

Asia–Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network (APFISN)

Genesis, objectives and achievements

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Presentation notes

Distinguished dignitaries, delegates and Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel greatly honored having got the opportunity to talk to you this afternoon on the origin, aims and objectives of the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network. The network was established in 2004 in response to the immense costs and threats posed by forest invasive species in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of ecological destruction, economic loss and detrimental social effects.

Forest Invasive Species (FIS) - what are they?

Previous speakers have already told you what forest invasive species are. To make it a bit more elaborate- forest invasive species are plants, insects or microbes which are non-native to a particular ecosystem and whose introduction will cause different types of damage - economic, ecological, social or even those affecting human health. The cost due to invasive species is enormous.

Introduction of FIS

The introduction of forest invasive species could be intentional or inadvertent. There are several pathways.

In general, introductions are greatly helped by increasing international trade and travel.

Why FIS are a problem?

They are a problem since the overall loss associated with forest invasive species in many countries is about 1 percent of the Gross Domestic Product.

In the Asia Pacific region the ecological and economic loss is estimated to be billions of dollars.

What we have are mere estimations - a real quantification of the losses has not been done – There is a necessity to do it. And, we have to find ways to mitigate the threats posed by forest invasive species.

We can't allow this to proceed uncontrolled; we need to stop further incursions to the region and control those which have already invaded our forest ecosystems

Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network (APFISN)

It is against this background the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network was born.

The network is a cooperative alliance of 32 member countries in the region and operates under the umbrella of Asia- Pacific Forestry Commission which is a statutory body of the FAO.

The main aims of the network are to help member countries:

1. to detect and prevent new incursion of invasive species in to the region;
2. to monitor, eradicate or control invasive species that have already been introduced.

What does the Network do?

Let us now examine what does the network do?

One of the key objectives of the network is to raise awareness of FIS among foresters, policy makers, researchers and the common man – more importantly at the governmental and political level. Lack awareness can result in new incursions and spread.

We also plan to exchange knowledge and information among member countries and facilitate access to expertise where it is available

Strengthening capacity of member countries to deal with invasive species is another major plan. Training opportunities would be provided to those who are in need of it. Regional collaboration and more broadly international collaboration is highly essential to combat the invasive species menace.

Action plans of APFISN

The action plans of the network involve: awareness raising, database and information sharing, and stocktaking of national activities.

The network is only two years old, but we have been very active all through.

For **raising awareness on FIS**, we have:

- developed a website, a brochure and a logo;
- started publishing a monthly newsletter since July 2006. (I have left copies of the newsletter in this room- those who are interested in receiving copies may please leave their e-mail address);
- started producing fact sheets and DVD's on FIS. A fact sheet on coconut leaf beetle and a film on *Mikania micrantha* are available for free distribution.

Databases and information sharing:

- developed and are maintaining a database;
- published 2 workshop proceedings and several workshop reports.

Our E-mail networking has been very active through which colleagues from the member countries send us requests to help resolving urgent and specific problems

On the **Stocktaking of national activities** front, ten countries have already prepared a state of the art report of FIS present in their countries to include it on our website

We encourage others to do it, and offered help to those who do not have the technical know-how to do it (Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos – to list a few).

Other action plans are:

Capacity building

We conducted three workshops during the period:

- Workshop on Eucalyptus rust (Bangkok- Oct. 2004), Coconut leaf beetle (Vietnam, Feb 2005) and Early Warning Systems for FIS (Kerala, Feb 2006);
- Workshops planned for 2007- Malaysia, China;
- Workshop in South Korea in early 2008.

Our future plans include staff exchange, sharing of technical expertise and collaborative research to resolve major problems in the region. (*Mimosa invisa*, coconut leaf beetle).

Organizational structures

We have strong organizational structures to do all these - duties and responsibilities have been assigned:

- National Coordinators (important link between countries and the network, helps in in-country networking, receives training, nominate trainees);
- Network Coordinator (Coordinate all regional activities to achieve the goals of the network, conduct workshops, training programs, raise funds are some of the several duties);
- Executive Committee (4 nominated members, 2 ex-officio members, term 2 yrs (they provide strategic guidelines and direction to the network activities);

- A regional strategy for implementing the various activities of the network has also been developed.

Expected outcomes from APFISN activities

- Improved coordination and cooperation to deal with forest invasive species problem in the region.
- Improved capabilities in all member countries to recognize the issue, to deal with the issue and prevent new incursions.
- Quick sharing of information on areas like new threats, new methods of control.
- Ultimate aim - prevention and control of FIS in the region.

We are here to mitigate threats posed by FIS in the Asia-Pacific region. Please strengthen our hands to do it.

Full implementation of the network will:

1. Provide early warning of potential invaders and aid in their rapid detection and identification throughout the region
2. Result in sharing of biological information, risk assessments and monitoring and control techniques of the species in question
3. Facilitate access to technical expertise, research results, training and educational opportunities.

We are highly thankful to FAO, the People's Republic of China, Government of India, Government of Australia, Government of Fiji, Government of Vietnam, ACIAR, and the Kerala Forest Research Institute for kind support to the activities of APFISN.

We have a number of challenges before us. The main challenge is - how to sustain the network- where to find funds? Other challenges are invigoration of the network, better profile, better engagement of countries and national focal points, and improve coordination and pace of activity implementation.

Thank you.