



**EPHYTO STEERING GROUP MEETING**  
**ONLINE MEETING**  
**4 NOVEMBER 2025**

**Meeting participants:**

<b>Region / Role</b>	<b>Name / Organization</b>	<b>Email address</b>
Asia Member	<b>Mr Bojun ZHANG</b> Department of General Operation General Administration of China Customs	<a href="mailto:509249093@qq.com">509249093@qq.com</a>
Europe Member	<b>Ms Helene KLEIN</b> Directorate SANTE.DDG2.G (Crisis management in food, animals and plants) European Commission DG Health and Food Safety	<a href="mailto:Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu">Helene.KLEIN@ec.europa.eu</a>
North America Member (ESG Chairperson)	<b>Mr Christian B DELLIS</b> United States Department of Agriculture, Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine	<a href="mailto:christian.b.dellis@usda.gov">christian.b.dellis@usda.gov</a>
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IPPC Secretariat	<b>Mr Gianluca NUZZO</b> Product Manager for IPPC ePhyto Solution	<a href="mailto:Gianluca.Nuzzo@fao.org">Gianluca.Nuzzo@fao.org</a>
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## **Approval of Previous Meeting Notes and Adoption of Agenda**

- [1] The notes of the previous ePhyto Steering Group (ESG) meeting were reviewed and formally approved by the members without further amendments. The agenda of the current meeting was also presented and adopted.

## **Strategic Planning Group (SPG) Outcome**

- [2] The IPPC Secretariat briefed the ESG participants on the outcomes of the recent SPG meeting, which focused on strengthening the Governance and Change Management framework of the ePhyto Solution. The SPG recognized the success and continued expansion of the system, emphasizing the need for a clearer and more structured approach to governance and decision-making.

The SPG identified the following key areas for improvement/discussion:

- Reviewing the current ePhyto governance arrangements and providing recommendations to CPM-20 on possible alternatives.
- Enhancing participation and contributions to ESG meetings and activities by expanding the group's membership.
- Discussing the potential value of adding the functionality to the IPPC ePhyto Solution that would allow importing countries to publish additional declarations, facilitating access for exporting countries.

In particular, New Zealand and the United Kingdom raised the following points:

- New Zealand and United Kingdom suggested establishing a robust governance arrangement for ePhyto. The role of governance would be to ensure: (i) continued appropriate and sustainable funding; (ii) appropriate financial and expenditure controls; (iii) appropriate integrity, security, assurance and quality systems; (iv) appropriate change management approval; (v) clear strategic direction and communicated; (vi) proactive identification and management of strategic risks and issues.
- New Zealand supported the development of a new functionality of adding a database of additional declarations (ADs) to the ePhyto Solution. Often a consignment can be compliant in all respects except for an error in or use of an incorrect AD.

Next Steps: The SPG report and its outcomes will be shared with ESG members for their information. The IPPC Secretariat will then prepare papers for the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), consolidating the SPG's conclusions and presenting a proposal for revised ePhyto governance arrangements. A draft version of CPM papers will be shared with SPG members for comments and input before finalization. The final papers are expected to be completed by the end of November and submitted to CPM-20 in early December.



- [3] The IPPC Secretariat informed participants of regular financial oversight of the ePhyto Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). This will allow for a continuous review of the budget and expenditure, ensuring transparency in the use of contributions. It was noted that, although available resources remain limited, efforts are being made to improve the level of contributions for the current year.

Next step: A letter will be sent to countries to remind them of their contributions to the ePhyto MDTF for 2025. Furthermore, the Secretariat will continue to monitor the receipt of contributions. Financial updates will be provided at upcoming meetings to ensure ongoing transparency and coordination.

### **Regional Updates**

- [4] The representative from the European Region provided an update on ongoing regional activities and bilateral engagement with countries participating in the IPPC ePhyto Solution. The representative from the EU is actively working with Ethiopia and Mozambique. The representative also reported progress in discussions with the Republic of Korea, noting that cooperation is at an advanced stage and that the electronic signature component is currently being finalized. There is optimism that exchanges with Korea could begin soon, and China could be considered as a next potential partner for testing and exchange.
- [5] The representative from Asia provided an update on the ongoing development of a new national phytosanitary certification system in China, which is expected to become operational in February 2026. The representative from China noted that the policy framework will remain unchanged, and once the new system is online, internal authorization will be required for connection to the IPPC ePhyto Hub. Upon approval, connection testing will be carried out with the Hub to verify system compatibility and data exchange functionality. At this stage, activities are focused on system development and preparatory testing, pending further internal clearance.
- [6] The representative of the Pacific provided a regional update on activities in the Pacific region. He reported that a new regional ePhyto coordinator had been appointed under the PACER Plus Program, a regional initiative funded by New Zealand and Australia. It was also noted that New Zealand and Australia are encouraging the organization of more frequent regional meetings, with plans to hold monthly coordination sessions following each ESG meeting to provide regional updates and strengthen collaboration among Pacific countries.
- [7] The representative from North America provided an update on recent developments in the ePhyto exchange. The United States recently went live with Japan, with both sending and receiving exchanges proceeding smoothly. El Salvador is expected to initiate exchanges shortly, following successful testing, and Kazakhstan has also been newly enabled, with initial exchanges anticipated in the near future. It was also mentioned that Mexico had requested to IPPC Secretariat to access to data showing the number of certificates sent and received by each country over the past six months, to better identify and engage partners that are actively exchanging certificates.
- [8] The IPPC Secretariat confirmed that several countries are currently in testing, specifically in the Southern Region area, with Angola expected to be ready soon. Progress in Angola has been delayed due to pending work on the digital signature, which remains a prerequisite for initiating exchanges. Mauritania and Japan have requested support for the implementation of the digital signature, to enable exchanges with European Union Countries.



