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**Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

**REPORT ON THE CURRENT FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE
ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES**

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS BY
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SPS COMMITTEE

The following report is being submitted by the Chairperson of the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee), Mr Tang-Kai Wang, under his own responsibility, at the request of the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods.¹ The report was prepared with the assistance of the Secretariat.

1 CURRENT STATUS OF COMMITTEE PRACTICES

1.1. This section describes the current practices of the SPS Committee, including changes adopted over the past years to improve its functioning. These practices have resulted from general and more specific suggestions from Members, Chairpersons and the Secretariat, and have also been the subject of various discussions in the Committee.

1.1 Assistance to delegates

1.2. In order to support the engagement of Geneva-based delegates in the Committee's work, various training activities are organized by the Secretariat on the practical aspects of the SPS Committee's functioning, including training on available online SPS tools (see additional information in sections 1.2.1 and 1.3.2). For example, in September 2019, the Secretariat organized a one-hour presentation for new and continuing delegates on the functions of the SPS Committee, which also focused on the ways that the Secretariat can support delegates' participation in the Committee.

1.3. The initial idea was to regularly organize this type of introductory activity, in advance of SPS Committee meetings. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the March 2020 SPS Committee meeting was cancelled, and subsequent conditions did not immediately allow for the resumption of in-person activities. In order to further support Geneva-based delegates in becoming familiar with the work and functioning of the SPS Committee, the Secretariat created a dedicated SPS Committee webpage. This webpage contains an [introductory presentation on the SPS Committee](#) (with audio), as well as a [FAQ section](#) which provides practical information for new SPS delegates.

1.4. The Secretariat has also participated in training activities organized by regional bodies, to sensitize officials on the role and work of the SPS Committee ahead of their participation in Committee meetings. For example, the Secretariat has presented at several training sessions held for SPS delegates from the African, Caribbean and Latin American regions.²

¹ See document [JOB/CTG/18](#).

² These training sessions were organized by the African Union and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), who were providing funding and support to African/Latin American delegations as part of their technical assistance programmes.

1.5. The Secretariat also participates in bilateral meetings, at the request of Members, to assist in providing the necessary information to new Geneva-based SPS delegates on relevant procedures and work of the SPS Committee, as well as to respond to any queries or points of clarification.

1.6. In addition, the Secretariat has undertaken several initiatives to increase the participation of capital-based officials, such as the development of SPS courses targeted at equipping capital-based officials to effectively participate in the SPS Committee. Some recent courses include the [2022 Course on Essentials for SPS Committee Participation \(virtual course in French\)](#) and the [2021 SPS In-depth Virtual Course \(in English\)](#).

1.7. During the period 1995-2019, the Secretariat also offered a yearly three-week, face-to-face **Advanced SPS Course**³ which had a strong focus on enhancing the participation of capital-based officials in the SPS Committee, and equipping them to address particular SPS areas of concern.

1.8. Information on all planned SPS courses (and also other SPS TA activities) is normally disseminated to WTO Members around March of every year as a document in the [G/SPS/GEN/997](#) series, and also presented at every March SPS Committee meeting. Following which, the Secretariat sends a communication with information on planned SPS TA-related activities (including eligibility criteria, application process and form) to all Members and Observers, as well as to the SPS Delegates mailing list (see section 1.2.3.1 for more information on the mailing list). This information is also made available on the [SPS Technical Assistance webpage](#), and widely shared via other organizations (e.g. Codex, IPPC, WOH, STDF, etc.).

1.9. Each year, the Secretariat also prepares a report on the SPS technical assistance activities undertaken (see section 1.3.4 for more information on reports by the Secretariat).

1.2 Organization of Committee work

1.2.1 Digital tools used for Committee work

1.10. The SPS Committee has pioneered the development of various digital tools in the Secretariat, often in close coordination with the TBT Committee. These tools are necessary to support the significant volume of SPS notifications, other documents and specific trade concerns (STCs) (more than 30,000 notifications and 5,700 other documents, and 558 specific trade concerns since 1995).

1.11. The first online SPS database, the Information Management System for Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS IMS), was launched in 2007 to facilitate searching, reporting and analysis of SPS information; and the first online notification submission system (SPS NSS) was launched in 2011.

1.12. These aging systems were replaced by the new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#), officially launched in July 2022⁴, integrating all the SPS (and TBT) IMS and NSS, as well as the ePing alert system, into a single platform. Members use the Platform to search SPS/TBT information on notifications, specific trade concerns, as well as the contact information of notification authorities and enquiry points. Registered users benefit from additional features, including receiving email alerts on notifications on products and/or markets of interest. Officials with additional rights can use the ePing SPS&TBT Platform to submit notifications to the WTO and, on a voluntary basis, disseminate their comments/replies on notifications. For searches on specific trade concerns, the Platform mirrors the data available in the [WTO Trade Concerns Database \(TCD\)](#), available to Members since February 2021.⁵ This advanced analytical tool integrates concerns raised in the SPS and TBT Committees, as well as in the Committee on Market Access. It may incorporate concerns raised in other WTO bodies in the future.

1.13. The **eAgenda** system, launched in 2020, was developed to allow Members, ahead of the SPS Committee meeting, to include any item on the proposed agenda, including specific trade

³ This flagship course, which was conducted in person during the period 2005-2019, provided the overall framework for the development of the recent courses which were held virtually in 2021 and 2022, due to COVID-19 considerations.

⁴ See [G/SPS/GEN/2058](#).

⁵ The WTO TCD was launched in beta version in the margins of the February 2021 TBT Committee meeting and presented to the SPS Committee at its March 2021 meeting.

concerns, as well as to upload statements. The Secretariat then generates the annotated draft agenda for formal meetings of the SPS Committee using the eAgenda system. Its use has been extended to support the work of other WTO bodies.

1.14. Additional information on the use of these tools and the various training activities offered is available in section 1.3.2 .

1.2.2 Planning and organization of meetings

1.15. In order to facilitate coordination among and participation of SPS officials in SPS Committee meetings, a tentative schedule of upcoming Committee meetings (and thematic sessions) is usually circulated in June/July of the previous year as a G/SPS/GEN document. For example, a tentative schedule of the 2023 SPS Committee meetings is available in document [G/SPS/GEN/2036](#), which was circulated in June 2022.

