



Online Comment System (OCS) user requirements

1. Scope of this plan

This plan provides an outline of the user requirements for the Online Comment System (OCS) used by the IPPC and Codex Secretariats.

2. Purpose of this plan

To present OCS user needs, with a focus on making the system more user-friendly and compatible with portable devices and commonly used browsers.

The understanding and knowledge of the Standard Setting Processes of both secretariats is essential background for the understanding of this document.¹

3. Background information

The current version of the OCS has been developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization's Knowledge and Information Systems (CIOK) division based in Bangkok using a Flash-based platform with a Java back-end. The IPPC Secretariat identified its initial requirements in 2009, and started using the system for its member consultation in June 2011.

The Codex Alimentarius Secretariat started testing the same system in 2012; the same year the WTO-SPS Committee recommended that its "Three Sisters" (the IPPC, Codex and OIE secretariats) should collaborate more in their efforts and the OCS was noted as one possible tool for enhancing such collaboration.

Originally, the OCS was conceptualised to be **simple**, with minimal complexity; **efficient**, therefore reaching its goals with a minimum of time-waste or unnecessary effort from its users; **user-friendly**, that is, users would be able to use the system in an easy and self-explanatory way based on their needs.

Until 2013, the system has proven adequate in meeting user needs, as it provided an online platform for Contact Points to insert, save, share and submit comments, and facilitated the IPPC Secretariat in collecting, compiling and posting comments during its member consultation periods. In fact, in 2012, 62 IPPC members submitted 4,786 comments to the IPPC Secretariat; in 2013, 66 IPPC members submitted 5,717 comments.²

It is now being revised due to four main reasons:

- restructuring of FAO has created uncertainty regarding FAO's support for the OCS and partial support has just resumed at the present time
- users have started expressing the recurrence of issues that may be better addressed with a comprehensive revision of the system rather than with minor fixes
- some programming imperfections make the compilation and management of comments difficult for the Secretariat and this causes delays in the workflow
- technology is changed and there is a need to make the OCS compatible with portable devices and a variety of browsers.

In fact, as the system developed, its technology became outdated and users identified some issues, which mainly consisted in **compatibility** with several browsers and devices (i.e. not full compatibility with IE 10 or above and IE 6 or below, system not running on portable devices); lack of **intuitiveness** (several users reported not being able to understand the system at first, also due to its many functions, frequent changes and difficulty in reaching all users for personalized training); degrading **performance** (to date, the system is very slow in loading); sharp drop in **user-friendliness** (many users have difficulties in logging in and locating the documents and commenting on long documents is not convenient and time consuming; Secretariat has many difficulties in compiling comments).

Therefore, the current system has grown inadequate to satisfy user needs, as new necessary features were added through time but they have overburdened its users and generated additional technical issues.

These reasons are the basis for reviewing users' needs and requirements with the specific purpose of reiterating the need for a simpler, efficient and user-friendly system to **facilitate** the participation of relevant stakeholders to the Standard Setting Process. Even if that was the original idea, the increase in the OCS complexity has resulted in a more inefficient system.

Background information and training material for the current OCS are available at www.ippc.int/ocs.

4. OCS new requirements

4.1 General requirements for users

In collaboration with the IPPC Secretariat, OCS users have set a series of general requirements to address the current challenges as described below.³

The OCS should be **compatible** with portable devices and all main browsers used by FAO. It should support the **six FAO official languages** (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), and it should be **integrated with the Secretariats' portals** (i.e. the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP) for IPPC and the Codex portal for Codex Alimentarius). The integration shall possibly allow for single sign-on Authentication. Nevertheless, the system should also be flexible and allow to have independent access to the OCS website. It should also be **customizable**, allowing secretariats to brand the system as their own and do minor adjustments to suit their needs. Minor differences between the systems will be allowed, with regard to content, graphics, user databases, and option to turn certain features on and off. **Users will be grouped in different categories** and may have more than one role.

Many OCS users find the system very complex and not user friendly. They deem the homepage is not really useful, and they would prefer to have direct access to the drafts. In the new system, **users should have direct access to drafts open for commenting**, which should always be up-to-date. In addition, **each document should be visible on one page** through a scroll-down bar, just like a word document.

