

REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLANT PROTECTION CONVENTION

Statement made by International Plant Protection Convention
at the meeting of 29-30 may 1996

Introduction

The Twenty-eighth FAO Conference, held in October 1995, accorded high priority to the revision of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). The proposals put forward by the FAO Secretariat, and agreed to by the Conference, envisaged a revision during the 1996/97 biennium. Its objectives were to bring the Convention into line with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) concluded within the framework of the Uruguay Round and to include recent developments in establishing standard-setting procedures under the IPPC. Within the SPS Agreement, the Secretariat of the IPPC is recognized as one of the major international standard-setting organizations.

The International Plant Protection Convention was adopted by the FAO Conference in 1951 and came into force the following year. It was amended by the FAO Conference in 1979 and the amendments came into force in 1991. The Convention has as one of its main objectives "securing common and effective action to prevent the spread and introduction of pests of plants and plant products and to promote measures for their control".

Although the IPPC was originally established without a Secretariat, it was foreseen that FAO would provide certain secretariat functions, in particular information exchange. In response to the negotiations in the Uruguay Round, in 1989 the Twenty-fifth FAO Conference agreed to establish a Secretariat for the International Plant Protection Convention, within FAO, to address all issues related to harmonization and information exchange in the area of plant quarantine. The Conference carefully considered the proposed programme of work of the Secretariat and agreed that its main task should be the development of: harmonized guidelines for pest risk assessment; harmonized plant quarantine principles governing phytosanitary laws and regulations; and harmonized plant quarantine procedures. The Conference further agreed that the IPPC Secretariat should be supported by a panel of experts on harmonization and plant quarantine and should be entrusted with the organization of regular Technical Consultations among Regional Plant Protection Organizations. The IPPC Secretariat became functional in 1992. In 1993, the Twenty-seventh FAO Conference adopted a procedure for the development of phytosanitary standards.

Actions taken to revise the Convention

The revision of the IPPC includes the following steps: in June 1995, prior to the FAO Conference, the Secretariat requested National Plant Protection Organizations to submit issues for review by the IPPC. Replies received were reviewed at the Seventh Session of Regional Plant Protection Organizations in September 1995, which also made further recommendations for revision. Based on

these comments, a draft of the revised IPPC was developed and submitted to an Expert Consultation for review in March 1996.

Expert consultation on the revision of the International Plant Protection Convention

Twelve experts participated in the meeting who were selected for their technical knowledge and based on a wide geographical representation. They served in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their government. The experts considered comments provided by National and Regional Plant Protection Organizations and a text provided by the FAO Secretariat representing these changes. The meeting provided general and specific comments on the text of the Convention.

The experts stated that the Convention should cover plant protection in general and not be limited to quarantine pests, which would make its coverage more restricted than the SPS Agreement. Although the scope of the Convention is wide, the proposed operative articles chiefly concern quarantine pests. Therefore, a new article was drafted that covers regulated non-quarantine pests of importance to international trade. It was recognized that the term "quality pest" may have wider application than "regulated non-quarantine pest"; the latter term may be restricted to pests of concern to plant health, but this will require further careful discussions and definition. Possibly in this manner a solution may be found for the currently undefined term "other injurious pests" in the phytosanitary certificate.

There was concern on the protection of the environment, particularly the protection of natural vegetation, which cannot be readily expressed in economic factors. It was believed that this should be covered in the Convention. Furthermore, there were concerns that countries should be able to take measures to protect neighbouring countries: although a pest may not be of great concern to a country, introduction may provide a conduit to the next country where it may be of importance.

The Expert Group was of the opinion that weeds were covered by the Convention and that it would be helpful if this were more clearly expressed.

The Expert Group considered the standard-setting mechanism. It recommended that this should be included in the Convention. The present mechanism, which includes an Expert Committee and revision and approval by the FAO Governing Bodies, was only a temporary measure and may not be appropriate in the future when less general, more specific standards are considered. The establishment of a Commission which would adopt standards and consider other matters relating to the implementation of the Convention was discussed. This would consist of countries adhering to the Convention, as opposed to the present Convention in which decisions are made by members of FAO. The experts agreed that provisions for an IPPC Secretariat should be included in the Convention.

The experts noted that Pest Risk Analysis was fundamental to the concept of fair trade and was practised by many countries. Therefore, the inclusion of the principle of PRA was essential. However, PRAs would remain a problem for developing and small developed countries and technical assistance would be required for such cases.

Specific language was added to provide for possible adherence of the European Community to the Convention.

The functions and responsibilities of National Plant Protection Organizations were considered. Most functions could be executed either by the NPPO or under its responsibility. However, the experts recommended that the issuance of phytosanitary certificates remain a function of NPPOs.

The experts recommended that the Convention should also cover risks associated with international travel.

Further steps in the revision of the IPPC

The results of the Expert Consultation are now being submitted officially to all FAO members and non-members adhering to the Convention. The comments will be discussed by the Eighth Session of the Meeting of Regional Plant Protection Organizations, to be held from 10 to 13 September 1996 in Paris, and will subsequently be submitted to an FAO Technical Government Consultation, scheduled to take place at FAO in Rome from 13 to 17 January 1997. If agreement can be reached during this meeting, the text will be submitted to the Twenty-ninth FAO Conference in 1997, through the FAO Committee on Agriculture and the FAO Council.