1.16. In setting these dates, the Secretariat liaises internally to check the meeting dates of other relevant Committees (those covered by many of the same delegates, e.g. the TBT Committee and the Committee on Agriculture), and also externally with other bodies of importance to SPS delegates, such as Codex, IPPC and WOA. The Secretariat also coordinates meeting dates with other CTG subsidiary bodies through the CTG coordination process. For logistical reasons, other major events taking place in Geneva, as well as official holidays, are also considered. Each June/July the Secretariat draws Members' attention to the GEN document with tentative meeting dates for the following year, and invites Members to inform the Secretariat of any potential issues with the dates. The Secretariat also highlights the upcoming SPS Committee meeting dates at the end of each Committee meeting.

1.2.3 Formal meetings

1.2.3.1 Communication before meetings

1.17. The Secretariat uses several means of communication before Committee meetings to ensure that Members are kept well informed of the upcoming meetings, the status of Committee work and other Committee-related developments. One of the ways that the Secretariat communicates directly with SPS delegates is via the **SPS Delegates mailing list**.

1.18. Specifically, the Secretariat maintains an e-mail list for Geneva- and capital-based SPS delegates which is used to transmit messages from the Chairperson and the Secretariat, regarding certain Committee documents, reminders of deadlines, etc. The Secretariat has separate lists for Members and for Observer Organizations. Delegates can e-mail a request to the Secretariat to be included in this list.⁶

1.19. In order to keep this list updated, the Secretariat normally reminds delegations at the start of each Committee meeting to submit requests for inclusion of new delegates in the list. Similarly, the Secretariat invites Members to indicate any other changes to the list.

1.20. The Secretariat and the Chairperson send out periodic communications to Members and Observers, via the SPS Delegates mailing list, ahead of Committee meetings (and in-between Committee meetings, as necessary) with relevant information to facilitate delegates' preparation for meetings.⁷ The Secretariat also circulates communications through annotated draft agendas (JOB/SPS series), and airgrams (WTO/AIR/SPS series). Additional information on airgrams and agendas is presented in section 1.2.3.3 .

1.2.3.2 Number of meetings

1.21. Since the beginning of 2019, the SPS Committee has held 11 formal and 11 informal meetings, including the November 2022 meeting (see Table 1). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

⁶ Communication between delegates and the Secretariat is channelled through a dedicated email address, SPSCommittee@wto.org, as much as possible.

⁷ Members are also informed through eAgenda of the opening of the platform for submissions and of various deadlines, if they have registered to use eAgenda.

only two formal meetings took place in 2020; normally, there are three formal meetings per year. Since 2021, as a result of the increasing number of trade concerns raised by Members, the duration of formal meetings has been extended by half a day. In general, the Committee week has more recently been scheduled as follows:

- **Monday:** Workshop (normally only for the June/July meeting)
- **Tuesday:** Thematic Session
- **Wednesday (am):** Informal Committee meeting
- **Wednesday (pm) – Friday:** Formal Committee meeting

1.22. The Committee has organized 9 thematic sessions during this period, to allow for more detailed discussions and experience-sharing on SPS topics of interest to the Committee (see Tables 1 and 5). Other types of events are also normally organized back-to-back with Committee meetings, such as workshops, information-sharing sessions and side events (either organized by Members, international organizations or the Secretariat).

1.23. Further to the establishment of the **Working Group (WG) on Approval Procedures** in November 2020, based on a recommendation in the Report of the Fifth Review ([G/SPS/64](#), para. 3.12), WG members have typically met on the Monday of the Committee week, with a few exceptions. The WG has also held additional meetings in between Committee meetings, as necessary (see Table 1 below).⁸

1.24. More recently, the Committee commenced its work on the **SPS Declaration work programme**⁹ through five thematic groups.¹⁰ These thematic groups have held several meetings between Committee meetings and also during the Committee week to discuss the themes outlined in the Declaration. The Committee has also convened an intersessional consultation for these groups to report on their work and for the Committee to consider related proposals.

Table 1: Number of formal and informal meetings

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g. workshops, symposia, etc.)
2019	21-22 March 2019 (2 days) 18-19 July 2019 (2 days) 7-8 November 2019 (2 days)	Informal: 20 March 2019 (0.5 days) 17 July 2019 (0.5 days) 6 November 2019 (0.5 days) Thematic Sessions: 18 March 2019 (1 day) 19 March 2019 (1 day) 5 November 2019 (1 day) Working Groups: 20 March 2019 (0.5 days) Working Group on Fall Armyworm Informal Consultations: 20 March 2019 (0.5 days) Informal consultations on strengthening the	Workshops: 15-16 July 2019 Workshop on Transparency and Coordination Side events: 20 March 2019 STDF Information Session on transboundary animal diseases in Cameroon 21 March 2019 EU Information Session on the EU Animal Health Law 3 July 2019 Launch of joint WTO/OECD publication 17 July 2019 United States and International Seed Federation event on "The promise of precision breeding in seed innovation" 18 July 2019 Information Session on "Low level presence: An agricultural trade issue", organized by Canada 5 November 2019 OECD Information Session – "Trade and economic effects

⁸ The WG is expected to finalize its work in March 2023.

⁹ The SPS Declaration was adopted in document [WT/MIN\(22\)/27](#) at the 12th Ministerial Conference, launching a work programme.

¹⁰ The proposed process for the work programme is available in document [G/SPS/W/330/Rev.1](#). A dedicated webpage (www.wto.org/spsdeclaration) contains all relevant documents and meeting dates to help delegates keep track of this information.

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g. workshops, symposia, etc.)
		<p>Committee's functioning, led by Brazil</p> <p>7 June 2019 (0.5 days) Informal consultations on strengthening the Committee's functioning, led by Brazil</p> <p>17 July 2019 (0.5 days) Informal consultations on strengthening the Committee's functioning, led by Brazil</p> <p>6 November 2019 (0.5 days) Informal consultations on strengthening the Committee's functioning, led by Brazil</p>	<p>of IRC: Further empirical evidence from SPS and TBT provisions"</p> <p>6 November 2019 WTO SPS Information Session – Presentation of the eAgenda project</p> <p>7 November 2019 STDF Information Session - "Strengthening capacity to meet pesticide export requirements: Findings and recommendations of an independent evaluation of STDF projects in ASEAN, Africa and Latin America"</p>
2020	<p>25-26 June 2020 (1.5 days)</p> <p>5-6 and 13 November 2020 (2 days)</p>	<p>Informal:</p> <p>24 June 2020 Information-sharing session on COVID-19</p> <p>25 June 2020 (0.5 days)</p> <p>4 November 2020 (0.5 days)</p> <p>Thematic Sessions:</p> <p>3 November 2020 (1 day)</p> <p>Informal consultations:</p> <p>16 September 2020 (0.5 days) SPS Committee informal consultations</p> <p>23 November 2020 (0.5 days) SPS Committee informal consultations on the proposed SPS Declaration for the 12th Ministerial Conference</p> <p>Working Groups:</p> <p>4 November 2020 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p>	<p>Other events:</p> <p>2 November 2020 SPS@25: Commemorating 25 years of the SPS Agreement</p> <p>Side events:</p> <p>2 November 2020 Information session on "Farmers' Perspectives on SPS Challenges for Sustainable Food Production and Trade"¹¹</p> <p>4 November 2020 OIE Information Session to launch two new publications¹²</p> <p>5 November 2020 FAO Information Session on pesticide MRLs¹³</p>
2021	<p>25-26 March 2021 (2 days)</p> <p>14-16 July 2021 (2.5 days)</p> <p>3-5 November 2021 (2.5 days)</p>	<p>Informal:</p> <p>24 March 2021 (0.5 days)</p> <p>14 July 2021 (0.5 days)</p> <p>3 November 2021 (0.5 days)</p> <p>Thematic Sessions:</p>	<p>Workshops:</p> <p>12-13 July 2021 Workshop on Risk Assessment, Risk Management and Risk Communication</p> <p>Side Events:</p>

