Report of the meeting of the members of the ePhyto Project Advisory Committee (PAC), the ePhyto Project Technical Committee (PTC) and the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group (IAG)

Geneva, CH

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# Participants

**Project Advisory Group**

Maame Agyeben, The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Salma Ben Haji, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

Erik Boskers, Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs

Barbara Cooper, CODEX Alimentarius

John David, UNCTAD

Craig Fedchock, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)-Secretariat

Bill Gain, World Bank Group

Nico Horn, NVWA (Chair PTC)

Tomoko Ishibashi, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

Francis Lopez, Intercommerce Inc.

Markus Pikart, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) / United Nations Economic Commisssion for Europe (UNECE)

Shane Sela, IPPC Secretariat

**Project Technical Committee**

Christian Dellis, United States Department of Agriculture, Plant Protection and Quarantine (USDA, PPQ)

Josiah Syanda, Kenya Plant Health Inspection Service (KEPHIS)

Venkatram, Venkateswaran, United Nations International Computing Centre (UNICC)

Shashank Rai, UNICC

**Industry Advisory Group**

Jan van Hoogen, Europatat

Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago, Europatat

Katy Lee, IGTC

Sylvie Mamias, Union Fleurs

Gerard Meijerink, International Seed Federation (ISF)(Chair IAG)

**Observers**

Didier Carton, European Commission (TRACES)

Henk Eggink, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sue Heinen, United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service (USFAS)

Svetlana Juin, European Commission (TRACES)

Sue Probert, United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

Philippe Loopuyt, European Commission (TRACES)

Kenza Le Mentec, Standard and Development Trade Facility (STDF)

Michael Perry, USDA PPQ

# Welcome and opening of the meeting

The IPPC Secretariat welcomed the members of the ePhyto Project Advisory Group (PAC), the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group (IAG) and the ePhyto Project Technical Committee (PTC). He noted the successful work of the PTC and the work being commenced by the IAG in assisting with the project. The PAC, he pointed out, will be a key component in bridging the technical work of the PTC and the industry advice of the IAG to the overall project development goals and in particular advancing the linkages to other international initiatives in eCertification. The PAC will also draw upon the expertise of its members in advancing projects in developing countries.

The IPPC Secretariat also extended his thanks to the STDF Secretariat for hosting the meeting and assisting the IPPC Secretariat in advancing the project.

The STDF Secretariat provided some general comments on logistics and some introductory comments on the background of the project. The purpose of the project is to support developing countries in implementing an ePhyto Solution which facilitates their trade and standard setting.

The participants then introduced themselves.

The IPPC Secretariat outlined the objectives of the meeting. The morning session would allow the members of the PAC, the IAG and the PTC to review the project plan, the project governance structure and to provide feedback on both. The afternoon session would be a more detailed discussion on the project in which the PTC would provide more technical information on the overall project design and the PAC members could then advise the IPPC Secretariat on appropriate approaches to advance project components including structure of testing the ePhyto Solution, capacity building and business modelling.

# Background on the ePhyto project and overview of the project plan

The IPPC Secretariat provided an overview of the milestones leading to the establishment of the ePhyto project. The project which consists of the development of an ePhyto Solution will facilitate the national implementation of electronic phytosanitary certification particularly in developing countries by building a hub (central server) which facilitates the secure transfer of electronic phytosanitary certificates (ePhytos) between countries and a generic national system which allows for the production and receipt of phytosanitary certificates (both electronic and paper based). The volume of phytosanitary certificates transferred annually between countries is estimated to exceed 6-7 million and as such the move to electronic certification will improve the efficiency of certification processes and remove the potential security concerns associated with paper exchange. The project is divided into seven components. These were described as:

Component 1 – establish a contracting arrangement between the IPPC and the UNICC to develop the ePhyto Solution;

Component 2 – design and develop the generic national system;

Component 3 – design and develop the hub;

Component 4 – test the operation of the Solution;

Component 5 – establish capacity building tools to support the business changes required for national implementation;

Component 6 – establish a business model that supports the long term operation of the Solution;

Component 7 – establish a governance structure that ensures the design and development of the Solution effectively delivers on the components and appropriately assesses and reports on project development;

The IPPC Secretariat noted that the STDF had provided US$ 1 million in funding to develop the ePhyto Solution (hub and generic national system) and that Canada and the United States have also contributed to the project. The funds are sufficient to support building the electronic systems; to begin piloting and carry out initial business operation; to develop capacity building tools to support developing country implementation and to conduct an analysis of options to establish a self-sustaining business model. However, the funds may not be sufficient to provide on-going operation after the initial piloting. The establishment of a business model and/or donor funding to support operations will be critical in maintaining the Solution over the long term.