Users will be able to login both from the main portal and from the direct OCS link(s). If a user of the main portal has a role in the OCS, the **landing page** after login must be the one of the only available application related to his/her role – in this case, OCS users will look at the documents open for commenting; when accessing through a direct link, the landing page must be the destination of said direct link. The **steps to send a comment** will be self-explanatory, depending on the user's type.

Four types of comments will be allowed as core/basic comments on each paragraph into which the document is automatically split into: Substantive, Technical, Editorial, Translation⁴. The Secretariat can open documents just for some types of comments and may also choose not to open some paragraphs for comments.

The OCS will not be an archiving system. Documents should be **visible to users only during their commenting periods**, and they will not be visible after their commenting periods are over; however, they should be available on the Secretariat portals.

Subject to further funding, level 1 users will also be able to **retrieve internal comments** from all users in the group (those saved as drafts, saved and sent, ready for submission and submitted) and to compile them for a period of one year after the commenting period is over (users would be notified of this deadline).

After login, users will be able to access a link on **notifications**, both OCS-related and related to the Secretariat portal. This should have a user friendly format, similar to social networks mailing. Users should be able to delete one or more (all) notifications with the click of a button. Notifications on the opening and closing of commenting periods as well as reminders should also be automatically sent via email: as these are vital, the Secretariat will not deactivate this function. It should also be possible for users to switch on and off the option to receive all notifications via email or a notification digest (i.e. sharing of comments, submission of comments, comments sent by lower groups, etc). The digest's frequency can also be changed by the users.

Users will be able to **search** for other users in the same group or for all users (for Secretariat and for level 1 users wishing to add their Assistant / Commenters). They will also be able to search for documents currently open for commenting, and for internal comments on documents whose commenting period is over.

The system should allow users to **export data** in the most common formats (i.e. Microsoft Office Word or Excel, PDF, etc.), and it should be printer-friendly. Exported files can be easily edited (e.g. to make format changes) in target programs, and document sections can be selected by the users as required. The **Statistics** page will allow

Secretariat and level 1 users to check how many and which types of comments have been submitted by which users on which documents in which timeframe. Therefore, statistics are based on the document (title and type), dates, comment type and status, user submitting the comment and Region of the user. This also allows Secretariat to track access to the OCS by its users.

4.2 General requirements for secretariats

The OCS should address the need to comment on drafts by a large number of users without losing the original draft and easing the work of the Secretariat to compile, format, post and forward these comments to other users for further consideration.

Secretariat members are registered by the administrators of the system and OCS Managers registration can be validated by Secretariat members.

As the Secretariat oversees the entire system, its members would need to have administrative powers in all areas. They need to be capable of delivering prompt solutions and manage the development of the Standard Setting Process as it moves forwards.

Secretariat users may perform the following actions (only some users will access all of them), including:

- creating groups in the system
- creating Level 1 users
- uploading documents for commenting in a streamlined way (this may also include a bulk upload feature, as requested by the Codex Alimentarius Secretariat, also allowing to match the different language versions)
- defining the schedule for commenting (insert start and end dates of commenting periods)
- inviting Level 1 users to comment on drafts
- receiving compiled comments automatically at the end of each commenting period
- formatting drafts within the system, possibly allowing the system to generate paragraph numbers, but not changing the text to a table format.

Secretariat users do not need to see the work of any other user and are there to carry out administrative tasks and offer administrative support to Level 1 users. However, it is possible for some Secretariat users to imitate any user in order to check and solve possible problems.

A compiling tool should be developed for the Secretariat to handle the comments received. The system should generate an output that fits appropriately in the landing page as per the following scheme, available for download in Excel, PDF and Word:

Comm. n.	Para. n.	Comment type	Original text	Modified text	Member explanation	Author (group)
25	1	Substantive	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of Growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	International trade involves the movement, so text deleted is redundant.	Country X, Country Y
25	1	Technical	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting in international	"In international trade" is redundant	Country X, Country Y

			trade (2005-004)	trade (2005-004)		
25	1	Editorial	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	It should be "media" instead.	Country X, Country Y
25	1	Translation	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Please make sure that Glossary terminology is followed for the Spanish translation.	Country X, Country Y

4.3 OCS Options

Level 1 users will be able to choose Option One or Option Two.