¹¹ Organized by the Permanent Missions of Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay and the United States.

¹² The OIE *Scientific and Technical Review* on "Ensuring safe trade in animals and animal products", and the OIE Technical Item 2020 on "Required competences of Veterinary Services for international trade".

¹³ "Understanding international harmonization of pesticide maximum residue limits with Codex standards - A case study on rice".

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g. workshops, symposia, etc.)
		<p>23 March 2021 (1 day)</p> <p>2 November 2021 (1 day)</p> <p>Working Groups:</p> <p>22 March 2021 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>14 June 2021 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>7 July 2021 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>1 November 2021 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p>	<p>23 March 2021 IPPC Information Session: "Promoting safe trade in the International Year of Plant Health"</p> <p>24 March 2021 STDF Webinar, as part of WTO's Aid-for-Trade COVID-19 Stocktaking Event: Investing in safe trade systems to protect health and market access</p> <p>24 March 2021 WTO Information Session: WTO Trade Concerns Database</p> <p>26 March 2021 OECD Information Session: Digital opportunities for SPS systems and the trade facilitation effects of SPS electronic certification</p> <p>14 July 2021 STDF and World Bank Webinar: Systems Approaches in Food Safety and Plant Health</p> <p>15 July 2021 US Information session: Improved SPS Capacity through Distance Learning, G/SPS/GEN/1914</p> <p>3 November 2021 STDF Side Event: Launch of the STDF guide on good regulatory practices to improve SPS measures</p>
2022	<p>23-25 March 2022 (2.5 days)</p> <p>22-24 June 2022 (2.5 days)</p> <p>9-11 November 2022 (2.5 days)</p>	<p>Informal:</p> <p>23 March 2022 (0.5 days)</p> <p>22 June 2022 (0.5 days)</p> <p>9 November 2022 (0.5 days)</p> <p>Thematic Sessions:</p> <p>22 March 2022 (1 day)</p> <p>21 June 2022 (1 day)</p> <p>8 November 2022 (1 day)</p> <p>Working Groups:</p> <p>7 February 2022 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>20 May 2022 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>20 June 2022 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>16 September 2022 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>7 November 2022 (0.5 days) Working Group on Approval Procedures</p> <p>SPS Declaration Thematic Groups Meetings (0.5 days):</p>	<p>Workshops:</p> <p>20 June 2022 Workshop on Transparency</p> <p>Side events:</p> <p>21 March 2022 STDF Side Event in collaboration with Canada and France: Exploring SPS technical assistance in Francophone Africa</p> <p>23 March 2022 Side event organized by Uganda and the United States: Responding to Fall Armyworm – Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Policy Approaches</p> <p>9 November 2022 World Bank IFC Side event: Presentation of IFC Scan Guide and IFC Food Safety Handbook</p>

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g. workshops, symposia, etc.)
		20 September 2022 (Group 1)	
		26 September 2022 (Group 2)	
		27 September 2022 (Group 3)	
		28 September 2022 (Group 4)	
		29 September 2022 (Group 5)	
		20 October 2022 (Group 3)	
		21 October 2022 (Group 5)	
		26 October 2022 (Group 4)	
		31 October 2022 (Group 2)	
		7 November 2022 (Group 3)	
		9 November 2022 (Group 1 and Group 2)	
		Intersessional SPS Committee consultations:	
		4 October 2022 (0.5 days)	

1.2.3.3 Preparation of airgrams and agendas

1.25. The SPS Committee's practices with respect to airgrams and annotated agendas for formal meetings have evolved. Until October 2019, the Secretariat circulated a "reminder airgram" about 30 days before a formal meeting, containing a rough outline of the agenda, and a "convening airgram" at least 10 days before a meeting, listing the detailed agenda items, including specific trade concerns and other sub-items.

1.26. In November 2017, the Committee agreed to a Member's proposal for the Secretariat to circulate the convening airgram earlier, allowing more time between the circulation of the detailed agenda and the meeting, to facilitate the preparation of responses to specific trade concerns.¹⁴ The convening airgram was then circulated about 20 days in advance of formal meetings. In July 2019, after consulting with Members, the Secretariat prepared an annotated draft agenda, which was informally circulated¹⁵ in addition to the convening airgram, to provide more information on what was expected under individual agenda items. Since March 2020¹⁶, the annotated draft agenda has replaced the convening airgram.¹⁷

1.27. The current practice includes the circulation of an **airgram about six weeks prior to a formal meeting**, containing an outline of the agenda, as well as the deadlines for submission of documents and agenda items, and the dates of any informal meetings, thematic sessions and other meetings planned in conjunction with the formal meeting.¹⁸ The **annotated draft agenda is circulated about 20 days before the formal meeting** as a JOB/SPS document, and includes all detailed agenda items and specific

¹⁴ See G/SPS/R/88, paragraphs 10.1-10.7.

¹⁵ This annotated draft agenda was informally circulated for illustrative purposes via the SPS Delegates mailing list, and was not assigned a document symbol. Since November 2019, the annotated draft agenda has been circulated as an official document in the [JOB/SPS](#) series.

¹⁶ An annotated draft agenda was prepared and circulated for the March 2020 meeting, however, this meeting was subsequently cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic ([JOB/SPS/5/Rev.1](#) and [JOB/SPS/5/Rev.1/Corr.1](#)).

