

## MINUTES OF THE IPPC EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) VIRTUAL MEETING

03 October 2023 (14.00-15.00, Rome Time UTC+2)

### 1. Opening of the Meeting

- [1] The IPPC Secretariat (hereafter referred to as the “Secretariat”) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. The new ESG Member, Mr Piriariki MAAO, representing the Southwest Pacific Region in replacement of Mr Peter Neimanis, introduced himself, working for the Biosecurity Service of the Ministry of Agriculture, Cook Islands.

### 2. Meeting arrangements

- [2] H el ene KLEIN, the Europe representative, volunteered to be the rapporteur.  
[3] The participants then approved the proposed agenda of the meeting ([Appendix 1](#)).

### 3. Administrative matters

- [4] The Secretariat introduced the two meeting documents: the agenda and the participant list of the ESG and requested them to inform should their contact details need to be updated.  
[5] The participants of the today ESG meeting are listed in [Appendix 2](#).

### 4. IPPC Secretariat updates

#### 4.1 IPPC ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan (2024-2030)

- [6] The Secretariat reminded that there is currently a [five-year IPPC ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan](#) (SIP) for the period 2019-2023. This ePhyto SIP was approved by the CPM-14 in 2019. Its purpose is to facilitate the transition from a project to business-as-usual operation.  
[7] The SIP was developed by the ESG, and the IPPC Secretariat, and its core elements are governance, operations, finances, country implementation and communication and international cooperation.  
[8] The Secretariat suggested to prepare a new SIP for the period 2024-2030 to be submitted for approval to the next CPM to be held in April 2024. The purpose would not be to reinvent the wheel but to update the SIP in the framework of the IPPC Strategic Framework 2020-2030 including its development agenda item on "Harmonization of electronic data exchange".  
[9] In addition, the Secretariat reminded that the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) commissioned an independent [ex-post evaluation of the ePhyto Solution: enhancing safe trade in plants and plant products \(STDF/PG/504\)](#), following the project funded from December 2016 to April 2020 to support the establishment of the Hub and the GeNS. This *ex-post* evaluation ran from November 2022 to May 2023 with field work conducted in January and February 2023 and the final report was released in May 2023. The Secretariat suggested to consider this report to update the SIP.  
[10] During discussions, the Chair suggested the Secretariat to share the SIP 2019-2023 as some ESG members may not have ever seen it as they are new members and the STDF evaluation report either.  
[11] The Chair suggested to give time to ESG members to review those two documents so they can propose some additions or changes to the SIP and discuss the topic for the next ESG Meeting. The ESG invited the Secretariat to also share with ESG Members the two documents through an email.

## 4.2 4th Global ePhyto Symposium

- [12] The Secretariat reminded the participants that within the previous months the Secretariat, through its former staff in charge of ePhyto, had started to work on the organization of the 4<sup>th</sup> Global ePhyto Symposium to be held in Morocco. This Symposium aims at promoting the IPPC ePhyto Solution globally, providing information about the ePhyto Hub and the Generic ePhyto National System (GeNS) to contribute to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement. This event is intended to build on the success of the IPPC ePhyto Solution thus far and raise awareness globally for those countries which have not yet come onboard and to discuss opportunities for further enhancing the system based on input from onboarded countries. The main expected result of this Symposium is to have additional countries onboard. Given the timeframe and the need to organize such an event at least six months in advance, the symposium would be held in May or June of next year at the earliest.
- [13] In the previous months, the Secretariat had contacts with some potential stakeholders in the organization of this Symposium such as the Kingdom of Morocco, the Islamic Center for the Development of Trade (ICDT), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the German Cooperation Development (GIZ), the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF), the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group (IAG), the STDF and also some ESG members (North America Member and Near East Member). In addition, some of them have expressed their willingness to contribute financially (ICDT, GATF, GIZ).
- [14] The Secretariat requested guidance from the ESG on the organization of this event and more specifically about the establishment of a task force to prepare and organize the event.
- [15] The Near East representative thanked the Secretariat for the information provided and noted that this event would not take place in December this year, but rather in June of next year. He also indicated that for the region it would be preferable to consider organizing the event in May instead of June. Indeed, June, July and August are the summer holidays, the end of exams and the end of the export season. Therefore, to obtain greater participation from the private sector and high-level representatives of the various governments, June is not the most appropriate month. Consequently, the Near East representative recommended organizing this event either in May as the first option or from September.
- [16] Regarding the task force, the Near East representative added that it should consist of ESG members such as the Chair and the Near East representative and representatives from the private sector such as the International Grain Trade Coalition (IGTC) among others. In addition, one key element is to also have someone representing the Focus Group on sustainable funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution. He also added that if the lack of financial support could delay the organization of the Symposium next year, it should also be considered that the aforementioned Focus Group has an operational funding model to start gathering money from member countries.
- [17] He added that the task force should also include an official contact point from the Moroccan authorities either from ONSSA (*Office national de sécurité sanitaire des produits alimentaires*) or from the Ministry of Agriculture. This focal point is vital to properly organize the event, as well as the IPPC Secretariat and the FAO Office of Morocco for assisting in logistical arrangements.
- [18] The Chair added that previously he worked with the Secretariat on the agenda and the host country worked on all the logistical aspects with the IPPC Secretariat too. Responding to the Secretariat's question regarding the potential involvement of potential donors at this stage, he would not think it is necessary at his stage. The first step is to make sure to have all the logistics worked out before getting too far down the road and the agenda will be easier to put together once the date and location of the event have been defined.
- [19] Responding to the Europe representative's question on the length of the event, the Chair confirmed that it would be a three-day event as was the case in global Symposiums before. He also pointed out, since no in-person ESG meetings have been organized since the pandemic, to take the opportunity of this

