

MINUTES OF THE IPPC EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) VIRTUAL MEETING

3 December 2024, 14.00–15.00, Rome Time (UTC+1)

1. Opening of the meeting

- [1] The IPPC Secretariat (hereafter referred to as “the secretariat”) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

2. Meeting arrangements

- [2] There were no comments from the participants on the proposed agenda for the meeting ([Appendix 1](#)).

3. Administrative matters

- [3] The secretariat introduced the two meeting documents: the agenda and the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held in November 2024.
- [4] The list of participants is provided in [Appendix 2](#).
- [5] Regarding the adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting, there were no comments from the participants and therefore the ESG:
- (1) *approved* the draft minutes of the ESG Meeting held on 05 November 2024.

4. Mixed commodities

- [6] The secretariat introduced the agenda item of mixed commodities, which had been raised on several occasions. A central concern for the ESG was how to address mixed commodities for electronic exchanges, and how to find a suitable XML schema (between simple consignment, mixed consignment and mixed product).
- [7] During discussions, limitations of the EU TRACES system for mapping data were recognized, including the ability to only list one entry (containing a one-word value) of species in the botanical name field, **hindering the accurate recording of multiple species within a shipment**. This restriction directly impacts users from sending, for example, a bouquet of flowers or sending seeds. While there are potential workarounds, such as sending data directly to the ePhyto HUB (as is the case for the Netherlands), this bypasses the intended mapping process and could create inconsistencies. To address this, one steering group member suggested to change the mapping parameter from “0.1” to “0.n” to allow for the mapping of multiple values of species. This change would require careful consideration and input from relevant stakeholders. Members confirmed that the mapping functionality had initially been allowed for multiple entries but was later changed to a single value (the reason for this remains unclear). The ESG also expressed concern that allowing multiple species within the same field could hinder species-specific data analysis and reporting.
- [8] The ESG further discussed how the **primary issue relates to the import of mixed commodities**, as export data is typically captured within national systems, and suggested the potential need for a separate field for each commodity when receiving shipments containing multiple species. Further suggestions from the ESG included the use of a text box field for species names, to which the UNICC representative proposed a transition time. They noted that external impact to the system would be minimal and should not present further issues. The ESG discussed the potential data reading and shipment issues that could arise, for example, only listing the first species of flower on a distribution box within a flower bouquet. The need for further mapping of mixed commodities related to flower bouquets and baskets was also suggested, following a request to the secretariat from Norway.

- [9] The ESG discussed the example of mixed commodities for electronic exchanges between the Netherlands and Kenya, and noted how Kenya was adhering to the protocols and references provided in the IPPC guidelines. The representative from Kenya informed the ESG that although they had recognized the notice from the Netherlands, they did not conclude on a particular version to be used and are instead using the contents of the dataset as provided in the IPPC ePhyto HUB to ensure correctness.
- [10] The secretariat supported the need to find a solution to this issue related to mixed commodities (and also to cross-commodities), following the suggestion of the ESG to review the UNICC paper proposing ways to map these mixed commodities.
- [11] After the discussion, the ESG:
- (2) *agreed* for the member representative from the UNICC to share the article on mixed commodities with the group ahead of discussion at the next ESG meeting.

5. IPPC Secretariat updates

- [12] The secretariat provided updates to the ESG:
- **Review of two Service Delivery Agreements (SDAs) between FAO and UNICC.** During the CPM Bureau October meeting, the bureau had discussed the review of two SDAs, including the hiring of an IT expert. The bureau had agreed that Samuel BISHOP (Bureau representative for Europe) would liaise with the secretariat to bring in this expert (through an in-kind contribution). The secretariat had also submitted questions to the UNICC to better understand resource levels, and the ePhyto and GeNS backup volumes.
 - **ePhyto Multidonor Trust Fund (MDTF) and letters.** The ePhyto MDTF was established sooner than anticipated in mid-November 2024. Therefore, only one contribution letter was sent (as opposed to an initial generic letter followed by a secondary letter regarding contributions once the MDTF had been established). The letter on the expected contributions for 2025/2026 from user countries was sent on Tuesday 26 November.
 - **Call for ePhyto Programme Assistant as in-kind contribution.** The secretariat informed the ESG that the competition for an in-kind contribution by a proposing contracting party, national or regional plant protection organization (NPPO or RPPO) for an ePhyto Programme Assistant had been posted on Wednesday 20 November, with a deadline of the 31 December 2024. This role would support ePhyto-related matters within the secretariat for at least two years.
 - **ESG Minutes.** The secretariat informed the group that previous ESG meeting minutes had been published on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP).
 - **Statistics.** The secretariat sought agreement from the ESG to communicate statistics at the aggregate level on “the total number of ePhytos sent and received by country by month” (for specific years). This request stems from the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation’s (GTAF) needs for such data to evaluate ePhyto’s impact in countries they supported through projects (not including full exchange details). Countries included: Cameroon, Colombia, Ecuador, Fiji, Jordan, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Thailand.
 - **Countries registration.** Three more countries had registered to the IPPC ePhyto Solution, including Ethiopia, French Polynesia and Eswatini.
- [13] During discussions, the group inquired about the review process for receiving nominations for the role of ePhyto Programme Assistant. The secretariat confirmed that only one nomination will be received, following a review of all candidates by the secretariat. They also suggested that an ESG member be a part of the review process.
- [14] After discussion, the ESG:
- (3) *requested* the secretariat to confirm whether ESG members could form part of the recruitment review process.

