

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

07 November 2023 (17.00-18.00, Rome Time UTC+1)

1. Opening of the Meeting

- [1] The IPPC Secretariat (hereafter referred to as the “Secretariat”) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

2. Meeting arrangements

- [2] There were no comments from the participants on the proposed agenda of the meeting ([Appendix 1](#)).

3. Administrative matters

- [3] The Secretariat introduced the three meeting documents: the agenda, the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held in October and the five-year strategic plan for ePhyto (2019-2023).
- [4] The UNICC representative apologized for being unable to attend the meeting. The list of participants is given in [Appendix 2](#).
- [5] Regarding the adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting, there were no comments from the participants and therefore the ESG:
- (1) *approved* the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held on 03 October 2023.

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 SIP was approved by the CPM-14 in 2019. Its purpose is to facilitate the transition from project to business-as-usual operation.
- [7] As suggested at the October meeting, the Secretariat informed the ESG that it will be drafting a new (SIP) for the period 2024-2030 for approval by CPM-18 in April 2024, and discussed the procedure to be followed in this matter.
- [8] After discussion, the ESG:
- (2) *invited* the Secretariat to consult the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group (IAG) in the drafting of the ePhyto SIP (2024-2030) before consideration by the ESG at one of its next two meetings, in December 2023 or January 2024.

4.2 4th Global ePhyto Symposium

- [9] The Secretariat reminded the participants that within the previous months, the Secretariat had started to work on the organization of the 4th Global ePhyto Symposium to be held in Morocco. The ESG discussed who should be part of the task force in charge of preparing this event, and when it could take place.
- [10] However, although such an event is useful for promoting the IPPC ePhyto Solution, the Secretariat drew participant’s attention to the following contextual elements:
- Currently, there are still countries joining the IPPC Hub.

- There are many regional workshops organized every year that are a very good way to promote the IPPC ePhyto Solution (at least five in 2023).
- The most stringent priority is to ensure that UNICC can be funded to maintain and improve the IPPC ePhyto Solution.
- It is necessary to help countries implement the IPPC ePhyto Solution.
- Organizing such an event would cost time and money, and for the moment the Secretariat does not yet know what funds will be available after 2024. Human and financial resources must first be dedicated to the above, i.e., funding the UNICC and supporting the countries.

[11] In this context, the Secretariat concluded that organizing such an event would mobilize resources to the detriment of other actions that must come first. The secretariat gave the floor to the participants on their views in this matter.

[12] The ESG Chair indicated that postponing the global symposium makes more sense until long-term funding is sorted out, as it is necessary to have enough funds for the UNICC and to continue supporting countries.

[13] The Near East representative agreed with the ESG Chair's point of view but, in order to be very transparent, suggested having the list of activities carried out by the Secretariat and the corresponding resources required. This would make it possible to prioritize activities and decide to postpone or not this event until the issue of sustainable funding is sorted out.

[14] To this end, the ESG Chair invited the Secretariat to find and then share some information on how much countries have contributed or how much money has come in, versus how much the Secretariat has to pay out for the UNICC to undertake annual maintenance, what enhancements are costing, etc. He also added that there is probably enough money to keep everything up and running through the end of 2024 but if the funding is not sorted out and no more comes in, he does not know what will happen to UNICC's funding.

[15] The Near East representative did agree and added that it is important to continue promoting the IPPC ePhyto Solution for new countries to join and support, for instance the Gulf countries. He also added that resources may be made available from the Gulf region to cover the missions.

[16] The ESG Chair noted that is a good point and that a regional meeting could be looked at and fully supported, rather than a global one that requires so much effort from the Secretariat. Indeed, as mentioned earlier by the Secretariat, regional events are also a good way to promote the ePhyto Solution.

[17] The ESG, until the long-term funding gets sorted out at CPM-18 and with the objective to keep everything up and running:

- (3) *invited* the Secretariat to share with the ESG information on how much money has come in versus how much the Secretariat has to pay out;
- (4) *invited* the Secretariat to postpone the global Symposium till 2025, to still be held in Morocco.

4.3 Connection to digital platforms (Blockchain technology)

[18] The IPPC Secretariat reminded that several calls were organized together with the UNICC, the ESG Chair and a company managing a digital platform transferring electronic trade documents according to Blockchain technology, namely the WaveBL Company. A new call is scheduled on 14th November 2023 to further discuss the technical modalities of the connection of their platform to the Hub and the legal aspects, as this company requires a non-disclosure agreement to be signed with the FAO. Such a connection would provide the possibility for exporters to send a copy of the ePhyto to a third party such as a digital platform.

