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Report on Strategic Direction 2: Information exchange under the IPPC

– Handout no. 3

COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES
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Information Exchange under the IPPC
Agenda Item 13.1 of the Agenda

1. The Annex to this paper provides a follow-up to the information exchange paper, distributed at the seventh session of ICPM as ICPM 2005/25.
2. The paper is intended as a follow-up to the decisions of the third session of the ICPM on information exchange, also taking into account the coming into force of the New Revised Text of the IPPC.
3. The CPM is invited to:
 1. *Consider* and, if appropriate, adopt “The role of IPPC Contact Points” as outlined in Section 3.1.2 of Annex 1.
 2. *Urge* contracting parties to provide official contact points and to ensure that, if that information changes, it is communicated to the Secretariat in a timely manner.
 3. *Agree* to the use, wherever possible, of electronic communications between official contact points and the Secretariat for official communications.
 4. *Consider* the distribution of CPM documents and, if appropriate, encourage contracting parties that are in a position to do so to inform the Secretariat that paper copies of CPM documents are no longer required.
 5. *Consider* whether observers should be provided with paper copies of CPM documents.
 6. *Urge* contracting parties to increase their utilization of the IPP to ensure national information exchange obligations are met in a timely manner.
 7. *Recommend* that high priority is given to the continued improvement of the IPP.
 8. *Consider* the resource implications for enabling developing country parties to participate in the IPP.
 9. *Consider* and, if appropriate, decide on the participation of non-parties in the IPP.

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THE EXCHANGE OF PHYTOSANITARY INFORMATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE IPPC

1. Introduction

This document updates information exchange activities under the New Revised Text of the IPPC. It describes the main elements of information exchange and notes some difficulties that have arisen in this regard. Suggestions of possible ways to enhance and facilitate information exchange between parties as provided for by the IPPC are outlined. In particular, these include more extensive use of IPPC contact points and re-enforcing opportunities to enhance the use of the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP).

2. Types of information exchanged under the IPPC

(a) **Phytosanitary (and related) information specified in the Convention:** The IPPC specifies certain types of phytosanitary information to be exchanged or communicated in support of implementation. This includes exchange/communication of information among contracting parties, between contracting parties and the Secretariat and, at times, between contracting parties and their Regional Plant Protection Organizations (RPPOs).

(b) **General organizational and administrative communications:** This relates to communications relevant to the meetings and operation of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) and its subsidiary bodies, including the process of adopting international standards (see in particular Articles X and XI and XII of the IPPC, and Rules of Procedure and Terms of Reference of the CPM and its subsidiary bodies).

(c) **Information on the status of the Convention itself:** This includes adherences, acceptances, amendments and proposals for amendments, and related legal and Depositary matters (Articles XVII, XXI and XXIII of the IPPC).

3. Channels and mechanism of communication for information exchange

There are two key national channels of communication for information exchange under the IPPC:

- IPPC contact points designated under Article VIII
- official FAO contact points as identified in the FAO Correspondence Manual.

The International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP – <https://www.ippc.int>) has been recognized by the Third Session of the ICPM as the main mechanism of communication.

3.1 IPPC Contact points

Article VIII.2 of the IPPC states:

"Each contracting party shall designate a contact point for the exchange of information connected with the implementation of this Convention."

The majority of information exchange under the IPPC, in particular phytosanitary information, is conducted via IPPC contact points. With the entry into force of the amendments to the IPPC, contracting parties that have not already done so will have to designate a contact point. The Secretariat will maintain on the IPP a list of all designated contact points.

It is in the interest of contracting parties to update the contact information when changes occur. Where possible contracting parties should update this information on the IPP. Failure to do so may result in contracting parties not receiving communications from the Secretariat and/or other countries or trading partners.

3.1.1 The position of IPPC contact points within contracting parties

The IPPC contact point is normally part of the National Plant Protection Organization of the contracting party. Preferably, it is a position and not personalized, as this may result in the frequent need to update the information.