¹⁷ See [G/SPS/R/97](#), paragraph 10.3. The above-mentioned changes did not require amending the Committee's Rules of Procedure ([G/L/170](#)).

¹⁸ At the same time, eAgenda opens for the online submission of agenda items and statements for the upcoming meeting.

trade concerns.¹⁹ It also includes hyperlinks to all documents submitted by the deadline, and information on informal meetings, thematic sessions, side events, meetings of working groups, etc. In addition, about one week before the informal meeting, the Secretariat sends an e-mail to the SPS Delegates mailing list, with the **annotated agenda for the informal meeting** (also circulated as a JOB/SPS document), other relevant documents, as well as an overview of the meetings planned for each day of the Committee week. For example, for the Committee meeting on 9-11 November 2022, the airgram in [WTO/AIR/SPS/39](#) was circulated on 23 September 2022, and the annotated draft agenda in [JOB/SPS/23](#) on 21 October 2022.

Table 2: Preparation of airgrams and annotated agendas for formal meetings

Year	Date of formal meeting	Date of circulation of Airgram and Agenda	No. of days before the meeting
2019	21-22 March 2019	15 February 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) 1 March 2019 (<i>Convening airgram</i>)	34 days 20 days
	18-19 July 2019	7 June 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) 28 June 2019 (<i>Convening airgram</i>) July 2019 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>) ²⁰	41 days 20 days -
	7-8 November 2019	30 September 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) 18 October 2019 (<i>Convening airgram</i>) 24 October 2019 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	38 days 20 days 14 days
2020	25-26 June 2020	9 June 2020 (<i>Airgram</i>) 16 June 2020 (<i>Draft agenda</i>)	16 days 9 days
	5-6 and 13 November 2020 ²¹	21 September 2020 (<i>Airgram</i>) 19 October 2020 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	45 days 17 days
2021	25-26 March 2021	5 February 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 5 March 2021 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	48 days 20 days
	14-16 July 2021	28 May 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 25 June 2021 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	47 days 19 days
	3-5 November 2021	17 September 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 15 October 2021 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	47 days 19 days
2022	23-25 March 2022	4 February 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 4 March 2022 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	47 days 19 days
	22-24 June 2022	6 May 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 3 June 2022 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	47 days 19 days
	9-11 November 2022	23 September 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 21 October 2022 (<i>Annotated draft agenda</i>)	47 days 19 days

1.2.3.4 Distribution of documents prior to meetings

1.28. Documents for meetings are available through the usual channels, including Documents Online. A hyperlink to all documents submitted before the deadline is included in the annotated draft agenda and in [eAgenda](#).²² Documents without symbols are rare; informal documents are usually circulated as room documents. It is not unusual for documents to be submitted after the deadline (usually set 22 days before a meeting, to allow inclusion in the annotated draft agenda circulated 20 days prior to a formal meeting). These documents are also made available through the regular channels on the WTO website,

¹⁹ The information in eAgenda mirrors the annotated draft agenda. The Secretariat uses the eAgenda system to generate the annotated draft agenda, including all agenda items added electronically by Members. Some editing is required before the document is circulated as a JOB/SPS document.

²⁰ This draft agenda was informally circulated for illustrative purposes via the Delegates mailing list, and was not assigned a document symbol.

²¹ Due to technical issues which affected the virtual platform, the Committee meeting had to be suspended on 6 November 2020 and reconvened on 13 November 2020.

²² The information in eAgenda mirrors the annotated draft agenda. The Secretariat uses the eAgenda system to generate the annotated draft agenda, including all agenda items added electronically by Members. Some editing is required before the document is circulated as a JOB/SPS document.

including Docs Online. Certain key documents (e.g. programmes for thematic sessions) are sent by email to the SPS Delegates mailing list.

1.2.3.5 Communication after meetings

1.29. At the end of the Committee week (normally the Friday of the same week, but on some occasions the following Monday), the Secretariat sends a follow-up communication which provides an overview of the deadlines for submission of comments/proposals as discussed in the meeting. In addition, the communication gives relevant information on any necessary follow-up steps or any important reminders. Through these communications, delegates also receive the weblinks to access presentations or video recordings from thematic sessions/workshops/side events, and also the relevant room document symbols for presentations.

1.30. In addition, a news item is normally prepared in collaboration with the Information and External Relations Division and published on the WTO website with an overview of the key issues discussed in the various Committee meetings/events held during the week ([SPS news items](#) are available on the [SPS section](#) of the WTO website).

1.2.3.6 Preparation of the summary reports

1.31. As foreseen by the Committee's Rules of Procedure (paragraph (viii) of [G/L/170](#)), the Secretariat prepares a summary report of formal meetings. These reports contain a summary of the oral interventions in formal meetings. In addition, longer statements can be shared through eAgenda, or circulated as documents in the [G/SPS/GEN](#) series upon request, in which case a hyperlink is included in the summary report. Summary reports also contain the Chairperson's summary of any informal meetings or thematic sessions held prior to the formal meeting.

1.32. Preparation of summary reports is usually shared by 2-3 staff members, based on notes, copies of statements submitted, and audio recordings, with a final check for consistency by the Committee Secretary. Rule 36 of the Committee's Rules of Procedure provides that Members should have the possibility of requesting to check how their statements will be reflected in the summary report. In practice, the Secretariat sends the draft summary report by email to these Members and provides a deadline for comments, usually about one week. The Secretariat takes these comments into account prior to the circulation of the summary report.

1.33. Additional information on the preparation of summary reports, such as the number of pages and number of days required for their preparation, is available in Table 3.

Table 3: Preparation of the Summary Reports

Year	Dates of the formal meeting	Date of circulation of the summary report	No. of pages	No. of days
2019	21-22 March 2019	27 June 2019	36 pages	98 days
	18-19 July 2019	12 September 2019	33 pages	56 days
	7-8 November 2019	18 December 2019	29 pages	41 days
2020	25-26 June 2020	11 August 2020	71 pages	47 days
	5-6 and 13 November 2020	21 December 2020	49 pages	46 days
2021	25-26 March 2021	19 May 2021	51 pages	55 days
	14-16 July 2021	17 September 2021	54 pages	65 days
	3-5 November 2021	17 December 2021	51 pages	44 days
2022	23-25 March 2022	18 May 2022	50 pages	56 days
	22-24 June 2022	26 September 2022	59 pages	96 days
	9-11 November 2022	-	-	-

1.2.4 Informal meetings

1.2.4.1 Communication before meetings

1.34. Informal meetings and thematic sessions are usually scheduled to immediately precede regular meetings, during the same week, to facilitate participation by capital-based delegates. The schedule of these "SPS Committee weeks" is tentatively determined in June/July of each year for the following year in a document (G/SPS/GEN) prepared by the Secretariat. More detailed information, including the planned thematic sessions, informal and regular meetings is announced at the end of each meeting week for the following meeting, included in the summary report, and communicated by email to the SPS Delegates mailing list. A preliminary list of topics to be discussed at an informal meeting is included in the airgram distributed about six weeks prior to each regular meeting, and in the annotated draft agenda of the formal meeting.