- [19] Beyond the additional resources such a connection would require, the Secretariat asked the following for the ESG Members: strategically speaking, would such a connection with a digital platform provide an added value to the IPPC ePhyto Solution?
- [20] The Latin America and Caribbean representative thought this is a very good idea because sharing operations between platforms is the future; that will contribute to facilitate trade, including safe trade.
- [21] The Europe representative asked whether the private companies could connect to the Hub and for which purpose. The ESG Chair answered that it is in a receive only mode, they cannot send anything to the Hub.
- [22] The Latin America and Caribbean representative asked whether it was related to artificial intelligence. The ESG Chair responded it is worth being explored, as it is the next step. However, the Secretariat should not be dedicating any of the limited resources until it is possible. The most important point is that the industry's solutions must be modified to fit the ePhyto Hub, changes should not be made to the ePhyto Hub to accommodate the industry.
- [23] The Africa representative reminded that there was early this year a request from the Trade Logistics Information Pipeline (TLIP) to receive the certificate from the Hub so it can then be used to inform the trader on the status of their consignment in the logistics chain. Their request was to receive the certificate issued by the country as it is. He added that the business community is asking for visibility of the documents used in trade and their status, and whether they have been cleared; and not only ePhytos.
- [24] The Latin America and Caribbean representative confirmed that in the region, trade companies need to have all related-trade documents on a digital platform.
- [25] Following the discussions, the ESG:
- (5) *invited* the Secretariat together with the UNICC to further investigate the possibility to forward ePhytos to digital platforms.

4.4 Other updates

- [26] The Secretariat gave the following updates:
- **The CPM Focus Group on Sustainable Funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution** presented to the CPM Bureau and Strategic Planning Group meetings held in early October 2023 a paper on a funding model of the IPPC ePhyto Solution (<https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/92604/>). The presentation was well received but the Bureau emphasized the necessity to get FAO funding. To this end, a concept note on the funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution was prepared and sent on 16 October to the FAO permanent representatives so that they can advocate to FAO Governing bodies in charge of establishing the biennium budget. In conclusion, the funding model prepared by the Focus Group seemed to be seen as a plan B and will become plan A (at least for the next 2 years) if FAO doesn't provide the needed funding or possible voluntary contributions from contracting parties are insufficient.
 - **The Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Kazakhstan** have expressed their interest to join the Hub through the GeNS and their own national system, respectively. The Secretariat responded in October explaining the registration process. **Azerbaijan** also expressed today its interest to join the Hub and the Secretariat also responded on how to register.
 - **A GeNS online training in Burkina Faso** will be moderated on 13-17 November 2023 by the UNICC.
 - **STDF/PG/755 project**: the Secretariat will have a call later this week with STDF together with the implementing partner and the International Seed Federation to take stock of the STDF project “**Strengthening phytosanitary compliance and public private partnerships to boost seed trade in the Asia Pacific region**”, as it includes one component on ePhyto. It involves seven countries including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

5. Regional updates

Africa

- [27] The Africa representative informed that Tanzania has just started this week testing ePhyto with its own IT system. In addition, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), composed of 16 member countries, is preparing a programme to get involved and if it gets approved it could start within the next six months or so. Ethiopia is also at the point of developing its own system. Gambia and Namibia, already registered, have also expressed their interest in testing the GeNS. He also mentioned he was currently in Zambia to support them in testing.

Europe

- [28] The Europe representative informed that, in the framework of a regional training held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, she met the IT staff in charge of developing ePhyto in Uzbekistan and provided them some NPPO contacts for further testing. She has also been contacted by Malaysia as they wanted to test ePhyto with TRACES for both issuing and receiving, and tests have just started today.

Latin America and Caribbean

- [29] The Latin America and Caribbean representative informed that the Regional Plant Protection Organization (RPPO) “Comite de Sanidad Vegetal del Cono Sur” (COSAVE) is boosting its only one country member not registered to the Hub to do so, namely Uruguay. He also informed that on 8 November 2023 there will be a meeting of the Inter-American Coordinating Group in Plant Protection (GICSV - *Grupo Interamericano de Coordinación en Sanidad Vegetal*) do discuss its new agenda including the connection to the Hub of the countries of the Central, North and South America not yet registered. To be noted that the GICSV has just published a contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification [available online](#) [Document to be distributed among ESG members by the Secretariat].