3.1.2 The role of IPPC contact points

The IPPC contact points are used for all information exchanged under the IPPC between contracting parties, between the Secretariat and contracting parties and, in some cases, between contracting parties and Regional Plant Protection Organizations (RPPOs).

The IPPC contact point should:

- have the necessary authority to communicate on phytosanitary issues on behalf of the contracting party, i.e. as the contracting party's single IPPC enquiry point;
- ensure the information exchange obligations under the IPPC are implemented in a timely manner;
- provide coordination for all official phytosanitary communication between contracting parties;
- redirect phytosanitary information received from other contracting parties and from the IPPC Secretariat to appropriate official(s);
- redirect requests for phytosanitary information from contracting parties and the IPPC Secretariat to the appropriate official(s);
- keep track of the status of appropriate responses to information requests that have been made to the contact point; and

The role of the IPPC contact point is central to the effective functioning of the IPPC, and it is important that the IPPC contact point has adequate resources and sufficient authority to ensure that requests for information are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner.

Article VIII.2 requires contracting parties to designate a contact point, and therefore it is the contracting party which is responsible for making, and informing the Secretariat of, the nomination. There can be only one contact point per contracting party. The contracting party, by making the nomination, agrees that the nominee has the necessary authority to fulfil the functions of the contact point as determined within the framework of the IPPC. Individual persons cannot appoint themselves as contact points.

3.1.3 The benefits of an IPPC contact point

An effective and efficient IPPC contact point has a number of benefits to a contracting party that include:

- a single NPPO enquiry point to improve information exchange efficiency;
- availability and reliability of official (verified) national information;
- improved transparency in meeting national obligations under the IPPC;
- building trust with trading partners and others partners within the framework of the IPPC; and
- improved response time for communications.

3.2 Official FAO contact points as identified in the FAO official correspondence directory

Such communication channels are used when the IPPC or the relevant rules of procedure state that information is to be provided to contracting parties or FAO member governments directly by the Director-General of FAO in the exercise of Depositary functions under the Convention.

3.2.1 Director-General of FAO in his function of Depositary of the Convention and functions under FAO basic rules and procedures

These communications include:

- matters concerning the adherence to the treaty. Countries should forward the instrument of adherence to the Director-General of FAO (Article XVII);
- proposals to amend the Convention should be sent to the Director-General of FAO (Article XXI);
- where a contracting party extends the area of its territories to which the Convention applies, notification should be sent to the Director-General of FAO;
- transmission by the Director-General to the contracting parties concerned of a report by Committee of experts set up to consider a dispute (Article XIII.3);
- government officials of contracting parties (officials from Foreign Affairs departments and FAO Permanent Representatives) providing certain types of information to FAO.

The CPM is established “within the framework of the FAO” and makes other references to the FAO, the FAO Constitution and the General Rules of FAO.

In this context, there may be situations where communication on matters relating to the IPPC occurs between FAO and FAO member governments. These will arise on a case-by-case basis.

3.2.2 CPM rules of procedure

The Rules of Procedure of the CPM require the use of the FAO official system for certain functions. These are identified in the draft rules of procedure (CPM2006/5).

3.3 International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP)

At its Third Session, the ICPM agreed:

- to the establishment of an internet-based IPP to facilitate information exchange under the IPPC;
- that the IPP would be developed with the guidance of the IPP Support Group;
- that contracting parties would be responsible for the upload and maintenance of their own information in the IPP;
- that the IPP would allow data to be uploaded but would also make maximum use of links to national and Regional Plant Protection Organization (RPPO) web sites; and
- that the IPP would contain the following basic components:
 - reporting obligations under the IPPC,
 - Secretariat information,
 - additional information could be added by countries this is not obligatory, but would facilitate the implementation of the IPPC, e.g. diagnostic techniques, pest data sheets,
 - links to other information resources that would be useful for contracting parties in the implementing the IPPC, i.e. information from unofficial sources.