1.35. Since October 2019, the Chairperson, with the assistance of the Secretariat, has in addition prepared annotated agendas for informal meetings, providing a list of topics as well as some information on the proposed/expected actions by the Committee. The annotated agenda for the informal meeting is circulated as document in the [JOB/SPS](#) series and sent by email to the SPS Delegates mailing list one week before the meeting.

Table 4: Convening of informal meetings

Year	Date of informal meeting	Date of communication convening the informal meeting	No. of days
2019	20 March 2019	15 February 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) 1 March 2019 (<i>Convening airgram – formal meeting</i>)	33 days 19 days
	17 July 2019	7 June 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) July 2019 (<i>Draft agenda – informal meeting</i>) ²³	40 days -
	6 November 2019	30 September 2019 (<i>Reminder airgram</i>) 30 October 2019 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	37 days 7 days
2020	25 June 2020	9 June 2020 (<i>Airgram</i>) 17 June 2020 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	16 days 8 days
	4 November 2020	21 September 2020 (<i>Airgram</i>) 29 October 2020 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	44 days 6 days
2021	24 March 2021	5 February 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 15 March 2021 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 9 days
	14 July 2021	28 May 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 7 July 2021 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 7 days
	3 November 2021	17 September 2021 (<i>Airgram</i>) 27 October 2021 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 7 days
2022	23 March 2022	4 February 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 16 March 2022 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 7 days
	22 June 2022	6 May 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 14 June 2022 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 8 days
	9 November 2022	23 September 2022 (<i>Airgram</i>) 2 November 2022 (<i>Draft annotated agenda – informal meeting</i>)	47 days 7 days

1.2.4.2 Communication after the meeting

1.36. The Chairperson, under his/her own responsibility and with the assistance of the Secretariat, prepares a summary of discussions at informal meetings and Committee thematic sessions. These summaries used to be read out in the formal meeting, but since approximately 2020 they are sent by email to the SPS Delegates mailing list during the meeting week. Delegates have the opportunity to submit comments by a set deadline (usually one week after the end of the meeting), which the Chairperson takes into account in finalizing the summary. The final summaries of informal

²³ This draft agenda was informally circulated for illustrative purposes via the Delegates mailing list, and was not assigned a document symbol.

meetings/thematic sessions are then circulated by email again and included as annexes in the summary report of the formal meeting. In addition, the Secretariat prepares a more detailed summary report of Committee workshops, which are circulated in the same document series (G/SPS/R) as the summary reports of formal meetings. All summary reports are available through Documents Online.

1.37. All presentations made at thematic sessions or Committee workshops are posted on the SPS [Events, workshops and training webpage](#) and since 2017 are also circulated as room documents (RD/SPS series) to ensure that they can be searched through Documents Online.

1.3 Substantive work

1.3.1 Thematic sessions/Informal working groups

1.38. The SPS Committee held its first thematic session in July 2015 to provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions and experience-sharing on particular topics of interest to Members. Since then, the Committee has regularly organized thematic sessions (See Table 5). In addition, the Committee normally holds one thematic workshop each year. While thematic sessions last 0.5-1 day, thematic workshops usually last 2 days. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat provided funding for capital-based SPS officials to attend SPS thematic workshops. Since then, thematic workshops can be attended in person or virtually, and no funding is provided for participants.

1.39. With respect to the focus of these thematic sessions and workshops, Members are invited to submit topics/proposals for consideration by the Committee. Following which, a deadline is provided for Members to submit comments. An opportunity is also normally provided in the informal Committee meetings for discussions on the suggested topics/proposals, and for proponents to respond to any questions or provide the necessary clarifications. In addition, as part of the periodic reviews of the operation and implementation of the Agreement, Members also propose particular topics for discussion in thematic sessions and workshops (see section 1.3.4 for additional information on the review process).

1.40. The Committee aims to agree at the end of each year on a tentative schedule of thematic sessions and workshops for the upcoming year, to facilitate Members' preparations and planning. Where too many topics have been proposed, and to clarify the order in which the topics will be scheduled, the Chairperson consults with Members until a schedule is agreed. This information is included in a G/SPS/GEN document, together with the dates of Committee meetings for the upcoming year. This document can be revised as necessary, e.g. if meeting dates change. As an illustration, the dates of meetings and thematic sessions for 2022 are contained in document [G/SPS/GEN/1910/Rev.1](#).

1.41. Most of the issues discussed in thematic sessions and workshops are also the subject of discussion in formal and informal meetings.

1.42. The Committee has also explored the webcasting of thematic sessions. In particular, the last few thematic sessions have been webcast on the WTO website, normally at the request of the proponents of a thematic session. The intention to webcast a thematic session is announced in a message sent to the SPS Delegates mailing list, and Members provided with an opportunity to raise any objections. The Committee has recently decided in November 2022 to systematically webcast all its thematic sessions, so a decision will no longer need to be taken each time.

Table 5: Overview of thematic sessions and workshops (2019-2022)

Year	Thematic sessions
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thematic Session on Equivalence (Part 2) ▪ Thematic Session on Fall Armyworm ▪ Workshop on Transparency and Coordination ▪ Thematic Session on Approval Procedures
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thematic Session on Voluntary Third-Party Assurance as Part of National SPS Control Systems

Year	Thematic sessions
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPS Committee Thematic Session on African Swine Fever ▪ Workshop on Risk Analysis: Risk Assessment, Management and Communication ▪ Thematic Session on Procedure to Monitor the Process of International Harmonization
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thematic Session on Trade facilitative approaches to pesticide MRLs, including substances not approved for use in an import market ▪ Thematic Session on the Use of Remote (Virtual) Audit and Verification in Regulatory Frameworks ▪ Workshop on Transparency ▪ Thematic Session on International Standards and Best Practices in Pest Risk Identification, Assessment, and Management

