Update from the IPPC Secretariat

While the IPPC Secretariat has been quite busy since the conclusion of CPM 8, a key development to report to the Bureau at the onset of this report is the announcement this week that the transition of the IPPC Secretariat to the Office of the Assistant Director General will take place beginning on October 1. While initially, the effects of the transition will be minimal (the move will not officially be recognized until 1 January 2014, budget support will remain with the AGP department until the end of the year, and other administrative efforts will stay until the end of the year as well), it is expected/hoped that the transition will raise the profile of the IPPC both within the FAO as well as in outside efforts for resource mobilization.

The IPPC Secretariat met with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity during the week of September 16 in Montreal Canada. This meeting was considered a success in that, consistent with the 2004 [Memorandum of Cooperation](http://www.cbd.int/doc/agreements/agmt-fa-ippc-2004-02-25-moc-web-en.pdf), the two Secretariats have agreed to work together on a thorough review and update of the Joint Work Programme. Both sides presented and discussed their strategic frameworks focusing on future collaboration, and the possibility of holding joint workshops on capacity development was proposed as way to promote consistency across conventions.

Also during the same week, New Zealand’s Ministry of Primary Industries hosted the first face to face meeting of the ePhyto steering group created by CPM8. This very successful meeting concluded with the development of a work plan for the group as well as a defined work schedule for ensuring the work gets accomplished. The meeting was also attended by the consultant working on the ePhyto feasibility study, affording him the opportunity to gain additional insights on the intentions of the CPM with regard to ephyto, as well as a chance to tap into the expertise available all at one time. The group is also investigating ways to provide support to the steward of ISPM 12, as well as to provide input to draft appendix 1 of ISPM 12.

From September 18-20, the Framework for Standards Task Force met in Ottawa, Canada. The Task Force defined standards as concepts and processes that are developed for implementation by Contracting Parties as the basis for harmonizing phytosanitary measures that achieve the objectives of the Convention.  A report will be presented to the next Strategic Planning Group (SPG) meeting in October 2013.

The 25th TC among RPPOs celebrated in Colonia Del Sacramento, Uruguay, from 24th -30th August 2013 addressed several issues of key importance and provided input to the different work programs under the IPPC. During the meeting more than twelve mentoring and cooperation actions among RPPOs were identified for next year in a record of cooperative activities under the responsibility of the RPPOs. The meeting provided also strategic and technical advice and support to the Bureau, Secretariat and CPM.

Due to the amount of work and decisions needed under it s role of steering committee of the global IPPC projects, the CDC is going to meet for the second time this year in Bari, Italy, in November 2013. Requests coming from other projects, programs and specific activities in the Convention are part of the agenda of the meeting.

Another significant development which has taken place recently was the conclusion and implementation of the FAO contract with SIB of Italy to register the ISPM 15 mark around the world. SIB had been contracted previously and when the work was placed out on tender, SIB won the bid once again. The firm immediately began working on registering the mark for the nearly 75 countries in which it would expire at the end of September. The Secretariat in particular appreciates the effort of the FAO legal office to support the IPPC in this matter.

Several Secretariat staff members have travelled to the first set of IPPC regional workshops and many more are under way for the end of October. These events are also an opportunity for the staff to meet with contracting parties and gain a deeper level of understanding on issues of concern to members. These opportunities also provide a chance to foster collaborative thinking on ways of moving the Convention forward into the future.

The nomination of the NRO advisory group (NROAG) has taken much longer than anticipated. However, in the interim the Secretariat has accumulated substantial background material for the review. This includes NRO statistics, summaries of obligations and analysis of the general survey results. Although the NROAG has been activated with reduced membership, the physical meeting has had to be delayed until after the SPG in October. It is anticipated there will be substantial progress made by CPM-9 to allow a status update at CPM.

It has been very difficult to get the SBDS to work virtually – not only are time differences a challenge, the Secretariat has been unable to get everyone available for the conference call at the same time. The SBDS survey launched at CPM did not have many respondents. However, there are now draft recommendations that will be going to forward to SPG and CPM-9.

The Secretariat met with the World Customs Organization (WCO) in Brussels in July 2013. This was the first exploratory meeting to create awareness of IPPC activities and find out about the WCO activities. There are a number of areas of mutual interest such as some components of standard setting, ePhyto, the WCO single window and WCO coordinated border management. The first two areas the organizations will be working together on components of the IPPC’s sea container standard and ePhyto. The Secretariats agreed to continue discussions and possibly formalize any joint activities or work programme. Creating awareness of each other’s activities was identified as important and could be addressed in the short-term.

