. It further recommends to collect additional elements to be included in the programme of the proposed international workshop.
- that CPM decisions on guidance and/or other next steps should be deferred until after the 2022 workshop. Such decision should be based on further analysis of the workshop discussions by the new CPM Sea Container Focus Group, if established. The SCTF expects that this will result in the best-informed decisions being taken.
- that any guidance developed by the IPPC should include in its scope both empty and packed sea containers, as both types move internationally and both types may be contaminated. When developing guidance, the capacity of NPPOs and all other entities that may be impacted by such guidance should be carefully considered.
- that IPPC Recommendation R-06: Sea containers, originally adopted in 2017, should be retained and revised, either as in interim approach prior to the development of an ISPM, or as a final approach.
- remain alert that advances in modern technology may be made rapidly and that opportunities to apply advanced technological approaches, including new detection methods and artificial intelligence, may exist in the near or mid-term future.

3) *consider* which subsidiary body would be most appropriate to have oversight of work on sea containers after CPM-16 (2022, as there are few Implementation and Capacity Development components and discuss how this activity should be handled at the level of the IPPC Secretariat.

4) *note* the following SCTF recommendations to the Focus Group (if established):

- The CPM Focus Group should ensure that its decisions fully take into account the outcomes of the SCTF’s work, and the expected international workshop tentatively scheduled for 2022.
- The CPM Focus Group should explore the potential value in the use of Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) programmes and adding data elements to assist in tracking the cleanliness status of container units under the Data Model (DM) of the World Customs Organization (WCO).

5) *note* the following SCTF recommendations to contracting parties and their NPPOs:

- Contracting parties are encouraged to collect data to better define the pest risk and to help measure the uptake of the CTU Code. Contracting parties are also encouraged to establish/execute sea container surveys according to the IPPC Guidelines on Sea Container Surveys for NPPOs and to submit the survey results to the IPPC Secretariat.

- Contracting parties are encouraged to contact their national customs counterparts with the aim to explore what ongoing activities and experience are available at national level so that a consolidated approach could be proposed on the ways for potential collaboration between WCO and the IPPC Secretariat on this topic.
  - Contracting parties should engage with their national contact points for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to support the inclusion of sea container cleanliness among criteria in the IMO inspection programmes for cargo transport units.
  - Collaboration and coordination between all border agencies should be undertaken to avoid duplicative and redundant activities, including inspections, compliance and enforcement systems. Border management activities should be risk-based and driven by data. This is in line with the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement.
  - WCO Data Model: Contracting parties are encouraged to conduct a national feasibility study with their national customs counterparts, in order to identify the way forward on how the WCO Data Model could be used for exchanging information on the cleanliness status of sea containers.
  - CTU Code: Contracting parties are called on to provide input during the process of revising the CTU Code.
- 6) *note* the following SCTF recommendations to all stakeholders:
- Raising awareness should continue and effective communication will be essential. All players within the chain of custody should be engaged so that the reason and the purpose of the approach applied can be easily understood. Large-scale importers should be engaged in discussions. The most significant challenge for future dissemination programmes will be ensuring that the advice and material developed reaches the many small- and medium-sized entities throughout the containerized supply chain, including those that are responsible for the packing and unpacking of sea containers.
  - The entire text of the CTU Code could be reviewed to make responsibilities and relevant actions clearer and better described along the CTU chain of custody. The language of the proposed amendments should take into account the status of the revised CTU Code: mandatory versus voluntary. This should result in a version of the CTU Code that could be used as an independent document for the management of pest risks. The SCTF recommends that the IPPC Secretariat submits comments and recommendations to this revision.
  - Container manufacturing technologies: Phasing out of containers with wooden floors and replacing them with either composite containers or steel-floor containers is expected to reduce the risk of contamination and facilitate effective cleaning, and should be explored further.
  - Industry organizations represented on the SCTF recognized the role their respective memberships could play in helping reduce the risk of pest contamination of sea containers. As the work of the SCTF drew to a close, a number of ideas and proposals were identified by each of the organizations, and it is understood that joint discussions to assess and develop these are expected to take place after the Final Report of the SCTF is submitted. These various ideas addressed the roles and responsibilities of different parties in the supply chain, the extent to which container cleanliness could be “verified”, and methods for raising awareness of the risks of contamination and the means of reducing them. The SCTF encourages the organizations concerned to keep the CPM informed of developments.