

Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

Report of the Expert meeting on Forest Invasive Species in Europe and Central Asia (6-7 September 2016, Minsk, Belarus)

First Day of the Workshop, 6 September 2016

1. Welcome and introductions

Mr Norbert Winkler-Ráthonyi (Forestry Officer at FAO REU) welcomed the country representatives on behalf of FAO and invited them to introduce themselves in a tour de table.

In order to provide participants with a perspective on the work of FAO in the region Mr Norbert Winkler-Ráthonyi and Mr Peter Pechacek (Forestry Officer at FAO SEC) introduced FAO's organizational structure and the new strategic objectives guiding the work of FAO in the region. Looking at the forest cover in European versus Central Asian countries they underlined the different challenges and opportunities when shaping FAO's work and activities at regional and national levels. They also gave an outline on the ongoing projects of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and of the Sub-regional Office for Central Asia.

Ms Shiroma Sathyapala (Forestry Officer at FAO HQ) explained the core objectives of FAO Forest Health & Protection Programme and the importance and benefits of Forest Invasive Species Networks in other regions such as Asia Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network (APFISN) and Forest Invasive Species Network for Africa (FISNA).

2. Invasive species Expert presentations

Dr Ferenc Lakatos (Institute of Sylviculture and Forest Protection, University of West-Hungary, Sopron) gave a comprehensive review on the regional aspects of biological invasions in forests. He highlighted that on a global basis the two great destroyers of biodiversity are habitat destruction and invasion by exotic species. He underlined that prevention, early detection and rapid response as well as research and public education and awareness have key role in the eradication, control and management of invasive species. He also shared his experiences on the Asia Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network (APFISN).

Dr Ingolf Kühn (Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research - UFZ, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg) gave a presentation about the regional perspective of invasive plants in forests. He explained the steps and stages of the invasion process and the role of trade in biological invasions. He also gave some examples of most "versatile" invasive tree species in Central Europe and explained that levels of forest's invasions can be regarded as intermediate compared to invasion levels of other habitat types.

Dr Alain Richard Roques (French National Institute for Agricultural Research, INRA, Orleans) in his presentation on invasive invertebrates explained the contribution of globalization to exponential increase of invertebrate invasions. He noted that the release of barriers in the EU and trade of large trees facilitate the invasive spread, however he highlighted that invasive species in most cases arrive with plants transported for planting purposes, but wood and wood products are also to be considered. Further he underlined that present EU inspections simply focusing on quarantine pests are not efficient and that possible bridgehead effects have to be systematically considered. He emphasized the importance of systematic testing of the possible new associations between invaders and natives.

Dr Wojciech Solarz (Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow) gave a presentation on the regional perspective of invasive vertebrates in forests. He explained that estimation of the numbers of alien species in forest is difficult because precise data combining taxonomy and habitat are not easily accessible, however it can be reliably stated that in forests, alien vertebrates represent less of a problem than alien invertebrates, fungi or plants. He

drew attention to the challenge of addressing threats represented by alien species with less effect on timber production which might have significant effect on biodiversity.

3. Group discussion

After the expert presentations, country representatives were invited to take part in group discussions on feasibility and design of umbrella Forest Invasive Species Network (FISN-ECA) for the region. All country representatives had the opportunity to express their views and concerns on the four topics of the groups, namely invasive plants, fungi, invertebrates and vertebrates, and raise questions regarding issues and challenges faced by their respective countries.

The main outcomes of the group discussions were:

- The scope of the network should be as broad as possible, dealing with all forests and trees and other woody plants outside the forests (including urban forests, parks, gardens, shrubs, nurseries).
- Any invasive species WITHIN and TO the region should be considered. Native / Exotic species need some clarification.
- List of invasive species at national level (cross-country co-operation) is needed.
- Use of existing resources (expert databases, institutions at national level, small-scale geographical networks) is important.
- Capacity building on detection and identification of microorganisms is necessary.
- Communications should be improved and harmonized at all levels within and between countries.
- Use of existing systems and tools related to invasive species by FAO IPPC and EPPO should be encouraged.
- Benefit and impact assessments of invasive species is needed.
- Health issues related to wildlife are to be considered.
- Climate change and Species range expansion is to be addressed.
- Awareness raising / Challenges of public perception are key issues.
- Priorities should be set because of limited financial and personal resources.