The Secretariat also held a substantive meeting with the EC to discuss continued financial support, and possible future collaboration. This meeting, held in early July in Brussels, was the third such meeting with the IPPC Secretariat’s most significant donor. In addition to discussing continued support, the Commission representatives presented a detailed review of their new plant health legislation and requested IPPC Secretariat support in publicizing the publication of two new pest risk assessments.

The Secretariat welcomed in-kind support from CABI in early September. The Secretariat hopes to harmonize terminology used by both the IPPC and CABI Plantwise and build necessary links between online resources managed by both teams. The intent from the perspective of the Secretariat is to try to reduce the misuse of pest related data by ensuring that factual data is clearly defined and understandable.

Regarding standard setting area, meeting reports for all standard setting activities and related documents and presentations are posted on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP). As is well known, CPM-8 noted the current status of the implementation of the standard setting process adopted at CPM-7 and agreed to extend the review date to CPM-11 (2016). Eight draft ISPMswere submitted tomember consultation, and three draft ISPMs were submitted for the substantial concerns commenting period which just concluded on 30 September. Also, three draft specifications were submitted to member. Regarding the draft specification on the *International movement of grain,* the SC had insufficient time to arrange the discussions requested by CPM-8 (2013) at the May 2013 meeting, but this will be a major issue for the November 2013 SC meeting.

Regarding a significant issue affecting not only the standards setting area but across the board of all IPPC core activities, at the October 2012 Strategic Planning Group (SPG) meeting the IPPC Secretariat initiated a discussion on engaging members in activities of the IPPC. This was because of the recent lack of response to calls for treatments and experts, as well as the lack of availability of nominated experts and stewards to participate in the activities for which they had been nominated, even though they had signed a statement of commitment. The SPG proposed that a questionnaire be sent to National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and relevant experts to identify their constraints.

At its 2012 November meeting, the Standards Committee (SC) asked the Secretariat to add an agenda point on “engaging experts” to Technical Panel (TP) meetings. At its May 2013 meeting, the SC discussedthe draft questionnaire and askedthe Secretariat to revise the questionnaire and send it to the Technical Consultation among Regional Plant Protection Organizations (TC-RPPOs) for further discussion.

The questionnaire was subsequently presented to the 25th TC-RPPOs. The meeting attendees mentioned that answers to the questionnaire will vary according to the experience of the NPPO Contact Point or the expert filling the questionnaire. They also indicated that the main reason for the lack of expert participation is that NPPOs and RPPOs have a shortage of human resources for their own activities, that RPPOs and IPPC are competing for the same human resources, and that a realistic approach could involve the reformulation of the standard setting work plan. Regarding this last comment, it should be mentioned that the 2013 November SC will consider the submissions from the 2013 call for topics and make recommendations for new topics to be added on the *List of topics for IPPC standards* by CPM-9 (2013). The IPPC Secretariat is planning to send the questionnaire to NPPOs and RPPOs at the beginning of December 2013 and to provide a 3 months deadline for responses.

From inside the FAO house, in addition to the upcoming transition of the Secretariat to the Office of the Assistant Director General, an inordinate amount of work is required of senior Secretariat staff in the development of the documentation related to the new FAO Strategic Objectives. As you may know, the IPPC Secretariat is considered to fall under Strategic Objectives 2 (Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in a sustainable manner) and 4 (Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels). The overwhelming majority of effort (90%) is considered to be ongoing under Strategic Objective 4. Each of the strategic objectives (there are five all together) is lead by a single coordinator from a senior level post. Through this exercise, budget allocations are being developed for the next biennium. One result from this exercise has been a lack of clarity as to leadership. In many respects there are blurred lines as to the roles of the Strategic Objective Coordinators and the Assistant Director Generals.

A final note concerns the labor situation within FAO as well. There has been a 50% reduction in IT staff as a result of the Director General’s efforts to reduce costs. This has a direct impact on the Secretariat in that support for the On-line Comment System will be gone as of January 1, 2014. In addition, the Secretariat is investigating changes to the situation with the in-house staff working on the IPP. Some alternatives are currently actively explored, but these are very serious issues that need to be addressed before the end of the year.

Finally, the Secretariat has met with an outside communications firm to discuss the communications workplan. After discussions with the US, a decision was made to pursue contacts in Italy who are already familiar the IPPC and some of its communications goals. A meeting has taken place and the Secretariat is waiting for a business proposal which should be forthcoming shortly.