1.3.2 Notifications

1.43. WTO Members submit significant and growing numbers of SPS notifications (currently over 1800 per year). To provide guidance on the implementation of the SPS transparency procedures, the SPS Committee has adopted the Recommended Procedures for Implementing the Transparency Obligations of the SPS Agreement ([G/SPS/7/Rev.4](#)). These **Recommended Transparency Procedures** were first adopted in 1996 ([G/SPS/7](#)) and have been revised four times since (1999, 2002, 2008 and 2018). The last revision in 2018 did not include any substantive changes to the text; it updated certain references to online tools etc. A new "technical" revision ([G/SPS/7/Rev.5](#)) will be circulated in late 2022 to reflect the use of the ePing SPS&TBT Platform. These Procedures also contain the notification formats adopted by the Committee. In addition, Members have regularly discussed possible improvements to the quality and completeness of notifications. In addition, a [Practical Manual for SPS National Notification Authorities and National Enquiry Points](#) provides hands-on explanations for all transparency-related tasks.²⁴

1.44. At the [October 2007 Workshop on Transparency](#), the Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare an **annual overview of the implementation of the transparency provisions** of the SPS Agreement. Since then, the Secretariat has revised document [G/SPS/GEN/804](#) annually to provide an overview of the level of implementation of the transparency obligations contained in the SPS Agreement (Article 7 and Annex B) and of the Committee's Recommended Transparency Procedures. A standing agenda item on transparency provides an opportunity to share information and experiences in all formal meetings of the SPS Committee.

1.45. The SPS Committee also discusses compliance with notification procedures and possible improvements in the context of the periodic reviews of the SPS Agreement. Based on proposals from Members, the Committee has adopted several decisions to guide the implementation of certain provisions of the SPS Agreement, some of which incorporate transparency-related aspects. This includes the Decision on Equivalence ([G/SPS/19/Rev.2](#)), and the Procedure to Enhance Transparency of Special and Differential Treatment in Favour of Developing Countries ([G/SPS/33/Rev.1](#)).

1.46. Since 1995, the SPS Committee has regularly held **special dedicated meetings or workshops on transparency**, on average every 2-3 years, which have offered an opportunity to discuss challenges faced in the implementation of transparency provisions, share information and experiences, and train Members on the online tools. The first such meeting, in 1995, was a joint SPS/TBT meeting on transparency (see [G/SPS/W/33](#)). Since then, nine SPS workshops on transparency (or transparency and coordination) were held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2022. The most recent [transparency workshop](#) was held in hybrid format. In addition to the workshop, a "notifications clinic" targeted to SPS notification authorities and enquiry points was held (virtually) for the first time in the Committee in June 2022. Summary reports on all these workshops are available in the [G/SPS/R](#) series, and the presentations are made available on the [SPS](#) section of the WTO website. In 2015, the Committee asked the Secretariat to circulate a survey on transparency ([G/SPS/GEN/1382](#) and results in [G/SPS/GEN/1402](#)).

²⁴ The original version of the Manual was written by Ms Sally Jennings, Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand, with contributions by the WTO Secretariat, and published in 2009. An updated version was prepared by the Secretariat with inputs from Ms Sally Jennings and other Members in 2018.

1.47. Over the years, the Committee has also requested the Secretariat to develop **online tools** to facilitate the management of SPS information and submission of notifications. These tools are described in section 1.2.1 .

1.48. In response to requests from Members, the Secretariat provides a significant number of technical assistance activities on transparency and the ePing SPS&TBT Platform. In 2022, the Secretariat launched the **SPS Transparency Champions Course** to further assist Members in implementing and benefiting from the SPS transparency framework.²⁵

1.3.3 Specific trade concerns (STCs)

1.49. Since 1995, Members have raised 558 specific trade concerns (STCs) in the SPS Committee. The number of STCs has consistently increased over the past few years (see Table 6 for additional information).

1.50. As part of its approach to keeping updated on the status of STCs, the Committee requests Members to report if STCs have been resolved; resolution of STCs is a standing item on the Committee's agenda. In addition, the Secretariat periodically asks individual Members to provide updates on STCs that have not been raised in the Committee for some time (see document [G/SPS/GEN/2062/Rev.1](#) for the results of the latest exercise). About 57% of STCs raised in the SPS Committee since 1995 have been reported as fully or partially resolved. The Secretariat prepares an annual overview of STCs in document G/SPS/GEN/204 and revisions. This document is described in section 1.3.4 .

1.51. In an effort to further facilitate the resolution of SPS-related trade issues, the SPS Committee adopted in 2014 a "**Procedure to encourage and facilitate the resolution of specific sanitary or phytosanitary issues among Members in accordance with Article 12.2**" ([G/SPS/61](#)). The use of this procedure has only been requested once (October 2022).

1.52. As part of the work initiated under the Fourth Review of the SPS Agreement, the Committee developed a "**Catalogue of Instruments Available to WTO Members to Manage SPS Issues**" ([G/SPS/63](#)). It is intended as a reference document for officials working on SPS issues, identifying relevant legal provisions, Committee guidance documents, and some outside resources available for particular SPS-related tasks or activities.

Table 6: Number of specific trade concerns (STCs)

Year	Dates of the formal meeting	Number of new STCs raised per meeting	Number of previously raised STCs per meeting	Total STCs raised per meeting
2019	21-22 March 2019	4	18	22
	18-19 July 2019	8	17	25
	7-8 November 2019	5	12	17
2020	25-26 June 2020	17	12	29
	5-6 and 13 November 2020	19	19	38
2021	25-26 March 2021	11	35	46
	14-16 July 2021	9	38	47
	3-5 November 2021	7	36	43
2022	23-25 March 2022	10	38	48
	22-24 June 2022	6	45	51
	9-11 November 2022	10	42	52

Source: [WTO Trade Concerns Database](#)

²⁵ [WTO | 2022 News items - DG Okonjo-Iweala stresses importance of SPS, TBT transparency to facilitate trade.](#)

1.3.4 Reports by the Secretariat

1.53. The Secretariat regularly produces a number of annual reports throughout the year, ahead of each SPS Committee meeting. The list below indicates the type of report prepared, the frequency with which it is prepared, and the document symbol for the latest report:

- March of every year:
 - Annual overview of the implementation of SPS transparency provisions and specific trade concerns ([G/SPS/GEN/804/Rev.14](#) and [G/SPS/GEN/204/Rev.22](#));²⁶
 - Overview of WTO SPS technical assistance and training activities planned for the upcoming year, including information on the selection process ([G/SPS/GEN/997/Rev.12](#)); and
 - Overview of SPS technical assistance activities undertaken ([G/SPS/GEN/521/Rev.17](#)).
- June/July of every year:
 - Annual report on the implementation of Article 6 of the SPS Agreement ([G/SPS/GEN/2021](#)); and
 - Annual report on the procedure to monitor the process of international harmonization ([G/SPS/GEN/2022](#)).
- November of every year:
 - Annual report on the use of the procedure to encourage and facilitate the resolution of specific sanitary or phytosanitary issues among Members in accordance with Article 12.2 ([G/SPS/61](#)) ([G/SPS/GEN/2057](#)).