Second Day of the Workshop, 7 September 2016

4. Expert presentation

Dr Lucio Montecchio (Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, University of Padova) delivered a presentation on regional perspectives of invasive fungi in forests, stating that import of cheap commodities is really 'invasive'. He highlighted that the concept of plant protection and legislations come from an anthropocentric perspective, the goal of which is not primarily to save plants, but to reduce production losses. He underlined that none of the Quarantine Forest Pathogens was 100% eradicated in the whole European Union. He stressed that known pathogen must be studied before their arrival, according to climatic and environmental features, looking for vulnerabilities (i.e. PRAs; Forecasting models).

5. Results of the questionnaires

Ms Kitty Horváth (Forestry Consultant at FAO REU) presented the summary of results of the questionnaires on invasive species filled by participating countries. She thanked country representatives' active participation in providing the required information. It was highlighted that 21 member countries out of 29 provided information on the situation of forest invasive species in their respective country. The country reports indicated that a wide range of species represented a problem in member countries but only a few of them were mentioned by more than one country. The most frequently mentioned invasive plant species were *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Alnus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Heracleum sosnowskyi*, *Impatiens glandulifera* and *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*. The microorganisms that had the highest number of incidence were *Cryphonectria parasitica*, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (*Chalara fraxinea*), *Ophiostoma ulmi* and *Mycosphaerella pini* (*Dothistroma septosporum*). Regarding invertebrates the most frequently mentioned species resulted to be *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*, *Cameraria ohridella*, *Hyphantria cunea*, *Cydalima*

perspectalis and *Harmonia axyridis*. Based on the questionnaire the most problematic vertebrates were *Nyctereutes procyonoides*, *Ondatra zibethicus*, *Myocastor coypus* and *Lepomis gibbosus*.

6. Proposal of Finland on The International Year of Plant Health

Mr Ralf Lopian (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland) made a presentation on the upcoming proposal on the proclamation of an International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) to be held in 2020. He informed participants about completed, ongoing and future steps of the proclamation process. He explained that the scope of the initiative is to raise awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global importance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development. He highlighted that the Specific Objectives for the IYPH 2020 are:

1. Raising the awareness of the public and political decision makers at the global, regional and national levels about plant health;
2. Promoting and strengthening of national, regional and global plant health efforts and their resources in light of increasing trade and new pest risks caused through climate change;
3. Educating the public and increasing its knowledge about plant health;
4. Enhancing dialogue and stakeholder involvement in plant health;
5. Increasing information about the state of plant protection in the world;
6. Facilitating the establishment of plant health partnerships on national, regional and global levels.

7. The way forward

Based on the common understanding upon the importance of co-operation between countries and institutions, establishing functional early warning systems and sharing the knowledge already existing on forest invasive species Ms Shiroma Sathyapala discussed a way forward and presented the summary of future steps to be taken. She highlighted the challenges represented by the diversity of the region and by the differences in needs and requirements of member countries.

She suggested to gain ideas and good practices from the already existing Invasive Species Networks. As an example she introduced the organizational structure of the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network and suggested to gain ideas and understand good practices already established. She noted that the initiative of establishing a similar network for the region of Europe and Central Asia is complementary and align with the existing organizations like IPPC, EPPO, FAO, CBD and also with small scale geographical networks, and use all available information and knowledge, and build upon existing structures. She also highlighted that FAO has a facilitating role in the establishment of these networks but is not the owner of them and all decisions are to be made by member countries as the network is their initiative.

In this context Mr Ralf Lopian from Finland stressed the importance of collaboration with EPPO and expressed concerns on possible administrative and legal issues in Finland associated with such a Network. Mr Ylli Hoxha from Albania and Ms Ljiljana Sovilj from Serbia expressed the importance of having a voluntary network exclusively focused on forest invasive species.

Ms Shiroma Sathyapala stressed the proposed network would be voluntary and the structures and procedures used in the African and Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Networks are good examples of the implementation of such systems. However member states would be able to customise the system according to the regional requirement.

Ms Shiroma Sathyapala suggested to prepare a Mandate of the Network and to appoint Mr Ferenc Lakatos as the interim Secretary until the establishment of a final network structure.

8. Closing remarks

Mr Norbert Winkler-Ráthonyi thanked the country representatives for their active participation, he summarised the main outcomes of the Workshop and underlined the goal of establishing the Network is to complement and fill the existing systems gaps and highlighted the importance of using existing tools and structures.