Symposium to organize an ESG meeting either before or after the event because all ESG members will be there.

- [20] Following the request of the Europe representative, the ESG invited the Secretariat to share with ESG Members the program of the previous Symposium held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in January 2018.
- [21] Following the Near East representative's question about UNICC's involvement in the Symposium, the UNICC representative indicated first that it is indeed preferable to organize the symposium next year rather than at the end of this year, as it is too close. He added then he would be happy to collaborate in the preparation of the Symposium, especially on the agenda.
- [22] In this regard, the Chair indicated that the agenda might include breakout sessions so that countries that use the GeNS would go into one room, countries that use their own system to connect to the Hub would be in another room. This approach would be more beneficial as it could address various issues countries have because their situations are different, especially because many countries are using the GeNS.
- [23] The UNICC representative confirmed the interest of this approach, considering the trend of countries starting with the GeNS and now developing their own national IT system, based on lessons learnt from the first one. In addition, this approach would also allow to consider growing demands from the industry to integrate additional documents on the Hub.
- [24] In conclusion of this item, the ESG agreed that, at this stage, the task force should consist of the ESG Chair, the ESG member representative of Near East and representatives of the Focus Group on sustainable funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution, Moroccan authorities, the FAO Office in Morocco, the UNICC and the IAG.

### 4.3 Other updates

- [25] The Secretariat gave the following updates:
- **The CPM Focus Group on Sustainable Funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution** prepared a paper for the IPPC Strategic Planning Group Meeting to be held 10-13 October 2023, available at the following link: <https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/92604/>
  - The **CAREC (Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation) Conference on ePhyto** took place on 11-13 September 2023 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and gathered 10 out of 11 CAREC Member countries. The Conference generated additional momentum for the widespread implementation of ePhyto within the CAREC region. Indeed, so far, one is exchanging (Uzbekistan) and three are testing (China, Georgia and Pakistan) while the seven other countries are not registered to the Hub. Since the conference, the IPPC Secretariat has received a letter from Kazakhstan to register to the Hub. The translation in Russian of the GeNS has also been announced during the Conference by the Secretariat.
  - **Digital platforms transferring electronic trade documents according to the blockchain technology:** following the mutual Non-Disclosure Agreement proposed by the WaveBL company, the Secretariat received a reply from the Legal Office (Data Protection Unit) requiring additional information in order to know whether both parties mutually share confidential information or only one-party shares to the other (i.e. only WaveBL shares confidential information with FAO?). The UNICC representative indicated he will respond to the email sent by the Secretariat in this regard.
  - The IPPC Secretariat received in August an email from Mr Peter Neimanis from the **PACER Plus Organization** (<https://pacerplus.org/>) with proposals on improvements in the use of the GeNS. To respond to this request, the ESG Chair, the UNICC and the Secretariat convened to have together a call on Tuesday 10 October to decide what enhancements are possible with indicative timeframe and those not possible and why.