1.54. The Secretariat prepares a summary report after each of the three Committee meetings held every year (G/SPS/R/# series). In addition, it assists the Chairperson in preparing written reports on the discussions in informal SPS Committee meetings (which are held ahead of formal SPS Committee meetings), and also thematic sessions. The final version of these written reports are included in the circulated summary report for each meeting (as an annex). The preparation of summary reports is explained in section 1.2.3.6 .

1.55. The Secretariat also supports the SPS Committee Chairperson in the preparation of the annual report, under the Chairperson's responsibility, on the activities of the SPS Committee. This report is submitted to the Council for Trade in Goods for consideration at its last meeting of every year (latest report available in document [G/L/1443](#)).

1.56. Article 12.7 of the SPS Agreement provided that the SPS Committee shall review the operation and implementation of this Agreement three years after the date of entry into force of the WTO Agreement, and thereafter as the need arises. In accordance with [WT/MIN\(01\)/17](#), the Committee conducts a **review of the operation and implementation of the SPS Agreement** every four years. This is an opportunity for Members to take stock and identify areas for further work. The review process begins with the adoption of a procedure and timeline, setting out dates for Members to submit proposals, to comment on proposals, and for the Secretariat to prepare a background document, and the draft report of the Review. Members' proposals address substantive issues, for example to elaborate further clarification to particular provisions of the Agreement or suggest improvements to processes.

1.57. At the end of the review process, the Committee adopts a report, which contains a record of the Committee's work in different areas, as well as recommendations resulting from Members' proposals and Committee discussions. These recommendations are usually addressed to the Committee, to Members, to Observer organizations or to the Secretariat, and relate to future Committee work, information sharing, and sometimes lead to the development of guidelines, procedures or recommendations adopted by the Committee. The results of such work are published

²⁶ Since 2021, the information previously contained in two reports (G/SPS/GEN/804 and [G/SPS/GEN/204](#) and revisions) has been merged into a single document, circulated with two document symbols. This has allowed to provide a more comprehensive view of both the implementation of transparency provisions and the STCs raised in the Committee, to align the periods of time covered (i.e. from January to December), and to harmonize reporting practices with those of the TBT Committee.

in a compilation of "[Major Decisions and Documents](#)", also available on the SPS section of the WTO website, which is periodically updated. It contains the text of the Agreement, Rules of Procedure, as well as all Committee Decisions, Guidelines, Procedures and Recommendations.

1.58. The most recent review (the Fifth Review) was launched in March 2018, and completed in June 2020.²⁷ The Report of the Fifth Review ([G/SPS/64](#) and [G/SPS/64/Add.1](#)) contains various recommendations on topics proposed by WTO Members and provides an overview of the work undertaken by the SPS Committee during the period under review, which spanned from 2014 to 2019.

1.3.5 Participation by external stakeholders

1.59. The SPS Committee has granted **observer status** to 25 organizations, ten of which have observer status on a regular basis, and the remaining 15 on an *ad hoc* basis (see [G/SPS/W/78/Rev.15](#)). Observer Organizations are normally invited to participate in all formal and informal meetings, thematic sessions and informal working groups.²⁸ Organizations requesting observer status are asked to provide information on their membership, mandate and scope of work, their potential contributions to the work of the SPS Committee, and reciprocity. This information is circulated as an addendum to document [G/SPS/GEN/121](#) to help the Committee decide whether to accept the request for observer status.

1.60. The list of Observer Organizations with regular status includes the **three international standard-setting bodies (ISSBs)** referenced in the SPS Agreement: Codex Alimentarius Commission; the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH); and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). These three bodies participate regularly in Committee meetings, providing regular updates on their work, including standard-setting activities, under the dedicated agenda item for information from the ISSBs. They also regularly submit written reports to the Committee. Other Observer Organizations also share information on their SPS-related activities in the meeting and submit documents with additional information on their SPS-related work.

1.61. As previously mentioned, the Secretariat maintains an SPS Delegates mailing list, including a list for Observer Organizations, and sends out communications before Committee meetings to ensure that Observer Organizations are kept well informed of upcoming meetings, the status of Committee work and other Committee-related developments. Similarly, Observer Organizations receive communications via the SPS Delegates mailing list after Committee meetings. The Secretariat also reminds Observer Organizations to submit written reports prior to each Committee meeting.

1.62. Representatives from the private sector (e.g. private companies, commodity associations) and from academia sometimes participate in Committee workshops and thematic sessions as speakers, sharing their knowledge and expertise on particular SPS-related topics. Inclusion of such speakers is usually suggested by Members.

1.3.6 Work with other Committees or WTO bodies

1.63. The SPS Secretariat team regularly works with other Committees, either by inviting representatives from other Secretariat teams, such as TBT and TF, to present in workshops/thematic sessions organized by the SPS Committee, or by presenting at events held by other Committees.

1.64. In July 2019, the SPS Committee organized a [Workshop on Transparency and Coordination](#), which provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on the notification of measures not clearly fitting only within the scope of the SPS or TBT Agreements.²⁹ This workshop was closely coordinated with a TBT thematic session held in June 2019, organized in light of a specific Eighth Triennial Review

²⁷ The Sixth Review is due in 2024. The Committee is discussing the timing of the Sixth Review in light of the ongoing work programme launched by the MC12 SPS Declaration, also described in section 1.2.3.2 .

²⁸ Unless any Member raises an objection to the participation of any of these observers in advance of a meeting.

²⁹ See [G/SPS/64](#), paras. 7.1-7.13.

recommendation to exchange information on practices to determine whether a measure falls under the SPS and/or TBT Agreement.³⁰

2 PAST EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

2.1. Several previous Chairpersons, along with Members, have undertaken initiatives to improve the Committee's work, some of which have been adopted by the Committee. Such initiatives include: regrouping and streamlining the Committee's agenda items in order to improve the overall flow of discussions in the Committee; including separate agenda items for information sharing from Codex, IPPC and WOH, and information-sharing from other Observer Organizations; and adding an agenda item on cross-cutting issues to facilitate discussions on any issues that relate to several provisions of the SPS Agreement, or that do not fit neatly under any of the other agenda items. The information provided below gives an overview of the more recent efforts, along with relevant background information.

