

MINUTES OF THE IPPC EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) VIRTUAL MEETING 01 October 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 three meeting documents: the agenda, the draft minutes of the ESG meeting held in September 2024 and the list of ePhyto challenges/suggestions from Sri Lanka submitted to the Secretariat on 12 September 2024.
- [4] The list of participants is provided in [Appendix 2](#).
- [5] Regarding the adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting, and after having addressed a few comments from the participants, the ESG:
- (1) *approved* the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held on 10 September 2024.

4. IPPC Secretariat updates

4.1 Review of the GICSV contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification

- [6] At its September 2024 meeting, the ESG had preliminary discussions on the contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification drafted by the Inter-American Coordinating Group in Plant Protection (GICSV - *Grupo Interamericano de Coordinación en Sanidad Vegetal*). The purpose of this document is to register the validation tools countries may have at their disposal and to mention the emails to know who to contact in the event of a problem with a particular country.

Following a suggestion from Japan, the Secretariat indicated that this information could be integrated into the existing National Reporting Obligations (NROs) system, which facilitates the exchange of official phytosanitary information through the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP). This integration would allow for the addition of links to validation tools and ensure that contact information for the IPPC Official Contact Point is easily accessible. Utilizing the existing NROs system would avoid the need to create a new database. In addition, the NROs system is used by IPPC Contracting Parties and the NROs country pages are regularly updated including the IPPC Official Contact Point information. The Secretariat then indicated that the proposal from Japan will be discussed with the dedicated NROs Team of the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC).

During discussions, the ESG welcomed the suggestion of integrating the validation tools to the NROs system and stressed the need for quick resolution of shipment issues and the concern about the reliability of the information in the NROs system that may not be updated. The recommendation is to also include the ePhyto focal point email address on the country landing page for quicker contact in emergencies.

- [7] After discussion, the ESG:
- (2) *welcomed* Japan’s suggestion to add phytosanitary certificate validation tools to the NROs system and, *recommended* that the ePhyto focal point email address also be added.

4.2 ePhyto challenges/suggestions from Sri Lanka

- [8] The Secretariat presented challenges and suggestions submitted by Sri Lanka that were then discussed by the ESG. Responses to the questions and suggestions are presented in [Appendix 3](#).

4.3 Other updates

- [9] The Secretariat informed that Botswana and Syrian Arab Republic registered in September to the IPPC ePhyto Hub while Mozambique expressed interest in joining.

5. Regional updates

Europe

- [10] The Europe representative informed participants that French Polynesia has requested to use the application of the European Commission namely TRACES NT to exchange ePhytos with EU and possibly with non-EU countries. She confirmed they would have their own ISO code (PF).
- [11] The Europe representative also requested why the Hub & GeNS monthly reports have not been released since January 2024. The UNICC representative replied that they were working on this among other priorities, and, at the request of the IPPC Secretariat, they needed to review the extraction logic of the reports to ensure consistency with data available on the ephytoexchange.org website's landing page.

Latin America and Caribbean

- [12] There was no specific update.

North America

- [13] There was no specific update.

6. UNICC updates

- [14] The UNICC representative indicated that they were working on reducing the running costs of the IPPC ePhyto Solution to stay in line with the budget available in the Service Delivery Agreements (SDAs) signed with FAO on behalf of the IPPC. In this respect, he reported that to reduce one of the current costs exceeding the allocated budget it is advisable to implement a shorter retention period for attached documents, produced PDFs, and application processing logs, in the GeNS.

- [15] After discussion, the ESG:

- (3) *agreed* not to keep certificate attachments, printed certificates, and application processing logs in the GeNS for over **three months after the issuing or the acknowledgment of the receipt of the certificate**.

The UNICC representative also indicated that Canada was in the process of deciding whether or not to use the GeNS. In this respect, they requested a multi-factor authentication, for which an initial cost estimate has been provided. This will only be possible if funds are made available to develop this new functionality.

7. Any other business

- [16] There was no other business.

8. Date of the next meeting

- [17] The next ESG meeting is scheduled on 5th November 2024 at 2.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+1).

