Commission on Phytosanitary Measures

STRATEGIC PLANNING GROUP

DISCISSION PAPER

rethinking ISPMs, what is the essence of the experienced problems?

(*Prepared by the Netherlands*)

1. Background

The International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) aim to help contracting parties (CPs) to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) implement the Convention and harmonize phytosanitary measures for the protection of plant life and to facilitate safe international trade. The ISPMs should be accessible and understandable to those that need to use them.

At the CPM Strategic Planning Group (SPG) meeting in October 2024, New Zealand presented an assessment of issues with the current ISPMs, the impact of these issues on implementation, and potential options to resolve them.

Following, the paper presented at SPG with revised recommendations and suggested next steps was discussed at CPM 19. Contracting parties agreed on the importance of ISPMs being clear, translatable and implementable.

Some CPs raised concerns regarding the process for "rethinking" ISPMs, including the involvement of other standard setting bodies, the resource implications associated with the proposal, the removal of guidance from ISPMs, and the necessary involvement of IPPC subsidiary bodies.

A Friends of the Chair meeting resulted in broad and extensive discussions by many CPs and observers, who agreed for the topic to proceed for discussion at the SPG 2025 meeting.

2. Discussion

2.1 Introduction

The EU and its Member States are among the CPs who raised serious concerns regarding the process for "rethinking" ISPMs and the possible negative consequences of the proposals currently being discussed for, for example, the scientific quality of ISPM’s and the needed uniform interpretation and implementation of an ISPM. After all, ISPM’s are the IPPC's core business. Therefore, caution and due diligence are paramount.

A good option would be to take some time to first determine the exact root causes of the problems being experienced by CP’s with understanding the current, existing ISPM’s. What could be the essence of the experienced problem?

Is it caused by the complex language and/or by the use of long, complicated sentences? Or is it the lack of visual tools to support the generally abstract texts? A consistent interpretation of an abstract text within each person's own cultural context in a foreign language is always a challenge, especially if it's not supported by visual tools such as tables, diagrams, summaries and pictures. Or is the root cause of the experienced problems with understanding the ISPM’s something else, e.g. the use of ISPM’s by phytosanitary inspectors in the field?

In order to gain a better understanding, it might be a good idea to do some research into these aspects to get a better understanding of the underlying problems of understanding the current ISPMs. Do many NPPOs experience these problems? Are there any ISPMs where these problems are especially prone? It would be better if it were primarily a qualitative description of the problem, rather than a quantitative one.

This could be done through a written IPPC (Observatory) survey, supplemented with a (limited) series of focused online interviews for further clarification and depth. A designated working group or focus group could help to prepare the content of the IPPC survey on this subject and conduct the interviews with (for example) a selection of NPPO’s from each FAO-region (via the RPPO’s?). Conducting focused interviews (as part of the survey) provides the opportunity to ask further questions for clarification and delve deeper into the real nature and cause of the experienced difficulties in understanding ISPMs.

In addition, this subject can also be discussed during the regional workshops.

The outcome of this research should help to get a better understanding of the problem and therefore might contribute towards a well-defined solution.

**3. Conclusion and next step:**

The SPS agreement encourages countries to use international standards, guidelines, and recommendations where they exist. Therefore, it is crucial that the ISPMs are clear, straightforward, and feasible for all CPs to implement.

The SPG is the right place to explore future developments for the IPPC and its work. SPG and then CPM, should reflect on these opportunities to significantly improve the core functions of standard setting and standards implementation.

The SPG and then the CPM should consider establishing a working group or focus group to first investigate the root causes of the experienced problems with understanding current ISPM, in order to get a better understanding of the problem and therefore contribute towards a well-defined solution.

**4. Recommendations** **to the CPM Bureau and SPG:**

The CPM Bureau and SPG are invited to:

1. *Agree* with the principle to start first with doing some research to get a better understanding of the underlying problems of understanding the current ISPMs, whether many NPPO’s experience these problems and whether there are any ISPMs where these problems are especially prone.
2. *Provide* feedback on the principle that such research should lead to a primarily qualitative description of the problem, rather than (only) a quantitative one.
3. *Consider* the idea to establish a working group or focus group to conduct that research to investigate the root causes of the experienced problems with understanding current ISPM’s.
4. *Provide* feedback on the idea to do that research by conducting a written IPPC (Observatory) survey, supplemented with a (limited) series of focused online interviews for further clarification and depth.