4.3.1 Option One: core activity with level 1 users

Option One should be used when there are limited resources for activities of inserting, saving, sharing and submitting comments. Under this option, there would be two types of level 1 users:

- i. **OCS Manager (main function: submit comments), *mandatory user*** who should be granted access to documents once they are open for commenting, with the capacity to submit them to the Secretariat. They are the Contact Points (CP) of each group.⁵
- ii. **OCS Deputy (main function: verify comments), *optional user*** created by the OCS Manager, who has its same capacity, except the final submission of comments.

Only Level 1 users may share comments externally and there is no default setting. The option to share externally is only limited to comments directly inserted by Level 1 users or verified by a Level 1 user. Only then they may be shared with:

- a specific Level 1 user from another group
- a set of Level 1 users, also identifiable through regional representation
- globally.

Login credentials are the only requirement, making sure that the right users have the appropriate rights and permissions. Usernames will be users' email addresses, while passwords will be initially set by the system and can be modified by users later.

The basic workflow would be as follows:

- i. OCS Manager receives notification that a draft is available to comment
- ii. OCS Manager reviews and comments on it as necessary
- iii. OCS Manager submits all the comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

There is one possible alternative to this workflow:

- i. OCS Manager has appointed an OCS Deputy

- ii. OCS Manager and Deputy receive notification that a draft is available to comment
- iii. OCS Deputy verifies all the comments, modifies them as necessary and notifies the OCS Manager once completed
- iv. OCS Manager verifies and submits all the comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

This is a minor alternative and should prevent the OCS Manager from directly commenting. The reason for this is because the role of OCS Deputy should be a global role to ease the OCS Manager from his/her duties except submitting comments to the Secretariat (i.e. if the OCS Manager is a high level person with limited time to deal with the system, he/she may delegate all his/her functions to the OCS Deputy but the final submission to the Secretariat).

Level 1 users should be presented the following options while interacting with the draft:

- **Save as draft:** to temporarily save the work done and resume it later

- **Cancel:** to discard the work done without saving

- **Save and Verify:** to include in the final submission comments sent by Level 2 and 3 users

- **Share Comment(s):** to share comments internally and externally, according to the sharing rules. Comments are shared internally within levels (level above can see comments by level below), and level 1 users can change the default internal sharing rule that level 3 users can see each other's comments when they are saved as draft. Comments can be shared externally by level 1 users only when they are saved and verified. Even if submitted, comments should remain available for sharing until the consultation period has ended

- **Submit to Secretariat:** only for OCS Manager to submit all comments to the Secretariat: this is a global command that should send all verified comments to the Secretariat

- **Ready for submission** button: only for OCS Deputy to send comments to the OCS Manager for the final submission. This should be a global command, since the OCS Deputy should use it to notify the OCS Manager that his/her commenting phase has completed and there are comments for him/her to submit to the Secretariat.

If none of the actions above is taken, the system should automatically save any text that has been inputted (equal to "save as draft").

4.3.2 Option Two: adding user levels 2 and 3

Option Two should be used when there are several people involved in the activities of inserting, saving, sharing and submitting comments. This option includes all the components of Option One (see section 4.1 above) but adds two more levels of users, level 2 and level 3.

Level 2 users, Assistants (main function: select comments). These are optional users that can be created by the OCS Manager (or OCS Deputy, if present), and appointed to **comment on one, more or all documents** open for commenting. Assistants can appoint one or more Commenters (level 3 below), select and modify comments coming from Level 3 users and add comments themselves; once they have selected all the comments, they send them to the OCS Manager or Deputy for verification and, if accepted, submission (always by the OCS Manager only) .

Level 2 users should be presented similar options as per the above level. So, they should be able to save their work as drafts, discard all added modifications and explanations or send their comments to Level 1 users. In addition, Level 2 users should also have the option to select comments from Level 3 users (Commenters), once they receive them: in this case, the system should allow an easy visualization of all sent comments, but the selection of only one per type per paragraph; in other words, for each paragraph it will not be possible to select more than four comments: one editorial, one technical, one substantive and one translation.

