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COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

Eighth Session
Rome, 08 - 12 April 2013
ePhyto Update
Agenda item 8.2.2
Prepared by the IPPC Secretariat

1. Substantial progress in the development of ePhyto (IPPC electronic certification) has been made since the Seventh Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM).
2. A meeting of the ePhyto Expert Working Group sub-committees 1 and 3 was held in Paris in September 2012. This event was not initially planned but it was essential for a face-to-face meeting to get consensus on the outstanding technical issues. The XML code and communication mechanism for the ePhyto were finalized, and Appendix 1 was checked for technical accuracy.
3. All phases of ePhyto have now entered into a period of field testing and should provide substantial feedback before the end of March 2013.
4. Issues that have arisen during the past six months:
 - there are no new obligations possible for ePhyto (e.g. mandatory use of Customs codes) as all obligations have already been established in ISPM 12: 2011;
 - many people find electronic systems difficult to understand despite the fact that they provide new opportunities beyond those offered by a paper version, as they are inherently less flexible than a paper system, e.g. free text fields;
 - signatures are now digital (i.e. they do not include the physical signatures as in the past) and the name of the inspector will not appear on the phytosanitary certificate as per ISPM 12: 2011 - national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) need to realize this was already agreed in 2011;
 - there are likely to be small costs involved in using ePhyto to ensure maintenance of some of these codes e.g. the Plant Protection Thesaurus of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPT). These costs are small and could easily be absorbed by the trading partners, if the necessary bilateral agreement is reached.

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5. The country commenting period for draft ISPMs (including Appendix 1 of ISPM 12:2011) was held and about 500 comments have been received. These will be considered and revised text submitted to the Standards Committee (SC) in May 2013 for their consideration. The ePhyto Steering Committee will be working with the SC Steward to ensure technical accuracy.
6. Appendix 1 and the ePhyto website (<http://ephyto.ippc.int>) will need substantial revision / re-structuring to take all country comments into account.
7. There is a need to establish a formal and transparent process to update, verify and review code i.e. all the material referenced in draft Appendix 1 to ISPM 12:2011. A written proposal will be made to the next SC meeting in 2013.
8. The Secretariat has been given approval by the Bureau of the CPM to undertake a feasibility study on the possible establishment of a Global ePhyto Hub. Terms of reference (see Attachment 1) were initially developed by the ePhyto expert working group and finalized during the Strategic Planning Group meeting in October 2012. This project will be initiated before the end of 2012 and delivery is expected around June 2013.

Attachment 1**FEASIBILITY STUDY ON ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING A GLOBAL EPHYTO HUB****Terms of Reference**

1. With the introduction of ISPM 12:2011 electronic certification known as ePhyto, many countries are looking at the implementation of national ePhyto systems. A major issue with current arrangements for implementing ePhyto systems is the need for bilateral agreements between sending and recipient countries. This could mean that many bilateral agreements will be required. As a result of these considerations, a number of countries have pointed out the possible benefits of a single global ePhyto system, as this would:

- 1) further harmonize ePhyto communication protocols, resulting in substantial gains in efficiency and savings;
- 2) greatly simplify development and reduce start-up costs of national ePhyto systems; and
- 3) allow least developed countries the possibility of participating in the global system with minimal development cost (personal and financial).

2. To this end the ePhyto Expert Working Group (EWG) and the IPPC Standards Committee have requested the Secretariat, as a matter of urgency, to instigate a Global ePhyto Hub feasibility study.

3. Under the supervision of the IPPC Secretariat, a study will be conducted that will include the following aspects:

- 1) The possible overall typology/ies of the ePhyto global hub, including the feasibility of establishing regional hubs within the global mechanism, should be considered
 - a) oversight by the IPPC Secretariat for a centralized system, or
 - b) a decentralized hub system with overall coordination and management by the IPPC Secretariat; and
 - c) consider other options for the hub, including arrangements for oversight and management.
- 2) How countries would access the hub, particularly detailing how countries, without or with limited capacity could participate in the system and whether use of the hub should be mandatory or encouraged once a country has decided to implement an ePhyto system.
- 3) Details of the benefits, drawbacks and operational expectations of a hub for both developed and developing countries.
- 4) Details of IT security features and safeguards necessary for the global phytosanitary community.
- 5) Details of the ePhyto communication processes and protocols necessary for the system to function efficiently, securely and reliably.
- 6) Description of the national business practices needed for participation, including:
 - a) legal framework of participation;
 - b) ownership and use of data;
 - c) confidentiality / security.
- 7) A financial feasibility study including the consideration of the following:
 - a) cost-benefit;
 - b) recommendation for a business operating model that is acceptable to various situations;
 - c) variable/overhead costs;
 - d) costs of setting up the system and running costs, including recommendations on how to recover costs;
 - e) cost model according to developed/developing country/number of certificates;
 - f) optional: recommendation for any possible additional value-added services; and

- g) risk analysis.
 - 8) Compatibility with Customs systems and, where appropriate, other systems used in trade.
 - 9) Possibility of adapting existing technologies used to deliver worldwide coverage and to operate systems all day every day (24/7). Possible contingency arrangements required to ensure such coverage.
 - 10) Proposed amendments, if necessary, to the agreed ePhyto protocols; and
 - 11) Propose a way forward while balancing phytosanitary, financial and technology considerations of all IPPC contracting parties.
4. The study should involve representatives from at least 3 FAO regions and include at least 1 member from a developing country. The group should include competent phytosanitary, IT ePhyto and financial expertise. The team leader will be sourced by the Secretariat from a country that has experience with electronic phytosanitary certification.
5. It is expected that this study will take at least 6 months to complete due to the combination of administrative, financial and technical aspects.
6. It is expected that members of this drafting team will meet virtually, and in person only in exceptional circumstances, and if resources are available for this purpose.
7. Funding sources / options for undertaking the feasibility study need to be considered.
8. The selection process will involve consulting the Bureau on candidates after a call for experts has been made to all contracting parties.
9. It is important to note that this study shall exclude the development of any complete, or components of, national phytosanitary system/s to support a national ePhyto system.
10. The final written report to be presented electronically in Microsoft Word format (2007 compatible) with electronic copies of all support documentation and materials to the IPPC Secretariat on completion of the assignment.

Timeline:

- i) consideration and agreement by the Strategic Planning Committee, October 2012
- ii) first draft by 28 February 2013
- iii) to be completed by 30 June 2013
- iv) consideration by the Strategic Planning Committee in October 2013 and development of recommendations for CPM-9
- v) submission to CPM-9 (2014).