

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

2 July 2024, 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.

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 two meeting documents: the agenda and the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held in June 2024.
- [4] The list of participants is provided 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 4 June 2024.

4. IPPC Secretariat updates

4.1 Bureau Meeting 17-21 June 2024

- [6] The Secretariat updated the ESG on the main related ePhyto items addressed at the Bureau meeting held in June (See the Bureau meeting report on the International Phytosanitary Portal).
- [7] **Establishing governance for the ePhyto Solution funding arrangements.** The Bureau discussed governance of the ePhyto Solution funding model and considered various options:
- *Option 1. Bureau/Finance committee oversight (maintain status quo).* The ePhyto Solution funding governance functions will continue to be implemented as per existing mechanisms, namely the Bureau and Finance Committee.
 - *Option 2. The ePhyto Steering Group* incorporates ePhyto Solution funding governance into its scope of activities, noting the group has been largely focused on operational implementation and ePhyto Solution functionality to date. However, to incorporate this in the scope of current work, the group would need to incorporate additional members with governance skills and capabilities.
 - *Option 3. An alternative financial governance body or group is set up.* This group would have a defined ToR and is expected to report directly to the Bureau. This option may be best implemented as part of a staged approach to governance, with the group established in 12 to 18 months as the ePhyto Solution funding mechanism is further established and implemented and as the ePhyto Funding Solution Focus Group reaches the end of its term.

At this stage, the Bureau decided to maintain the status quo i.e., the IPPC ePhyto Solution funding model is oversight by the Bureau and the Finance Committee.

- [8] **Update on FAO funding.** The importance of FAO funding of the ePhyto Solution was raised at the 175th Session of the FAO Council (Rome, 10-14 June 2024). During this Session of the Council, there

were several interventions to increase the IPPC budget in general and ePhyto budget in particular. Thus, the [report of the 175th Session of the Council](#) provides the following:

“8. The Council:

e) requested FAO to continue advancing science- and evidence-based normative and standard setting work, including by supporting Codex Alimentarius, and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) along with its ePhyto solution, including allocating adequate resources from FAO’s Regular Budget in the next PWB;”

[9] **Confirmation of membership for the FG on ePhyto sustainable funding.** See Bureau report.

[10] **Forwarding ePhytos to digital platforms as third entities.** As a reminder, the ESG agreed in February 2024 to go forward with this project. The feature to allow this is already there on the Hub; this is the channel forwarding channel. This is possible for countries having their own national IT system. But for the GeNS, some enhancements need to be provided so that the blockchain company could retrieve copies of ePhytos if the exporter has made this choice and if this is enabled by the NPPO of the exporting country. This issue was discussed at the Bureau meeting and the latter wanted more information on the legal implications and on the costs for developing the system.

4.2 Other updates

[11] **Mixed commodities.** Following a request from New Zealand on how to address mixed commodities for electronic exchanges, and after discussion the ESG:

- (2) *noted* to be fully aware of the issue of mixed commodities for electronic exchanges and the need to agree on how to fix it namely to find a suitable XML schema for everybody;
- (3) *noted* the UNICC cannot make any changes (XML schema, XML validation tool, GeNS) until the sustainable funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution is sorted out and that for now, the priority is to maintain the system before making any further developments.

[12] **Feedback from the Standards Committee (SC) on the ESG recommendation to add ePhyto definition in ISPM 5 Glossary of phytosanitary terms.** The ESG invited the SC at its May meeting to request the Technical Panel for the Glossary to include the definition of the term “ePhyto” in its work programme. The SC discussed the proposal and noted that the ISPM 5 definition of “phytosanitary certificate” already covered electronic certificates and if the ESG felt that there was a need for a definition of the abbreviation “ePhyto” in addition to this, it would be advisable for the ESG to develop the concept further and make a recommendation to the SC. Therefore, before adding the term “ePhyto” to the Technical Panel for the Glossary Work Programme, the ESG should draft a proposed definition and a rationale explaining the wording of the definition, for consideration by the SC. After discussion the ESG:

- (4) *noted* the SC decision and *agreed* not to go further at this stage.