2.1 Changes to the agenda for formal meetings of the SPS Committee

2.2. The Committee has periodically agreed to changes to the agenda for its formal meetings. For example, after the adoption of the Report of the Fifth Review at its June 2020 meeting, the SPS Committee implemented the recommendation to include a new standing agenda item on control, inspection and approval procedures (Annex C) to facilitate discussions and information exchange on the topic. This new agenda item was included for the first time in the airgram for the November 2020 meeting ([WTO/AIR/SPS/33](#)).

2.2 2019-2020 Discussions on the consultative function of the SPS Committee (G/SPS/W/319/Rev.2)

2.3. During 2019-2020, as part of the broader initiative launched by the Ottawa Group, Brazil coordinated a series of open-ended consultations, focused on ways to further strengthen the work of the SPS Committee, which resulted in document [G/SPS/W/319/Rev.2](#). Several consultations were organized (see Table 1), and ideas from these consultations were brought to the SPS Committee for consideration. These discussions initially focused on the use of online tools to facilitate discussion of specific trade concerns, including in the context of the Secretariat's SPS-TBT eAgenda project, and were subsequently broadened to include other topics.

2.4. While the discussions were ongoing, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Committee, began implementing a number of the suggestions made, such as:

- a. the development of an annotated draft agenda;
- b. creation of an online system for submission of STCs (i.e. eAgenda);
- c. webcasting of thematic sessions; and
- d. inclusion of a reminder in the airgram for Members to consult the Catalogue of Instruments Available to WTO Members to Manage SPS Issues ([G/SPS/63](#)), and about the availability of the Chairperson to provide good offices upon request to assist with the resolution of trade concerns ([G/SPS/61](#)).

2.3 Committee discussions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

2.5. In light of the COVID-19 situation, the June 2020 SPS Committee meeting took place in a combined virtual/written format. The written procedure was facilitated by the then new eAgenda platform, which was used for the first time and allowed Members to submit agenda items, statements, and STCs online.³¹ Since the time available for virtual meetings was limited, eAgenda was also used to facilitate an exchange of written statements on STCs and other agenda items. The Secretariat prepared a report on the Committee's first use of eAgenda in document [G/SPS/GEN/1818](#).

³⁰ See [G/TBT/49](#), para. 1.28.

³¹ Initially, the Secretariat had planned to roll out eAgenda for the March 2020 SPS Committee meeting, following a pilot-test phase with nine Members. That meeting was subsequently cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.6. Further to the June 2020 SPS Committee meeting, Members requested an opportunity to discuss the procedure and format used for the June 2020 meeting, with a view to determining what aspects should continue to be used in future SPS Committee meetings. As such, informal consultations were held in September 2020. These consultations also provided an opportunity to continue discussions on other topics, such as strengthening the consultative function of the SPS Committee.

2.7. The following sections provide an overview of some aspects of the Committee's functioning discussed by Members in the September 2020 informal consultations.

2.3.1 Combined use of written and oral procedures

2.8. Members recognized the value of using a written procedure for the June 2020 Committee meeting due to the exceptional circumstances linked to the pandemic; however, they also underscored the importance of maintaining oral exchanges in the Committee. In relation to specific trade concerns, Members emphasized the importance of having oral interventions from supporting Members.³²

2.3.2 Use of time-limits

2.9. Members recognized the special circumstances in June 2020, which had necessitated the use of time-limits for interventions. However, Members also expressed the need to maintain flexibility in the Committee's procedures, and not to include time-limits for oral interventions for any agenda item in the future. Several Members advocated for the practice of delivering succinct oral statements, with more detailed information provided in written statements submitted through eAgenda and/or as G/SPS/GEN documents. Time-limits are not currently used in SPS Committee meetings.

2.3.3 Format for statements from Observer Organizations

2.10. Members recognized the important work of Observer Organizations, and in particular, the specific role of Codex, WOH and IPPC. They saw a continued need for these organizations to share information through brief oral interventions and submission of GEN documents ahead of meetings. Members were not in favour of the suggestion to include a panel discussion format with Codex, WOH and IPPC in Committee meetings to enable more focused sharing of information. The importance of avoiding a replication in the SPS Committee of the discussions in the meetings of Codex, WOH and IPPC was also noted. Currently, Observer Organizations are encouraged to provide brief oral interventions and submit written documents.

2.3.4 Format of the summary report

2.11. A different format for the summary report was used in June 2020³³, where a lengthier report was circulated with the full statements of Members, many extracted from eAgenda.³⁴ This was in contrast to previous summary reports, which were shorter, with summarized interventions of Members.³⁵

2.12. In the discussions, Members recognized two important considerations: (i) the length of time required to prepare the report; and (ii) the ideal amount of information to be contained in the report. Some delegates valued having the full statements included in the report, which the Secretariat could prepare more quickly, thus facilitating their reports to capital. Other delegates preferred the summarized version of the report, even if it took longer, as this version was more reader friendly. They were also in favour of strictly capturing what was said in the meeting, avoiding potential

³² Due to the extraordinary circumstances and the associated time constraints for the June 2020 SPS Committee meeting, Members supporting STCs were requested to submit their statements in written form, instead of making oral statements. See [JOB/SPS/8 \(and JOB/SPS/8/Add.1\)](#) for more information.

³³ As indicated above, the June 2020 meeting included a written procedure, due to the shorter allotted timeframe for meetings as a result of COVID-19.

³⁴ Other statements were emailed to the Secretariat, or prepared based on meeting recordings. The summary report of the June 2020 SPS Committee is available in document [G/SPS/R/99](#) (71 pages) and [G/SPS/R/99/Corr.1](#).

³⁵ As an example, please see the summary report of the November 2019 SPS Committee meeting in document [G/SPS/R/97/Rev.1](#) (29 pages).

discrepancies between delivered statements and written statements submitted through eAgenda. Several Members stressed the need to ensure that the final version of written statements submitted through eAgenda would reflect the information presented in the meeting, and not include additional or changed information.

2.13. The Secretariat drew the Committee's attention to a new feature of eAgenda that allowed Members to generate a compilation of submitted statements. This feature would allow delegates to access full statements very quickly, thus supporting their need to submit reports to their capitals. Some Members suggested that since this new feature allowed quick access to statements, the Secretariat should continue to prepare the shorter version of summary reports, as had been the practice. This is the approach that is currently being used.

2.3.5 Activities related to COVID-19

2.14. A separate report to the CTG covers the Committee activities in relation to COVID-19. This report has been circulated as G/L/1477-G/SPS/66.