Level 3 users, Commenters (main function: comment). These are at the third level of the hierarchy and can be added by one of the higher level users. Commenters automatically belong to the group of the user who added them into the system and may not interact with the other groups directly (unless invited by Level 1 and 2 users of

another group). These users, once registered, will have the possibility to add comments upon invitation by the OCS Manager, Deputy or Assistant **on a specific draft**

Level 3 users can only save, discard or send their work to the next available Level of users.

The only case where same-level internal sharing applies is level 3 (Commenters). Level 3 users can see each other's comments as they are saved as drafts by default. This option can be unchecked by level 1 users.

In general terms, when users save their work as drafts, the above hierarchal Level of users should be able to view such content (but not editing it until it is actually sent by its author).

An explanatory scheme of system structure at its highest complexity can be found in Annex 2. Please note that Selection is made by level 2 users, while Verification is made by level 1 users. These actions both entail that the user can see the comments made by users at lower levels, chose one of them per paragraph per comment type and modify it as needed. The different terms are used to differentiate the same actions performed by different levels of users.

Moreover, there is the need to specify a general principle that applies at any level, now that there are three of them: if there are several Commenters but no Assistant, in case there are several comments already sent by the Commenters and an Assistant is appointed later, the system should be able to respect the new hierarchy and make the comments available to the Assistant, which is the immediately above level. At the same time, the Assistant needs to be notified of the comments already sent to the level above by the Commenters.

All types of users defined so far (OCS Manager (level 1), OCS Deputy (level 1), Assistant (level 2) and Commenters (level 3)) can add a comment in the system and save it as a draft or, once they are satisfied with their work, send them to the higher user Level (i.e. Commenters may save and send their comments to the Assistant, OCS Deputy or OCS Manager; once sent, comments are final and the user who sent them will not be able to edit them again; the Assistant will select the comments by Commenters, modify them as necessary, and send them to the OCS Manager or the OCS Deputy, if any; the OCS Deputy will save and verify the Assistant's comments, modify them as necessary and, when ready, click on the button "ready for submission", to send them to the OCS Manager for the final submission).⁶

Table 1 - OCS users and their available actions

AVAILABLE ACTIONS	USERS			
	-----Option 2-----			
	-----Option 1-----			
	LEVEL 1		LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
	OCS Manager	OCS Deputy	Assistant	Commenter
	mandatory	optional	optional	optional
	one per group	one per group	one per draft	as necessary per draft
Submit Comments	✓	✗	✗	✗
Appoint Deputy	✓	✗	✗	✗
Verify Comments	✓	✓	✗	✗
Appoint Assistant	✓	✓	✗	✗
Select Comments	✗	✗	✓	✗
Appoint Commenters	✓	✓	✓	✗
Add Comments to drafts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Send Comments to Assistant	✗	✗	✗	✓
Send Comments to OCS Deputy	✗	✗	✓	✓
Send Comments to OCS Manager	✗	✓	✓	✓
Share Comments	✓	✓	✓	✓

Internally				
Share Comments Externally ⁷	✓	✓	✗	✗

5. Stewards add-ons (note: Stewards can have different names; in the Codex module, they may be Working Group Leads)

Once a commenting period is over, the Secretariat may invite a Steward (Level 1) to provide responses on compiled comments. The process is very similar to the one for OCS Managers: in its relevant additional column (“Steward’s responses”) the Steward has to add responses to comments submitted by OCS Managers.

The Steward will review comments, add his/her responses and submit them by the deadline set by the Secretariat. The Steward may invite level 3 users to have their feedback (i.e. Assistant Stewards or expert drafting group members), but only the Steward is entitled to verify those responses and make the final submission.

Even if there is a difference in the time frame, terminology and recipients, the workflow is the same; thus, the Steward should have the same rights as a OCS Manager, only on a different version of a document and with a different output.

The only difference would consist in the possibility for Stewards to edit the original text directly (to add text modifications consistent with their responses and to provide a twofold output: compiled comments with Stewards’ responses and a revised version of the document in track changes, including the Stewards’ text modifications).