[13] **Potential collaboration between the World Customs Organization (WCO) and IPPC.** The Secretariat informed the ESG on concept note under preparation between the two organizations on “Enable digital collaboration between Customs and NPPOs through data standardization” with two objectives:

- promote digital collaboration between Customs and NPPOs in Single Window environments;
- develop guidance on standardized data exchange between Customs and NPPOs related to phytosanitary and border clearance processes.

[14] After discussion the ESG:

- (5) *welcomed* the potential collaboration between WCO and IPPC and *highlighted* that exchange of data between Customs and NPPOs should not imply to modify the ePhyto data model.

- [15] **International cooperation with IICA for electronic certificates on animal and animal products.** A new STDF funded project ([STDF/PG/856](#)) on electronic veterinary certification in Latin America and the Caribbean and implemented by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has just started. Although this new project will work on electronic certification for animals and animal products, the work will draw on the success of the ePhyto Solution.
- [16] **SPS Committee thematic Session on digital tools, 25 June 2024, Geneva¹.** At this thematic Session that preceded the 89th formal meeting of the SPS Committee, the WTO Secretariat, the Standard Setting Bodies (IPPC, World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) and *Codex Alimentarius* Commission), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), countries (Chile, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, European Union on behalf its member states, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, United States of America), the International Grain Trade Coalition (IGTC) and the Global Trade Solution (GTS) presented their perspectives as regards **Digitalization in SPS for Trade Facilitation and Future of Digital Tools and New Technologies²**. Following presentations and during discussions it appeared that harmonization of SPS certificates is key to facilitate electronic exchange of data. In addition, while the ongoing study of the FAO Investment Center (CFI) estimates that 17% of the economic value of global trade in plants and plant products was certified by ePhytos in 2023, recent and ongoing work of the OECD on digitalization of SPS systems estimates this percentage at 25% for ePhytos and 7.6% for electronic sanitary certificates in 2022. This discrepancy for ePhytos was discussed and exchanges between the two organizations on the methodologies used in their respective studies should take place.
- [17] **Industry Advisory Group (IAG) annual meeting, 25 June 2024, Geneva.** At the IAG annual meeting, focus was made on the presentation by the FAO Investment Center (CFI) of the cost-benefit analysis of ePhyto and its impact on global trade. The ePhyto sustainable funding model approved in April 2024 at the 18th Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures was also presented and IAG members recommended that efforts must be continued to have FAO regular programme funding of the IPPC ePhyto Solution. The term of the IAG Chair, the representative of the International Seed Federation (ISF), was renewed for two more years.

5. Regional updates

Europe

- [18] The Europe representative informed that Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia should move to production in July. ...

6. UNICC updates

- [19] The UNICC informed that based on ESG decisions made at the March 2024 meeting and related to the “checks from the XML validation tool to elevate from warning to severe issues”, a release of the updated XML validation tool is scheduled in the next two weeks.

7. Any other business

- [20] There was no other business.

¹ Thematic session on digital tools, 25 June 2024, WTO, Geneva: [programme](#)

² Presentations available [here](#)

8. Date of the next meeting

[21] The next ESG meeting is scheduled on 6 August 2024 at 2.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+2).

9. Close of the meeting

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

Action List

Action	Responsible	Deadline
1. Finalize the concept note “Enable digital collaboration between Customs and NPPOs through data standardization” for potential collaboration between WCO and IPPC.	Secretariat	End of September 2024

Appendix 1**AGENDA OF THE EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING****2 July 2024, 14.00-15.00, Rome Time (UTC+2)**

	Agenda Item	Document No.	Presenter
1.	Opening of the Meeting		IPPC Secretariat
2.	Meeting Arrangements		
2.1	Adoption of the Agenda	2024-07_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	2024-06_ESG_Meeting_Minutes_Draft	IPPC Secretariat
4.	IPPC Secretariat updates		
4.1	Bureau meeting 17-21 June 2024		IPPC Secretariat
4.2	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 Carribean - 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****2 July 2024, 14.00-15.00, Rome Time (UTC+2)**

Region / Role	Name / Organization	Email address
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
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@usda.gov
UNICC	Mr Gianluca NUZZO Solutions Delivery Manager Digital Business Solutions Section (DDD)	nuzzo@unicc.org
	Mr Dominique MENON IPPC Secretariat / IFU ePhyto Programme Officer	dominique.menon@fao.org