

Information Note:

The International Poplar Commission A Technical Statutory Body of the Food and Agriculture Organisation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), established in 1945, is one of the specialised agencies of the United Nations. The general mandate of FAO is to:

- Provide a neutral forum for discussion and debate for all member countries,
- Collect, analyse and disseminate information and statistics as a basis for policy and planning at national and international levels; and
- Promote sustainable resource use through direct support to member countries, and through collaboration with national institutions and international organizations and mechanisms.

International Poplar Commission

The International Poplar Commission (IPC), founded in 1947, is one of the Technical Statutory Bodies of FAO. Notwithstanding its name, the scope of the Commission covers willows as well as poplars, both members of the family Salicaceae.

The functions of the IPC, in line with the FAO mandate, are to:

- study the scientific, technical, social and economic aspects of poplar and willow cultivation;
- promote the exchange of ideas and material among research workers, producers and users;
- arrange joint research programmes;
- stimulate the organization of congresses and study tours;
- report and make recommendations to the Conference of FAO;
- make recommendations to national poplar commissions through appropriate channels.

The IPC is the only forum that brings together managers, users and researchers in poplars and willows to discuss topics of common interest in a cross-disciplinary way. It has also had an important role in the development of national forest sectors, to a great extent through the exchange of ideas and breeding material.

Roles of Poplars and Willows

Trees and shrubs of the Salicaceae are at the forefront of developments throughout the world in forest plantations, tree breeding, conservation of genetic resources and environmental functions. They are native to the temperate and subtropical zones where their adaptability to a wide range of climatic and soil conditions has led to their widespread use in developed and developing countries and in countries with economies in transition. They are mostly fast growing and provide a wide range of goods (including industrial roundwood such as sawn timber, peeler logs, packing crates, pallets and pulpwood; fuelwood;

poles; and fodder) and services (including protection for soil, crops, livestock and dwellings and aesthetic value). They have an important role in rural life in developing countries and those with economies in transition. Traditionally the growing of poplars has been integrated in many temperate and subtropical agricultural systems, while new fields of interest include the use of poplar and willow as biomass for renewable energy and for phyto-remediation of severely degraded sites.

The poplars are easy to establish by vegetative means (cuttings) and to hybridize between species within the broad taxonomic sections of the genus *Populus*. These features allow tree breeders to develop new cultivars and growers to multiply the offspring from individual trees with desirable attributes (such as rapid growth, straightness, good fodder value and favourable branching habit) quickly and simply.

Reliance on clones as the sole means of reproduction for plantations, however, has its drawbacks if a particular clone proves susceptible to attack by a pest or disease. Thus in recent years breeders have given greater emphasis to the conservation and maintenance of natural populations of the Salicaceae *in situ* and *ex situ* as safeguards and as a pool of genetic variation to meet future needs.

Working Parties and Sub-Committee of IPC

The IPC has five working parties which reflect the main issues concerning the cultivation and utilization of the Salicaceae in member countries:

- Genetics, Conservation and Improvement;
- Diseases;
- Insect and Other Animal Pests;
- Production Systems and Environmental Applications; and
- Logging and Utilization

There is also a Subcommittee of the Executive Committee on Poplar and Willow Nomenclature and Registration, which fulfils IPC's role as the internationally recognized authority for the nomenclature and registration of poplar and willow cultivars under the provisions of the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, Utrecht, 1958.

Membership to the IPC

As the IPC is governed by a Convention placing it within the framework of FAO, membership is open to member or associate member countries of FAO or, under certain conditions, to members of the United Nations or of its specialized agencies that are not FAO members. Membership is upon application of the country's authority relevant to FAO, and a declaration that the country accepts the Convention. FAO provides the secretariat of the IPC, and can provide details of membership procedures¹.

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Each member country is obliged to establish a national popular commission or other suitable body as the formal channel of communication with the IPC Secretariat. At present there are 37 member countries of the IPC, of which 14 are developing countries and five are countries with economies in transition (see Annex). The official languages of the IPC are English, French and Spanish, and simultaneous interpretation in the three languages is provided at all plenary sessions.

The IPC meets in session every four years. Each member country is entitled to one vote at sessions, through a nominated delegate. Between sessions, IPC business is handled by an Executive Committee, which meets every two years. Twelve members of the Executive Committee are elected in their personal capacities on nomination by the respective national popular commissions, and up to five additional members may be co-opted.