6. UNICC updates

- [15] The representative from the UNICC provided an update on ePhyto activities and tools, including the request from the IPPC for an analysis on the effectiveness of sharing services across different organizations and partners, and to produce a certificate of a region. They also provided the ESG of an update regarding the possibility to use different mapping on the ePhyto application, presenting a strong case for the modernization of the platform (since its inception six year prior). Maintenance of the application with several interventions was also discussed, with works to optimize costs, as well as storage and load. Regarding GeNS, the UNICC is allowing the IPPC to implement log cleaning and the removal of old files that reduce cost. The representative also informed the ESG of a freeze mode over the holiday period and the process regarding the resubmission of certificates.
- [16] The ESG discussed the process for processing certificates during this period and noted the updates regarding the optimization of storage and ePhyto costs. Regarding the wider issue of the ability of user countries to resend certificates, the ESG raised concerns on how this current option could promote abuse (for example, by sending the certificate multiple times). A suggestion was therefore made to block resubmission after a certain number of attempts.
- [17] Regarding discussions on cost effectiveness, one member emphasized the export survey as the most effective method for estimating ePhyto costs, and concerns were raised that alternative cost estimation methods might discourage ePhyto use. The ESG discussed the importance of improving data quality through enhanced validation tools within the app, avoiding the unnecessary sending of ePhytos to countries that are not receiving them, and utilizing the “validate and deliver” function.
- [18] The need for improved user guidance and support (particularly on the abovementioned matters in addition to user-specific concerns) was highlighted, which could be achieved through the delivery of regular webinars (to be followed by wide distribution).

7. Regional update

Africa

- [19] The Africa representative updated the ESG on proposed plans to support NPPOs through a short broadcast or email, regarding best practices to accurately record their ePhyto exchanges to ensure data integrity. Practices include how to receive correct data, and store correct information on the ePhyto HUB, so that certificates are only sent to participating countries, and only successful ePhyto exchanges are counted (unsuccessful exchanges would be filtered). This was expanded to SPS documents with plans to extend this information to web services, to automatically update app systems. The representative also informed the ESG of the request from Israel and Nepal to share ePhyto certificates.
- [20] During discussions, ESG members shared their experiences for testing electronic exchanges.

Latin America and the Caribbean

- [21] The Latin America and the Caribbean representative updated the ESG on a recent Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay from 26–27 November,¹ which discussed the project of electronic animal certification. This electronic certification is currently the most important revolution of eVet, which follows the same process of the IPPC ePhyto Solution. The project aims to mirror the successful implementation of the ePhyto platform and leverage the existing infrastructure of the ePhyto HUB and GeNS as a model for development and best practice. Collaborating stakeholders included the SDTF, GATF and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).
- [22] During discussions, ESG members talked of cost-sharing for ePhyto expansion, with the representative from North America offering technical support towards the project.

¹ [Fourth Regional Meeting of National Trade Facilitation Committees](#)

8. Any other business

[23] There was no other business.

9. Date of the next meeting

[24] The next ESG meeting is scheduled on **Tuesday 07 January 2025** at 2.00 pm, Rome Time (UTC+1).

[25] Subsequent ESG meetings proposed for the next few months include Tuesday 4 February, Tuesday 4 March, Tuesday 1 April, Tuesday 6 May and Tuesday 3 June 2025.

10. Close of the meeting

[26] The Chairperson thanked the participants for their active participation.

Action List

Action	Responsible	Deadline
1. Share the article on mixed commodities with the ESG ahead of discussion at the next ESG meeting.	UNICC	January 2025
2. Secretariat to confirm whether an ESG member(s) could be part of the review process regarding the call for an ePhyto Programme Assistant.	IPPC Secretariat	January 2025

Appendix 1

AGENDA OF THE EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING

3 December 2024, 14.00–15.00, Rome Time (UTC+1)

Agenda Item		Document No.	Presenter
1.	Opening of the meeting		IPPC Secretariat
2.	Meeting arrangements		
2.1	Adoption of the agenda	2024-12_ESG_01_Agenda	Chairperson
3.	Administrative matters		
3.1	Review of meeting documents		IPPC Secretariat
3.2	Meeting participants	ESG Membership list	IPPC Secretariat
3.3	Approval of minutes of previous meeting	2024-11_ESG_Meeting_Minutes_Draft	IPPC Secretariat
4.	Mixed commodities		All
5.	IPPC Secretariat updates		IPPC Secretariat
6.	UNICC updates		UNICC
7.	Regional updates		
	Updates of activities in the FAO Regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Africa - Asia - Europe - Latin America and Caribbean - Near East - North America - Southwest Pacific 		Regional representatives
8.	Any other business		Chairperson
9.	Date of the next meeting		IPPC Secretariat
10.	Close of the meeting		Chairperson

Appendix 2

EPHYTO STEERING GROUP (ESG) MEETING PARTICIPANT LIST

3 December 2024, 14.00–15.00, Rome Time (UTC+1)

Region / Role	Name / Organization	Email address
Africa Member	Mr Josiah Musili SYANDA Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS)	jsyanda@kephis.org
Asia Member	Mr Bojun ZHANG Department of General Operation General Administration of China Customs	509249093@qq.com
Europe Member	Ms Helene KLEIN Directorate SANTE. DDG2.G (Crisis management in food, animals and plants) European Commission DG Health and Food Safety	Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu
Latin America and Caribbean Member	Mr Rodrigo ROBLES Electronic Certification eCert SAG, Ministry of Agriculture Chile	rodrigo.robles@sag.gob.cl
North America Member (ESG Chairperson)	Mr Christian B DELLIS United States Department of Agriculture, Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine	christian.b.dellis@usda.gov
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