9. Close of the meeting

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

Action List

Action	Responsible	Deadline
1. Inform the National Reporting Obligations Team of the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC Team on NROs) that the ESG welcomed Japan's suggestion to add phytosanitary certificate validation tools to the NROs system and, recommended that the ePhyto focal point email address also be added.	IPPC Secretariat	2 October 2024
2. Respond to Sri Lanka on ePhyto challenges and suggestions.	IPPC Secretariat	15 October 2024
3. Send an email to UNICC to add to the backlog Sri Lanka suggestion on opening attachments in a pop-up within the same window, subject however to prioritization among other more urgent enhancements of the GeNS and the availability of funds.	IPPC Secretariat	30 October 2024

Appendix 1**AGENDA OF THE EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING****01 October 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	2024-10_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	2024-09_ESG_Meeting_Minutes_Draft	IPPC Secretariat
4.	IPPC Secretariat updates		
4.1	Review of the GICSV contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification		IPPC Secretariat
4.2	ePhyto challenges/suggestions from Sri Lanka	2024-10_ESG_02_ePhyto challenges--suggestions Sri Lanka	IPPC Secretariat
4.3	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		
7.	Any other business		Chairperson
8.	Date of the next meeting		IPPC Secretariat
9.	Close of the Meeting		Chairperson

Appendix 2

EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING PARTICIPANT LIST

01 October 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
CPM Bureau	Mr Barik Dris Chef de la Division de la protection des végétaux Office National de Sécurité Sanitaire des Produits Alimentaires (ONSSA) Morocco	dris.barik@onssa.gov.ma barikdris@gmail.com
	Mr Dominique MENON IPPC Secretariat / IFU ePhyto Programme Officer	dominique.menon@fao.org

Appendix 3

EPHYTO CHALLENGES / SUGGESTIONS FROM SRI LANKA

(Submitted to the IPPC Secretariat on 12 September 2024)

1. Server Overload or Server does not respond (Not frequently)
 - Sometimes, when the volume of requests high, it may become slow or unresponsive.
 - May be the slowness of Server or database capacity.
 - Heavy database queries can slow down response times, especially if the database isn't optimized or can't handle the load.

Answer. The IPPC Secretariat and the UNICC acknowledge and are fully aware of the overload occurring at specific times on the GeNS and the UNICC is actively working to address it. They have already planned changes and have been tracking the issues to prevent as much as possible. Communication will continue with Sri Lanka to ensure the changes are effective in resolving the problems.

2. Connecting the systems across many countries via HUB
 - In presently, only 35 countries have been connected and exchanged with ePhyto of Sri Lanka. USA, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Korea South and EU countries.
 - Plenty of countries now connected with the IPPC HUB (Sending and accepting), Sri Lanka looks forwards to connect with them in nearly. It may lead to decrease paper cost. It's important to enhance our focus on paperless certification.

Answer. Indeed, countries with exchanging status (over 90 to date) can potentially exchange ePhytos between themselves. However, beyond the technical connection, and based on ISPM 12 provision, (*"Phytosanitary certificates can be in paper form or, where it is accepted by the NPPO of the importing country, in electronic form."*) these countries must contact each other bilaterally to ensure that they can start exchanging ePhytos in production.

3. It's important to establish a reliable process for verifying and validating certifications from non ePhyto countries. They may be used their own country local system, if we have a chance to verify them through WhatsApp or telegram when find unidentified manual phytosanitary certificate.

Answer. The ePhyto Steering Group (ESG) is currently reviewing the contingency plan for electronic phytosanitary certification drafted by the Inter-American Coordinating Group in Plant Protection (GICSV - *Grupo Interamericano de Coordinación en Sanidad Vegetal*). The purpose of this document is to register the validation tools countries may have at their disposal, including for paper certificates, and to mention the emails to know who to contact in the event of a problem with a particular country.

4. Creating a mobile-friendly version of the ePhyto System could enhance accessibility and usability.

Answer. This suggestion is already in the UNICC backlog of potential GeNS enhancements, subject for the moment to the availability of funds to implement this new functionality.

5. System must need to generate a registration number upon completing the online registration by exporters/importers. Also create a certificate of registration, it can be printed to the Exporter/Importer.

Answer. This suggestion is already in the UNICC backlog of potential GeNS enhancements, subject for the moment to the availability of funds to implement this new functionality.

6. The system should open attachments (Treatment certificate, attached list, bill of loading, etc.) in a popup within the same window for user convenience.

Answer. The IPPC Secretariat will ask UNICC to add to the backlog this suggestion on opening attachments in a pop-up within the same window, subject however to prioritization among other more urgent enhancements of the GeNS and the availability of funds.