A user-friendly layout is needed that could present the Steward with the original and modified document along with the comments (see example below):

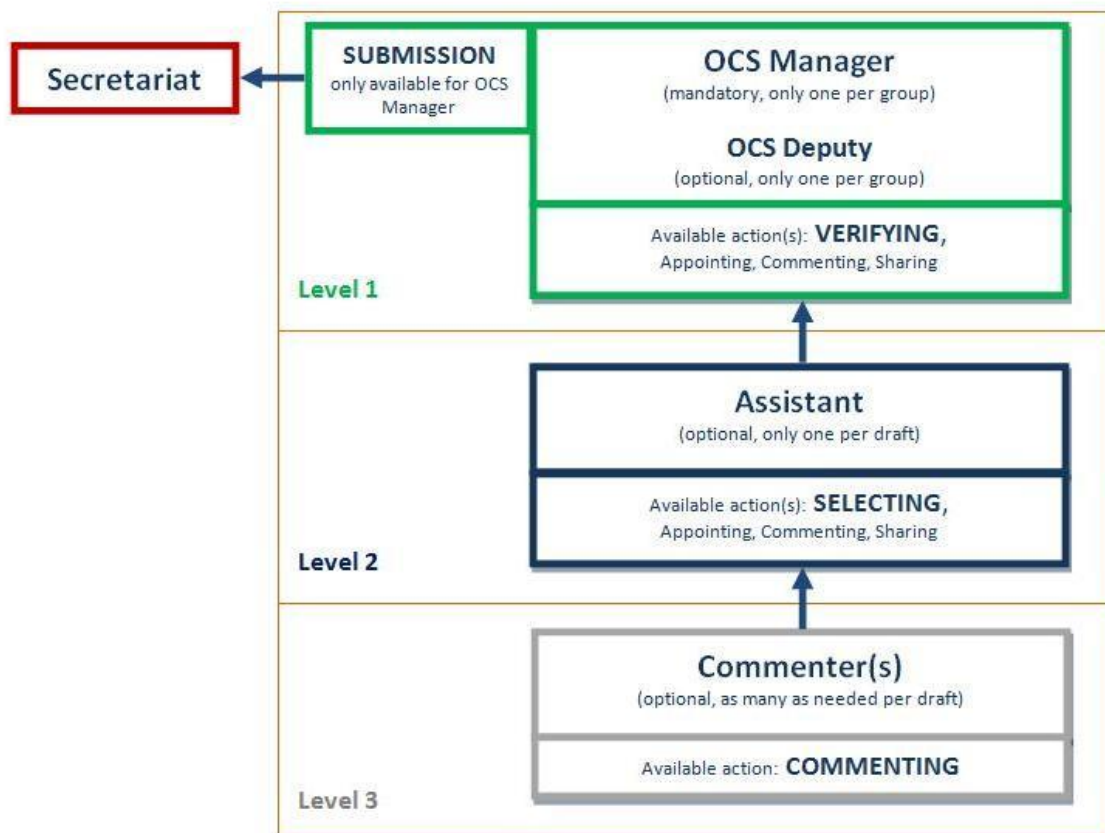
Comm. n.	Para. n.	Comment type	Original text	Member comment	Member explanation	Author (group)	Steward’s responses
25	1	Substantive	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of growing media Growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	International trade involves the movement, so text deleted is redundant.	Country X, Country Y	I disagree with the change for consistency with other ISPMs. The text was changed to “International movement of growing media...”
25	1	Technical	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade international trade (2005-004)	“In international trade” is redundant	Country X, Country Y	I agree, text modified.
25	1	Editorial	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting	It should be “media” instead.	Country X, Country Y	I agree, text modified.

			in international trade (2005-004)	in international trade (2005-004)			
25	1	Translation	Movement of growing medias in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Movement of growing media in association with plants for planting in international trade (2005-004)	Please make sure that Glossary terminology is followed for the Spanish translation.	Country X, Country Y	Noted.

6. Other users

Finally, it should be possible for other types of users to add comments on separate sets of documents. User levels may be 1, 2 or 3 depending on the user types and on the drafts open for commenting. Thus, the system may be used to comment on reports and papers for expert consultations or by governing bodies (i.e. commenting on reports by the IPPC Bureau and Expert Consultations on Diagnostic Protocols).