**Introduction by IAG and PTC of their operational procedures**

The Chair of the PTC provided background on the structure and organization of the Committee. He noted that the IPPC established an ePhyto Steering Group (ESG) prior to the initiation of the project to guide the development of ePhyto within the IPPC. The PTC consists of the members of the ESG along with members of the project implementation team (the IPPC Secretariat Coordinator, the ePhyto Project Manager and UNICC). The PTC is the oversight body of the project and provides detailed technical advice on project development. The PTC will exist for the duration of the project; however the ESG will continue to advise the IPPC beyond the delivery of the project. The PTC meets electronically on a monthly basis and several times a year in-person.

The Chair of the IAG reported that the IAG is composed of representatives of international organizations of plant and plant product industries. The IAG has met once in Rome and is planning on meeting again in 2016. He noted that the development of any Solution must consider the broad implications of business changes in particular to the relationship and structure of how industry and NPPOs work. Under paper systems, the industry and NPPO have evolved to ensure that the particular needs of both are considered in operational procedures. These considerations must continue to exist particularly at the national level with the adoption of electronic systems. In this regard, the project should ensure that countries receive adequate business tools to support implementation of business changes that meet both NPPO and industry needs

**Comments from IAG, PTC and PAC on the proposed Governance structure and the other Committees**

Industry members noted that the project should carefully consider the costs of implementation and the development of an effective long term business model. Industry members strongly advocated that the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the IAG should be adjusted to include a role for the IAG in the development of a business model for the long term operation of the Solution.

Industry members pointed out that the potato sector should be added to the membership of the IAG in the ToR. Both industry and PTC members noted that local industry may offer unique perspectives on the development and operation of the Solution. They advocated that the program design should give some consideration to engaging local industries.

Participants also noted that although some issues such as data transfers between border systems may be beyond the scope of the project, where possible these issues should be fully discussed by the various governance committees and methods which may address these issues should be documented to permit future enhancements of the Solution, or to permit other organisations to consider them within their project development plans.

**General discussion on ePhyto (input from IAG, PAC and PTC)**

Participants indicated that the Solution should recognize that phytosanitary information is required not just by national plant protection organisations (NPPOs) but also supports the activities of industry and other government organisations and in particular Customs (e.g. integration of data transfers between ePhyto and single window systems). The ability to transfer data from the ePhyto Solution to other agencies should be considered carefully although such transfers may not be within the project scope. A member of the PTC noted that the project scope is limited to transferring phytosanitary data between NPPOs and that broadening the scope would further tax limited resources. Several PAC members reported that although there may be slight differences in data models, the ability to move data between ePhyto and other border/business systems should be possible. A standardised message could be envisaged which could transfer data between a national system, generic national system or any other e-certification system that might already be in place such as ASYCER or a system proposed for implementation in the European Union . It was stated however that many systems operate using HS codes which would be insufficient for describing plant and plant product commodities.

They also pointed to several specific data issues where harmonisation would improve simplifying the certification process. Although many of these issues have existed with paper certificates the need to address these has become more important with electronic certification where harmonization of codes is critical to facilitating a simple electronic exchange. For example, a member of the IAG noted that additional declarations used in phytosanitary certification are not always harmonized and that these will require some consideration under electronic certification to ensure that the data is provided by the exporting country complies with the requirements of the importing country in an environment where the requirements are not shared within the system.

**Other issues**

The participants agreed that the multi-committee meeting was very useful in sharing views and ideas and in allowing all participants to understand the links between various industry and other international initiatives. The participants felt that future meetings that include the various participants in the governance bodies of the ePhyto project would benefit all members and the project development process. However, members also recognized the complexity and costs associated with such integrated meetings and proposed that the ePhyto Project Manager and IPPC Secretariat could facilitate the linkages.