[9] The ESG:

*Requested* the IPPC Secretariat to design a couple of options to enhance the current ePhyto Landing dashboard<sup>1</sup> and a regular factsheet that can be regularly shared with countries, considering the ongoing improvements to the communication plan and activities on the ePhyto.

### Proposed Changes – Mixed commodities

[10] The IPPC ePhyto Product Manager presented the Proposed Changes document for the IPPC ePhyto Solution. The ESG reviewed the six proposed options related to mixed commodities and assessed the potential impacts and risks of each. The evaluation was conducted using a set of indicators — including cost, impact/risk, alignment, feasibility, flexibility, and timelines — with corresponding scoring criteria applied to identify the most suitable option.

- **Option 1** foresees one trade line item where all ingredients are listed under the same set of information (e.g. Botanical Name, Common Name, Plant Part, Condition, Origin, Additional Declarations). This offers more structured data but creates interpretation issues, as the link between each ingredient and its related information is not clearly defined.
- **Option 2** foresees one trade line item with a single descriptive line covering all ingredients together, which has less impact on existing systems but leaves data and reporting gaps.
- **Option 3** assigns one trade line item to each ingredient, with its own separate set of information. This provides clearer data associations than Option 1 but would require major adjustments to existing systems. (It was noted that the approach suggested by Option 5 aligns closely with Option 3).
- **Option 4** one trade line item, describing each ingredient separately, and all the information of a particular ingredient are described together.
- **Option 5** proposed by the Netherlands and focused on the use of the existing UNCEFACT Schema, is equivalent to Option 3, providing a more structured but technically demanding approach.
- **Option 6** leaves the ePhyto schema mapping as it is, foresees no change, keeping current practices such as the use of attachments, providing no improvement in data structure.

[11] The representatives of ESG noted that New Zealand and Australia recommended putting on hold the mixed commodities exercise, considering the upcoming revisions to ISPM 12, which may have significant implications.

[12] The ESG:

- *Agreed* that, although a detailed analysis of the six options had been completed, the final decision should be deferred until the new ISPM 12 is finalized, as the changes could affect both the technical design and data mapping. Consequently, the group agreed to freeze the current analysis and temporarily retain Option 6 (“no change”) as the operational approach.

[13] The representative from Europe noted that the description of the options and their associated risks should be further expanded and clarified in the Change Management document. Option 5 should be described in greater detail, to ensure consistency with the level of detail provided for the other options. The table of indicators (cost, impact/risks, alignment, feasibility, flexibility, and timelines) should also be aligned with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ephytoexchange.org/landing/>





the narrative section, as some discrepancies were identified — for example, Option 4 is rated as “low impact/risk” in the table, while the text describes it as requiring intensive system modifications.

- [14] The representatives in the ESG emphasized the importance of providing a clear explanation of how each option’s score is calculated, including how qualitative assessments (e.g. “low”, “medium”, “high”) are converted into numerical values and combined with their respective weights to produce a total score. The final document should explicitly indicate how these scores support the recommended options and how differences between options are interpreted. It was noted that this scoring and evaluation methodology could also be integrated into the revised governance framework, to clarify how ESG assesses and decides on proposed system changes.

Next step: The Change Management document on ePhyto system will be revised by the IPPC Secretariat to incorporate the feedback provided by ESG members. The updated version will be recirculated to the ESG for review, aiming to present the agreed process to the next CPM-20.

### **Proposed Changes - Country Responses**

- [15] The IPPC Secretariat clarified that “non-compliance” refers to any situation where a consignment does not meet phytosanitary requirements, including missing certificates, detection of harmful organisms, or absence of mandatory declarations. Building on previous ESG discussions, the Secretariat presented a proposal to digitalize non-compliance notifications through the existing Country Responses (SPSAcknowledgement) function. It was noted that the functionality currently operates only when an ePhyto is available and is supported exclusively within the GeNS environment. To extend its use to cases where no certificate exists, such as paper-based or non-commercial shipments, it was proposed to allow the use of the “Not Available” code in the certificate ID field.

- [16] The ESG:

- Agreed that the proposal for non-compliance will remain under consideration among the potential system changes to be submitted to CPM-20.

### **Packaging Code**

- [17] The representative from Europe raised an issue regarding the packaging code “O2 – Trolley”, requested by the Netherlands for inclusion in the GeNS packaging list. It was clarified that the code is not part of the UN/CEFACT schema version 17A currently<sup>2</sup> used by the IPPC ePhyto system. Using codes not defined in the implemented schema may trigger validation warnings or rejections during certificate verification. The IPPC Secretariat explained that enabling the code would require updating to a newer schema version or introducing a compatibility mechanism. The Secretariat will assess the feasibility of this update and report back at a future meeting.

- [18] The ESG:

- *Requested* the IPPC Secretariat to assess the feasibility of the packaging code update.

### **Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be scheduled in December

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<sup>2</sup> The document will be shared among ESG members