

## Plant Health Committee Communiqué—PHC59

Plant Health Committee (PHC) held its 59th meeting (virtually due to COVID-19 border closures) from 26–29 July 2021, chaired by Rosa Crnov (Victoria). Topics considered by PHC as part of the meeting include the following:

- **Governance**

PHC has developed a Work Plan 2021-2024 that will govern the work of the Committee over the next three years. PHC59 has been progressing activities on the work plan for the 2021-22 financial year.

A project team and national working group has been established under the National Biosecurity Committee (PHC's parent committee) to develop a national performance evaluation framework. Performance evaluation is being progressed collaboratively by all jurisdictions through the Performance Evaluation Working Group. This will help to track the performance of the national biosecurity system and identify opportunities for improvement.

- **Diagnostics**

PHC endorsed the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Strategy 2021-2031. The strategy was developed by Plant Health Australia, in collaboration with PHC's Subcommittee on Plant Health Diagnostics (SPHD) and other biosecurity stakeholders, and provides a framework to further strengthen Australia's plant biosecurity diagnostic system. An implementation plan for the strategy, yet to be finalised, aims to prioritise investments and set out ongoing arrangements for collaboration and coordination to implement the strategy over the next decade.

PHC noted SPHD activities since PHC58, including continuing to oversee the development of National Diagnostic Protocols (NDPs). NDPs are an integral component of Australia's plant biosecurity system, allowing for a nationally consistent approach for the accurate taxonomic identification of exotic plant pests. There are currently 42 nationally endorsed NDPs and 83 draft NDPs in various stages of development (a full list of endorsed and draft NDPs is now available on the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Network website).

Additionally, SPHD continues to provide strategic advice and input into the Australian Plant Pest Database (APPD) to ensure the system will meet national requirements now and into the future. The APPD is currently being redeveloped by Plant Health Australia. APPD is a virtual database of specimens of Australian plant pests and pathogens, collating information from the 18 major Australian reference collections.

- **Collaboration and engagement**

The Committee met with the newly-formed Chair of the Plant Industries Biosecurity Committee (PIBC). PHC agreed to identify and discuss mutual priorities of PHC and the PIBC (recently formed under the Plant Health Australia – Plant Industry Forum) that could be advanced under a shared approach or partnership arrangement at a forthcoming workshop to be conducted as part of the PHC60 meeting in November. PHC also confirmed the establishment of a specific government-industry session at each future PHC meeting to be attended by the PIBC Chair. This session will allow ongoing formal collaboration and engagement between PHC and industry to enhance the national plant biosecurity system.



The Committee also met with a representative of the Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative (PBRI) and agreed an engagement model for collaboration with PBRI on future cross-sectoral plant biosecurity research, development and extension priorities for investment.

- **Fruit fly**

PHC discussed the progress of commitments made under the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Strengthening Australia's Fruit Fly Management System* and *National Fruit Fly Strategy 2020-25*, including ongoing engagement with the National Fruit Fly Council and progressing the Australian National Fruit Fly Management protocols. PHC expressed their ongoing support for continuation of the National Fruit Fly Council and has committed to ongoing negotiations with Horticulture Innovation Australia and PHA to agree to a Phase 4 of the Council.

- **Surveillance**

PHC noted the recent activities and outcomes of the Subcommittee on National Plant Health Surveillance (SNPHS) and its working groups since PHC58. Key achievements noted were the successful Annual Surveillance Workshop – 'International, Regional and Local' held virtually in December; and the development of the National People Capability Framework for Plant Biosecurity Surveillance which will serve as a guide for assessing surveillance capability requirements and developing and implementing development programs to address deficient areas.

PHC noted progress on the development of the National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy. This strategy is being developed by Plant Health Australia, in collaboration with a wide range of biosecurity stakeholders, including SNPHS, to support the broader national plant biosecurity system through its alignment with the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity and the National Plant Biosecurity Strategy.


- **Interstate Trade**

Plant Health Australia and the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ) presented the Interstate Trade Review of the effectiveness of the National Interstate Certification Assurance Audit Program to the Committee. PHC will now consider the recommendations in the report to inform next steps.

- **Preparedness, response and management**

Plant Health Committee noted progress on Plant Health Australia's development of the National Plant Biosecurity Preparedness Strategy and PHC's Plant Biosecurity Preparedness Working Group's involvement in this. The Committee considered the national preparedness agenda being facilitated by the Working Group and agreed to priorities for the future work plan of this group. These priorities include development of diagnostic protocols for key pests and diseases, and specific preparedness and contingency plans.

The Committee endorsed the *National Khapra Beetle Action Plan 2021-2031* and its *Implementation schedule*. The plan outlines high-level actions designed to prevent and prepare for a khapra beetle incursion nationally and was developed in consultation with jurisdictions, relevant industries and potentially affected peak bodies.



The Committee continues to monitor progress made in improving preparedness for *Xylella* despite disruptions to planned activities during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee endorsed an amended process for the importation of plant related viable forms of pest organisms including appropriate consultation with Peak Industry Bodies. Under the amended process, PHC members will be provided a summary of viable, plant-related organisms for which import permits have been granted by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, and will be consulted on applications to import viable forms of organisms with a high impact and high escape potential.

#### ▪ **Systems**

The Committee is continuing to work together on the national implementation of MyPestGuide™ Reporter, an application that will support public reporting and collection of surveillance information for pests and diseases nationally.

The Committee noted that implementation of AUSPestCheck™ has been agreed at the 34<sup>th</sup> meeting of the National Biosecurity Committee and will be funded by all government jurisdictions for three years to support governments and plant industries collate plant pest surveillance data at a national level.

The Nationally Integrated Surveillance Systems Working Group has commenced reviewing surveillance models with the long-term goal of developing a nationally integrated plant health surveillance system for Australia. The delivery is anticipated to be a multi-phased approach that will rely on engagement with and the participation of stakeholders across the surveillance spectrum, including from industry, government, community, environment and regionally focused representatives.

PHC revisited the recognised need for property identification across plant production sectors. In this context, the Committee noted, GS1 – an international property identifier system used in a range of supply chains – is about to be piloted in plant industries nationally (with NBC endorsement). This pilot will help to track the journey of produce door to door, in order to better trace and mitigate potential pest outbreaks.

All agricultural ministers and governments have committed to deliver nationally harmonised property identification arrangements across livestock and plant production sections. PHC will continue to play a role in working with industry and other parties towards the goal of agreeing business rules for a national traceability system.

#### ▪ **Next Meeting**

The PHC will next meet for an intersessional meeting on 23 September 2021, then 16-18 November for PHC60.