Recent meetings have included the following. Reports of these meetings are available from the Secretariat or from the website (see below).

- The forty-first session of the Executive Committee, hosted by FAO, Rome, 2 September, 2002;
- The twenty-first session of the IPC and the fortieth session of the Executive Committee, hosted by the United States and Canada in Portland, Oregon, United States in September 2000;
- the thirty-ninth session of the Executive Committee (Rome, Italy, 1998);
- the twentieth session of the IPC and the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee (Budapest, Hungary, 1996);
- the thirty-seventh session of the Executive Committee (Sapanca, Turkey, 1994); and
- the nineteenth session of the IPC and thirty-sixth session of the Executive Committee (Zaragoza, Spain, 1992).

These meetings, especially those of the working parties, are attended by plantation managers, academics, researchers, industrialists, conservationists and tree breeders, as well as by workers in fields such as agriculture and renewable energy.

The recommendations of the IPC are drawn to the attention of the other FAO Statutory Bodies, and most notably to the Committee on Forestry (COFO) - and through COFO to the FAO Council and Conference, as relevant. The IPC thus, potentially, has a powerful voice and its recommendations can reach policy makers at the highest levels.

Priority Initiatives

The Forty-first Executive Committee Meeting emphasized that as a Statutory Body of FAO, the IPC needed to respond to and support initiatives to the priority needs of member States as reflected in the Organization's Strategic Framework (2000 – 2015) and the Strategic Plan for Forestry. Assignments in process included an eBook, e-catalogue (through ECOPORT) and CD on Insects of Poplars and Willows; reviewed and updated book on Poplars and Willows (1957 and 1980) through working papers corresponding to the main chapters, CD and possible republication of the complete document; and review and update of the FAO publication, Breeding Poplars for Disease Resistance (1985) to

incorporate new techniques and reflect developing country grower needs. Additional features to be considered for the new IPC website include: e-conferencing; sub-sites for Working Parties and National Poplar Commissions; a correspondence corner for users; a photo database and a CD version for users without regular web access.

The Executive Committee made the following recommendation:

- Acceptance of Chile as the host of the 22nd Session of the IPC, with an associated study tour to Argentina, scheduled for October/November, 2004. The theme is to reflect topical issues of Latin America in general and Chile and Argentina in particular.
- Working Parties and National Poplar Commissions to translate the Functions of the IPC (as detailed in Article III of the Convention placing the IPC within the framework of FAO) into actions to bridge the application of science to a wide range of stakeholders in an endeavor to achieve sustainable forestry and sustainable development through initiatives in the three dimensions - economic, environmental and social.
- Working Parties of the IPC to review and rationalize existing Working Parties to refocus and integrate with, and complement, the objectives, outputs, activities, resources and mechanisms of FAO, Committee on Forestry, Regional Forestry Commissions, Statutory Technical Bodies in Forestry; and National Poplar Commissions to reflect the priority needs of member States in a more transparent and accountable way.
- Working Parties to prepare a two-year programme of work to detail focused but achievable activities, assign persons responsible, detail indicative delivery dates and show linkages and collaboration with FAO, Forestry Department, Forestry Commissions and other agencies and institutions in particularly meeting the needs of developing countries.
- A new Working Party to be established to address the application of Poplars and Willows in rehabilitation, conservation and phyto-remediation of degraded soils.
- Continuance of the IPC, through the Subcommittee on Nomenclature and Registration as the International Cultivar Registration Authority for Poplars, and extend to include Willows, adopting the standard procedures and an electronic register which have been established.

IPC Website

A website has recently been developed for the IPC detailing functions, history, country membership, National Poplar Commissions, composition of the Executive Committee, reports of recent sessions, details and outputs of the Sub-committee on Nomenclature and Registration and the five Working Parties, current and planned activities, publications and reports, directory of poplar and willow scientists, a catalogue of cultivars and links to other institutions and web sites. The web is available on <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ipc>. The site will soon be available in English, French and Spanish.

Member Countries of the International Poplar Commission

Argentina	France	Korea (Republic of)	Spain
Austria	Germany	Lebanon	Sweden
Belgium	Hungary	Morocco	Switzerland
Bulgaria	India	Netherlands	Syria
Canada	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	New Zealand	Tunisia
Chile	Iraq	Pakistan	Turkey
China	Ireland	Portugal	United Kingdom
Croatia	Italy	Romania	United States of America
Egypt	Japan	Serbia and Montenegro	
Finland		South Africa	