Near East

- [30] The Near East representative informed that he succeeded in having a meeting with Lebanon; they are very interested in joining the Hub with the GeNS but the main challenge is the regulatory framework as they need to have a new ministerial decree.
- [31] The Near East representative also added that Egypt is currently developing its own system with possible support of the GIZ as they are going to have a mission by the end of November, and they will be reporting their final conclusions by mid-January.

North America

- [32] The Chair informed that Canada has begun sending to the US some tests and results looked pretty good. They hope to start sending at least to the US early next year and then expanding out from there.

Southwest Pacific

- [33] The Southwest Pacific representative reminded that the third ePhyto regional workshop was organized on 6-10 November in Nadi, Fiji. Ten of the 11 countries attending the workshop are using the GeNS in production mode. Experiences on implementing the GeNS were being exchanged with the NPPO of Jamaica and on paperless trade with trading partners. The issues of GeNS outage and the time difference with the UNICC Help Desk can cause delays in good clearance. To mitigate the issue of GeNS outage, the Pacific region would like to develop a contingency plan.
- [34] He also mentioned that some countries in the region were wondering whether their low usage of ePhytos would be taken into consideration in the funding model presented at the SPG. He added that the Pacific region will develop soon a Strategic Implementation Plan.

6. Any other business

[35] There was no other business.

7. Date of the next meeting

[36] After discussion, the ESG decided to organize the next two meetings on 12 December 2023 at 5.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+1) and on 9 January 2024 at 5.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+1).

8. Close of the meeting

[37] The Chairperson thanked the participants for their active participation.

Action List

Action	Responsible	Deadline
1. Share with ESG Members the GICSV contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification	Secretariat, on behalf of the Latin America and Caribbean representative	10 November 2023
2. Draft ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan (2024-2030) for submission to the ESG after having been sent to the Industry Advisory Group	Secretariat	9 January 2024
3. Share with ESG Members information on how much money has come in versus how much the Secretariat has to pay out	Secretariat	February 2024

Appendix 1**AGENDA OF THE EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING****7 November 2023, 17:00–18:00 Rome Time (UTC+1)**

	Agenda Item	Document No.	Presenter
1.	Opening of the Meeting		IPPC Secretariat
2.	Meeting Arrangements		
2.1	Adoption of the Agenda	2023-11_ESG_01_Agenda	Chairperson
3.	Administrative Matters		
3.1	Review of meeting documents		IPPC Secretariat
3.2	Meeting Participants	ESG Membership list	IPPC Secretariat
3.3	Approval of minutes of previous meeting	2023-10_ESG_Meeting_Minutes_Draft	IPPC Secretariat
4.	IPPC Secretariat updates		
4.1	IPPC ePhyto Strategic Implementation Plan (2024-2030) revision	Five-year strategic plan for ePhyto (2019-2023)	IPPC Secretariat
4.2	4 th Global ePhyto Symposium		IPPC Secretariat
4.3	Connection to digital platforms (Blockchain technology)		IPPC Secretariat
4.4	Other updates		IPPC Secretariat
5.	Regional updates		
	Updates of activities in the FAO Regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Africa - Asia - Europe - Latin America and Caribbean - Near East - North America - Southwest Pacific 		Regional representatives
6.	UNICC updates		UNICC
7.	Any other business		Chairperson
8.	Date of the next meeting		IPPC Secretariat
9.	Close of the Meeting		Chairperson

Appendix 2**EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) MEETING PARTICIPANT LIST****7 November 2023, 17:00–18:00 Rome Time (UTC+1)**

Region / Role	Name / Organization	Email address
Africa Member	Mr Josiah Musili SYANDA Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS)	jsyanda@kephis.org
Europe Member	Ms Helene KLEIN Directorate SANTE.DDG2.G (Crisis management in food, animals and plants) European Commission DG Health and Food Safety	Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu
Latin America and Caribbean Member	Mr Rodrigo ROBLES Electronic Certification eCert SAG, Ministry of Agriculture Chile	rodrigo.robles@sag.gob.cl
Near East Member	Mr Islam ABOELELA Central Administration of Plant Quarantine The Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation Egypt	islam.gene@gmail.com
North America Member (ESG Chairperson)	Mr Christian B DELLIS United States Department of Agriculture, Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine	christian.b.dellis@aphis.usda.gov
Southwest Pacific Member	Mr Piriariki MAAO Biosecurity Service Ministry of Agriculture Cook Islands	piriariki.maa@cookislands.gov.ck
	Mr Dominique MENON IPPC Secretariat / IFU ePhyto Programme Officer	dominique.menon@fao.org