The development phase for official information has been completed and contracting parties can now use the IPP to meet their information exchange obligations under the IPPC as agreed by the ICPM. Over 150 national IPP editors have been trained for this purpose and a number of countries have received technical assistance for information management as components of larger projects.

Contracting parties, through their contact points, are able to use the IPP as a means to fulfil their reporting obligations under the IPPC and to communicate information to the IPPC Secretariat, other contracting parties or to their RPPOs. It is possible for countries to upload and maintain their phytosanitary information on the IPP, or provide the necessary links to their own phytosanitary information systems. Notification of additions to the IPP is automated via a weekly newsletter.

Navigation of the IPP is possible in English, French and Spanish and other official FAO languages will be added once resources become available.

To meet national IPPC information exchange obligations, and in accordance with the report of ICPM-3, there are three categories of information that can be exchanged through the IPP:

Basic reports

Permanent items which have to be reported by NPPOs include:

- Description of the NPPO
- Phytosanitary requirements, restrictions and prohibitions
- List of regulated pests.

Event-driven reports

Items driven by events, such as pest outbreaks or cases of non-compliance:

- Pest reports
- Non-compliance and emergency actions
- Emergency measures.

Such items should be reported as soon as possible after they occur. NPPOs need to ensure that such events efficiently "trigger" the reporting process through the IPP.

Request-driven reports

The IPPC specifies that certain information should be provided on request by an NPPO to another NPPO and includes:

- Organizational arrangements for plant protection
- Rationale for phytosanitary requirements, restrictions and prohibitions
- Information on the status of particular pests.

In addition, contracting parties can report via the IPP any other information they wish (free reporting). They should, however, avoid mixing this information with information subject to a reporting obligation.

The Secretariat uses the IPP for the provision of information on the programme of work. The documents for the CPM and the reports of the CPM are all posted on the IPP as they become available. Further information includes the calendar of events, news items and draft documents for the Standards Committee, Expert Working Groups and Technical Panels.

Most information in the IPP is available to the general public. However, documentation that is related to the work programme (particularly the standard setting process) and that has not been finalized or sent for country consultation is restricted to members of the relevant CPM working groups.

4. Developments in information exchange under the IPPC

4.1 Electronic mail

The use of electronic mail greatly simplifies information exchange between the Secretariat and official contact points and results in substantial labour and financial savings. It is recognized that there are contracting parties without capacity in, or who choose not to use, electronic communication. However, it is highly desirable that the CPM agrees that contracting parties who are in a position to do so can use e-mail for official information exchange and inform the Secretariat accordingly.

4.2 Electronic Document Distribution

Documents for the CPM are placed on the IPP as they become available. Distribution through the IPP greatly reduces costs. The CPM may encourage Contracting Parties that are in a position to

do so, to inform the Secretariat that paper copies of CPM documents are not required. The CPM might also consider whether observers should be provided with paper copies of CPM documents. In addition, as decided at ICPM-7, the use of electronic means for distributing ISPMs should be promoted.

4.3 Development of the IPP

The continued development of the IPP will ensure:

- greater efficiency for contracting parties in meeting their national phytosanitary obligations;
- greater efficiency in the provision of information by the Secretariat.
- support to other components of the work programme, including the development of a roster of experts in support of the Subsidiary Body of Dispute Settlement (SBDS), and links to unofficial information as agreed by ICPM-3.

4.4 Non-contracting parties and the IPP

With the coming into force of the New Revised Text of the IPPC, parties might wish to differentiate the participation in the IPP between parties and non-parties. In its deliberations the CPM may wish to take into account that:

- Non-parties do not have mandatory information exchange obligations
- Non-parties do not have to appoint an official contact point
- A number of non-contracting parties have the knowledge and training to fully utilize the IPP as soon as their countries become a contracting party.

4.5 IPPC Information Exchange Manual

As time and resources allow, the Secretariat will prepare an “IPPC Information Exchange Manual” to allow a clear understanding of the process and obligations for all parties under the IPPC. This will be undertaken through the IPP Support Group and will only be available electronically on the IPP.