- **GeNS training in Burkina Faso:** the UNICC and the Secretariat convened to have a call together by the end of the week to discuss on the organization of this training scheduled in early November.

## 5. Regional updates

### *Europe*

- [26] The Europe representative informed that Brazil has started to exchange ePhytos with the European Union (EU) and Uzbekistan as well. Two days ago, the European Commission gave the green light to those countries to go in production even if they cannot go paperless due to their national laws.

### *Latin America and Caribbean*

- [27] The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) representative informed that he attended last week a meeting organized by the working group on electronic certification of the Regional Plant Protection Organization (RPPO) “*Comite de Sanidad Vegetal del Cono Sur*” (COSAVE) to develop a new agenda on electronic certification.
- [28] Likewise, the RPPO “*Organismo Internacional Regional de Sanidad Agropecuaria*” (OIRSA) has nominated a new coordinator from SENASICA (*Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria*), Mexico, for the working group on electronic certification. This working group is expected to develop a new agenda with the objective of having all OIRSA’s member countries connected to the hub (as of today only two are not).

### *Near East*

- [29] The Near East representative indicated he was exchanging with some countries in the region that have expressed interest for ePhyto but are not connected yet to convince them to join, mainly through the GeNS. To this end, he is scheduling a meeting with Lebanon for instance.

### *North America*

- [30] The Chair informed that the USA enabled Papa New Guinea this morning as they have gone into production now. They have also enabled receiving from Sweden and are also beginning testing this week with Canada.

### *Southwest Pacific*

- [31] The Southwest Pacific representative indicated first they will have their third ePhyto regional meeting on 6-10 November in Nadi, Fiji. Thirteen countries have confirmed their participation in this meeting including the two main trading partners in the region, namely Australia and New Zealand. The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation and the World Bank will also participate in this meeting and are currently working on a pilot project with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji on the integration of ePhyto in the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) which is another trade facilitation program that is currently being used throughout the Pacific.
- [32] Ha also added that as of May this year there were 10 Pacific Island countries that were using the GeNS and, recently as of August, the Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO) endorsed the ePhyto implementation plan for the Pacific from 2022 to 2024 at the meeting that was hosted in the Cook Islands.

## 6. UNICC updates

- [33] The UNICC representative indicated he had received a request from Fiji for a presentation and confirmed they could organize for that. He also added, as a follow-up of the OIRSA workshop held at

the end of August in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the UNICC will connect El Salvador and Nicaragua to the GeNS when they will decide to do so. Indeed, among the nine OIRSA Member countries, those two countries are not connected to the hub yet.

- [34] Last week, in the framework of the IPPC workshop on the African Phytosanitary Program held in Cairo and to which he participated, he gave the onboarding document to the Democratic Republic of the Congo so that they could register to the GeNS.
- [35] He also indicated to the Near East representative that they can use the Arabic version of the GeNS for Oman. It would be great to have one country to use the Arabic version because the product is there, and Jordan has not switched yet from the English to the Arabic version.
- [36] He also informed that UNICC is working on organizing additional trainings for Bangladesh and Burkina Faso. Likewise, two releases are due today for the Hub, one about documentation and one for additional elements in the mapping.
- [37] He added that this year is mainly about stabilizing the Hub because of the lack of funding for additional enhancements.
- [38] He concluded that yesterday, together with the Secretariat, they had a call with the Secretariat of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as some member countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia) are starting to do the final tests before going to production with their own system (CEFTA TRACES). The UNICC asked them to do some tests with the GeNS and with EU TRACES as well. Next week another meeting will be held to organize the tests, especially to exchange ePhytos with EU member countries; that is why the Europe representative has also been invited to this upcoming meeting. He also indicated that UNICC has provided CEFTA TRACES a delegation channel such as the one for EU TRACES.

## 7. Any other business

- [39] There was no other business.

## 8. Date of the next meeting

- [40] After discussion and to better consider the time difference between ESG members, the ESG decided to shift the time of the next meeting on 7 November at 5.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+1).

## 9. Close of the meeting

- [41] The Chairperson thanked the participants for their active participation and the meeting was closed at 3.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+2).

