**Discussion paper from Australia**

**Future of the Informal Working Group on Strategic Planning and Technical Assistance**

**Issue**

The need for the Informal Working Group on Strategic Planning and Technical Assistance (SPTA) should be closely examined against current IPPC governance structures and operations and consideration given to ceasing SPTA annual meetings.

**Considerations**

The scope of the Informal Working Group on Strategic Planning and Technical Assistance (SPTA) is to assist the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) with business and strategic planning, technical assistance, administrative and procedural matters.

Traditionally the SPTA has worked on budget and operational planning. However, in 2010, the Bureau recommended that the SPTA’s role should be longer term strategic planning. In 2012, CPM 7 will consider adoption of the draft IPPC Strategic Framework 2012-2019. Once adopted, this document will provide the direction for IPPC activities for the next eight years, taking over the longer term strategic planning role undertaken by SPTA. These changes contribute to diminishing the role of the SPTA. Other factors are:

* The expansion of the CPM Bureau to seven members, thereby ensuring regional representation in Bureau discussions and decisions;
* The Bureau decision in 2010 that the Bureau would cover budgets and operational issues, not the SPTA;
* The poor financial situation of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) suggests that the resources used to hold SPTA meetings may be better utilised in supporting other activities of the IPPC, such as standard setting;
* Recommendations from the 2011 Focus Group on improving the standard setting process, if adopted, mean that SPTA would no longer need to be involved in setting priorities for standards development nor would there be a need for evening sessions to finalise text of draft standards; and,
* A recommendation from the Expert Working Group for Phytosanitary Capacity Development that a subsidiary body on capacity building be established.

The CPM is the global forum for all members to discuss strategy and phytosanitary issues and allow members to make decisions. If the Focus Group recommendations are adopted, evening sessions would be no longer needed for standard setting and the CPM could take the opportunity to hold an evening session on any issues that needed more in-depth member input if there was insufficient time during the plenary sessions.

The Bureau has the responsibility for identifying issues and reporting to CPM. Together with the IPPC Secretariat, the Bureau continues the work of the IPPC between CPM meetings. There is a need to ensure that the work of the Bureau is not duplicated by the SPTA. *The purpose of the Commission Bureau is to provide guidance to the Commission on the strategic direction, financial and operational management of its activities in cooperation with others as approved by the Commission.* (Rule II of the Rules of Procedure for the Commission).

The SPTA has made a valuable contribution to the work of the IPPC, but it is now appropriate to reconsider what role the SPTA has in future workings of the IPPC. If the Bureau provides the regional inputs in developing guidance to the CPM, there is no reason for the SPTA to continue to meet annually.

**Background**

The SPTA was established under the Interim CPM to be a body that had full regional representation, unlike the then Bureau, that would develop a strategic work plan for the interim Commission. This role was later extended to undertake specific activities related to planning and prioritising elements of the work program. CPM continued to recognise the value of the SPTA when the Bureau membership was extended from three to seven members.

At its June 2010 meeting, the CPM Bureau clarified the respective roles for itself and the SPTA. The Bureau made the following recommendations which it agreed would be formally proposed to CPM:

* Bureau responsibilities will be short term planning and operational issues - the Bureau was best placed to assist the Secretariat with budgeting, short-term planning and monitoring follow-up activities from CPM meetings, but could not undertake all long term strategic planning as well. The Bureau should conduct its work under the overall guidance of the IPPC strategic plan(s) once approved by CPM, and could establish focus groups where necessary in pursuit of implementing the strategic plan(s).
* SPTA responsibilities will be longer term strategicplanning - Bureau members noted that the SPTA had spent a lot of time recently reviewing budgets and operational issues, but they preferred the Bureau, rather than the SPTA, to do this from now on. The SPTA would then be free to focus on more strategic and longer term issues, rather than administration and regular business planning.

The Bureau also flagged a range of other ideas on which no agreement was reached, including:

* scheduling an annual strategic planning meeting to discuss progress on the strategic plan
* making the ‘open-ended Bureau meeting’ (the SPTA) an ad-hoc meeting to be convened only when the Bureau decided
* reclassifying the SPTA as a focus group on strategic planning to provide long term analysis and input (not as an extended Bureau meeting, but as a totally independent body)
* having the SPTA focus on specific topics that need a strategy to proceed (e.g. sea containers).

The 2011 Focus Group on improving the standard setting process is recommending that the Standards Committee should use the IPPC Strategic Framework when reviewing submissions of topics for proposed new standards and that as a result, the topics would no longer be submitted to the SPTA. This diminishes further the role of the SPTA.

If the 2011 Focus Group recommendations that there be no discussion of draft standards at CPM, the CPM would be able to discuss more strategic issues including the annual operational plan. Again this will reduce the role of the SPTA.

The Expert Working Group on Phytosanitary Capacity Development has recommended that a subsidiary body for capacity building be established. Such a body would cover that aspect of the work in the SPTA’s scope.

As a result of these activities, the role for the SPTA is much reduced and does not warrant the holding of annual meetings. The SPTA should be put in abeyance and recalled as necessary to address any issues requiring increased input that cannot be covered during CPM meetings.

**Recommendation**

Australia requests SPTA discussion on the future of the body with recommendation that CPM 7 in 2012 consider:

1. The effectiveness of the 7-member Bureau in delivering the actions and strategies agreed by the CPM between annual meetings of the Commission over the last four years. A review of efficacy should also include the role and operations of the Bureau as they have evolved and the relationship it has with the IPPC Secretary and Secretariat.

2. The value added by the SPTA and the ongoing merit in continuing to hold regular meetings of the SPTA in light of changes to strategic planning and the functions of the SPTA as outlined in the discussion paper.

3. The impact on IPPC governance and operations if the SPTA was no longer convened annually.

4. Any gaps that would arise as a result of ceasing SPTA annual meetings and how these might be filled including, for example, the option to reconvene the informal working group as needed or utilise evenings at CPM to focus on specific strategic issues.

Australia

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