Annex 1: OCS User Structure



Annex 2: Available Workflows within the OCS**Workflow 1.a** - Direct Commenting (OCS Manager with no OCS Deputy):

- i. OCS Manager receives notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Manager comments as necessary, providing an explanation for each comment
- iii. OCS Manager submits all the comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 1.b - Direct Commenting (OCS Manager with OCS Deputy)⁸:

- i. OCS Manager and Deputy receive notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Deputy comments as necessary, providing an explanation for each comment
- iii. OCS Deputy sends all comments to the OCS Manager (through “Ready for submission” button)
- iv. OCS Manager submits all the comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 2.a – Commenting with the presence of Commenters (OCS Manager with no OCS Deputy):

- i. OCS Manager receives notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Manager appoints one or more Commenters to the available draft
- iii. Commenters comment as necessary, providing an explanation for each comment
- iv. Commenters send all comments to the OCS Manager (through “Save and send” button)
- v. OCS Manager verifies and submits all comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 2.b – Commenting with the presence of Commenters (OCS Manager with OCS Deputy):

- i. OCS Manager and OCS Deputy receive notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Deputy appoints one or more Commenters to the available draft
- iii. Commenters comment as necessary, providing an explanation for each comment
- iv. Commenters send all comments to the OCS Deputy (through “Save and send” button)
- v. OCS Deputy verifies all comments (which can be modified) and sends them to the OCS Manager (through “Ready for submission” button)
- vi. OCS Manager submits verified comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 3.a – Appointing Assistant (one per draft), with OCS Manager, no OCS Deputy and no Commenters:

- i. OCS Manager receives notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Manager appoints an Assistant for the available draft
- iii. the Assistant comments as necessary, providing an explanation for each comment
- iv. the Assistant sends all comments to the OCS Manager (through “Save and send” button)

- v. OCS Manager verifies and submits all comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 3.b – Commenting with Assistant (one per draft) and Commenters, with OCS Manager and no OCS Deputy:

- i. OCS Manager receives notification that a draft is available for commenting
- ii. OCS Manager appoints an Assistant for the available draft
- iii. the Assistant appoints one or more Commenters for the available draft
- iv. Commenters and the Assistant comment on the draft, providing an explanation for each comment
- v. Commenters send all comments to the Assistant who selects them
- vi. the Assistant sends selected comments (which can be modified) to the OCS Manager (through “Save and send” button)
- vii. OCS Manager verifies and submits all comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Workflow 3.c – Commenting with Assistant (one per draft) and Commenters, with OCS Deputy:

- i. OCS Manager and Deputy receive notification that a draft is available for commenting;
- ii. OCS Deputy appoints an Assistant for the available draft
- iii. the Assistant appoints one or more Commenters for the available Draft
- iv. Commenters and the Assistant comment on the draft, providing an explanation for each comment
- v. Commenters send all comments to the Assistant who selects them
- vi. the Assistant sends selected comments (which can be modified) to the OCS Deputy for verification (through “Save and send” button)
- vii. OCS Deputy verifies selected comments (which can be modified) and forwards them to the OCS Manager for submission
- viii. OCS Manager submits all verified comments to the Secretariat before the deadline.

Footnote 1: For more information on the IPPC Standard Setting Process, see IPPC Procedural Manual for Standard Setting: <https://www.ippc.int/node/21079>.

Footnote 2: In these statistics the European Union is considered as a single user, even it submits comments on behalf of 28 member countries.

Footnote 3: Formal and informal interviews were conducted in February and March 2014. A total of 10 users from 5 FAO regions were interviewed.

Footnote 4: Guidance on the different types of comments may be found in the IPPC Procedural Manual for Standard Setting at <https://www.ippc.int/node/21079>

Footnote 5: Groups are going to be defined by the Country, the Region or the Working Group to which the OCS Manager (CP) belongs to.

Footnote 6: See also Annex 2: OCS User Structure

Footnote 7: Specific rules and descriptions on how to share comments apply, both internally and externally.

Footnote 8: Please note that if the presence of an OCS Deputy slightly modifies the workflow: this is because the OCS Deputy is a global role unlike the others (Assistants, one per draft, and Commenters, as many as needed per draft). In fact, the OCS Manager appoints an OCS Deputy (and one only) but may appoint more than one Assistant and Commenters, since they are draft-bound.

Rome, June 2014