### Action List

Action	Responsible	Deadline
1. Share with ESG Members the five-year IPPC ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan (2019-2023) and the ex-post evaluation report of the ePhyto Solution (Project STDF/PG/504)	Secretariat	7 October 2023
2. Share with ESG Members the program of the previous Symposium held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in January 2018	Secretariat	7 October 2023

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<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
3. Respond to the Secretariat on the nature of exchange of information with digital platforms using the blockchain technology	UNICC	7 October 2023
4. Organize a UNICC/ESG Chair/Secretariat call on the improvements on the GeNS (PACER Plus request)	Secretariat	10 October 2023
5. Organize a UNICC/Secretariat call on the GeNS training in Burkina Faso scheduled in early November	Secretariat	7 October 2023

**Appendix 1****AGENDA OF THE EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING****3 October 2023, 14:00–15:00 Rome Time (UTC+2)**

	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Document No.</b>	<b>Presenter</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Opening of the Meeting</b>		IPPC Secretariat
<b>2.</b>	<b>Meeting Arrangements</b>		
2.1	Election of the rapporteur		Chairperson
2.2	Adoption of the Agenda	2023-10_ESG_01_Agenda	Chairperson
<b>3.</b>	<b>Administrative Matters</b>		
3.1	Review meeting documents		IPPC Secretariat
3.2	Review of participant list	2023-10_ESG_02_Participant_List	IPPC Secretariat
<b>4.</b>	<b>IPPC Secretariat updates</b>		
4.1	IPPC ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan (2024-2030)		IPPC Secretariat
4.2	4 <sup>th</sup> Global ePhyto Symposium		IPPC Secretariat
4.3	Other updates		IPPC Secretariat
<b>5.</b>	<b>Regional updates</b>		
	Updates of activities in the FAO Regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• Asia</li> <li>• Europe</li> <li>• Latin America and Carribean</li> <li>• Near East</li> <li>• North America</li> <li>• Southwest Pacific</li> </ul>		Regional representatives
<b>6.</b>	<b>UNICC updates</b>		UNICC
<b>7.</b>	<b>Any other business</b>		Chairperson
<b>8.</b>	<b>Date of the next meeting</b>		IPPC Secretariat
<b>9.</b>	<b>Close of the Meeting</b>		Chairperson

**Appendix 2****EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) MEETING PARTICIPANT LIST****3 October 2023, 14:00–15:00 Rome Time (UTC+2)**

<b>Region / Role</b>	<b>Name / Organization</b>	<b>Email address</b>
Europe Member	<b>Ms Helene KLEIN</b> Directorate SANTE.DDG2.G (Crisis management in food, animals and plants) European Commission DG Health and Food Safety	<a href="mailto:Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu">Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu</a>
Latin America and Caribbean Member	<b>Mr Rodrigo ROBLES</b> Electronic Certification eCert SAG, Ministry of Agriculture Chile	<a href="mailto:rodrigo.robles@sag.gob.cl">rodrigo.robles@sag.gob.cl</a>
Near East Member	<b>Mr Islam ABOELELA</b> Central Administration of Plant Quarantine The Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation Egypt	<a href="mailto:islam.gene@gmail.com">islam.gene@gmail.com</a>
North America Member ( <b>ESG Chairperson</b> )	<b>Mr Christian B DELLIS</b> United States Department of Agriculture, Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine	<a href="mailto:christian.b.dellis@aphis.usda.gov">christian.b.dellis@aphis.usda.gov</a>
Southwest Pacific Member	<b>Mr Piriariki MAAO</b> Biosecurity Service Ministry of Agriculture Cook Islands	<a href="mailto:piriariki.maa@cookislands.gov.ck">piriariki.maa@cookislands.gov.ck</a>
UNICC	<b>Mr Gianluca NUZZO</b>	<a href="mailto:nuzzo@unicc.org">nuzzo@unicc.org</a>
	<b>Ms Sarah BRUNEL</b> IPPC Secretariat / IFU IFU Lead	<a href="mailto:sarah.brunel@fao.org">sarah.brunel@fao.org</a>
	<b>Mr Dominique MENON</b> IPPC Secretariat / IFU ePhyto Manager	<a href="mailto:dominique.menon@fao.org">dominique.menon@fao.org</a>