

International Trade and Invasive Alien Species

Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are species introduced into new habitats where they thrive and threaten biodiversity, including agricultural and domestic species and wildlife. Threats include competition for food, the spread of disease and of predators. Species that are in balance in one environment can become invasive in other habitats. Trade is one of the main pathways of IAS introduction into new habitats.

This briefing note summarizes the key findings and conclusions of a seminar on this topic organized by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) on 12-13 July 2012 at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland. The seminar was attended by over 100 experts and sought to raise awareness about the mutually supportive objectives of the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the contribution of effective SPS control systems to help protect against the entry of harmful species, including pests, diseases and other IAS.

International context

The SPS Agreement (Annex A) defines "SPS measures" as including "any measure applied to prevent or limit other damage within the territory of the Member from the entry, establishment or spread of pests", in addition to measures taken to protect human, animal and plant life or health from risks arising, *inter alia*, from "pests". The terms "animal" and "plant" in the SPS Agreement include wild fauna and wild flora, and "pests" includes weeds. Since "other damage" may include environmental damage caused by pests, measures applied to prevent or limit other damage within the territory from the entry, establishment or spread of IAS falls under the definition of an SPS measure.

Due to their considerable negative impacts on biological diversity, the CBD requires countries to prevent the introduction of, or to control or eradicate, those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species (Article 8(h)).

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are the standard-setting bodies recognized by the SPS Agreement with relevance to IAS and to the implementation of Article 8(h) of the CBD.

Enhancing SPS capacity to manage IAS

Use existing SPS systems. Virtually all trade-related IAS can be successfully managed by well-organized SPS systems (comprising border controls, quarantine, control and eradication measures, risk assessment, etc.). In some countries the SPS systems are well-equipped to address the majority of trade-related IAS, but many developing countries need substantial additional efforts and resources. For more information on initiatives implemented by the IPPC and the OIE, please visit: www.ippc.int and www.oie.int.

Ensure coherence and coordination.

In view of the diverse institutions involved in the area of IAS at national level, coordinating sectoral policies and strategies and formulating common goals to manage IAS risks is a prerequisite. Coordination should, as much as possible, use existing frameworks and platforms (e.g. national SPS coordination mechanisms).

Encourage stakeholder engagement.

Engaging relevant stakeholders (e.g. industry, research and academia, civil society, and local communities, etc.) in the early stages of policy and strategy development on IAS management is essential to create "ownership" and ensure their effective implementation. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged.

Key messages

- **Measures applied to prevent the entry, spread and establishment of IAS via trade, that aim to protect human, animal and plant life or health or territory, fall within the scope of the SPS Agreement and should abide by its provisions.**
- **Risk-based approaches under the SPS Agreement are a key tool in preventing the movement of organisms that have potential to become invasive.**
- **Countries are encouraged to use the relevant IPPC and OIE guidelines in dealing with IAS.**
- **International organizations should further collaborate to enhance the implementation of the SPS Agreement and the CBD.**
- **Increased SPS capacity building efforts will ensure that international standards are adequately implemented to prevent trade from spreading harmful alien species.**
- **Regional approaches are effective in the prevention and control of IAS which do not respect political borders. Regional networks are useful means to share relevant experiences and knowledge.**

Communicate on risks and solutions. Education and awareness-raising is important to ensure the broad support from all concerned stakeholders needed to manage IAS. Communication strategies, tools and channels adapted to specific target audiences are needed.

Promote evidence-based advocacy. Studies on the economic costs and benefits of prevention versus control, as well as on the returns on investment, can help raise support for action to manage risks related to IAS.

Build bridges between biodiversity and SPS capacity building. When elaborating IAS capacity building programmes, countries and development partners should take into account the needs identified using the IPPC's Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) and the OIE's Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) tools, in addition to relevant biodiversity needs assessments. Consultation among environment institutions, veterinary and plant health services, fisheries authorities and public health institutions is essential in the early stages of developing projects and programmes.

Examples of existing initiatives

The **Inter-agency Liaison Group on Invasive Alien Species** was established to facilitate cooperation among relevant international organizations to support measures to "prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species". The Secretariats of the CBD, WTO, IPPC and the OIE are amongst its members. The Group meets regularly to exchange information on activities related to IAS and to reflect on how best to create synergies between these activities.

The **Caribbean Invasive Species Working Group** serves as a technical advisory body to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat. It develops strategies to safeguard the Caribbean against invasive species that enter the region. The Group includes members from international governmental and non-governmental organizations, regional agencies and academia.

A number of **industry initiatives** have emerged over the past years aiming to ensure responsible business practices and maximize global environmental benefits from addressing these issues in a sustainable and cost-effective manner. Examples include the Global Industry Alliance for Marine Biosecurity which aims to reduce the transfer of harmful invasive species and pathogens via ship ballast water. Similarly, the Pet Industry Advisory Council has undertaken initiatives to reduce IAS risks by educating pet owners about responsible pet choices, risks of pet abandonment and of translocated invasive amphibian pathogens.

Spotlight invaders

➤ In 2003, a new fruit fly species, morphologically very similar to *Bactocera dorsalis*, was reported to be spreading rapidly in central Africa. This new pest, which attacks mangoes, citrus and other tropical fruits, is called *Bactocera invadens* owing to its invasiveness potential. By 2010, this fruit fly had almost completed its spread throughout Africa, threatening agricultural production, disrupting trade and triggering huge financial losses.

➤ *Aedes albopictus*, or the "tiger mosquito", was introduced to Italy in the 1990s with the import of scrap tires. It spread widely over the country and initially was not associated with any changes in disease patterns. In 2007, however, an Italian traveller to India became infected with the Chikungunya virus, which counts the tiger mosquito amongst its main epidemic vectors. Upon his return to Italy, the traveller became the source of infection for 205 locally acquired cases, which were spread by bites from the tiger mosquito. The case illustrates how the impacts of an invasive species may not become apparent or manifest themselves until the ecological or epidemiological conditions change.

➤ **Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome** is a disease of freshwater finfish that affects a large number of species and is geographically widely spread. Control in natural waters is thought impossible. Detection of the disease can trigger huge financial losses, market rejections, and affect farmers' incomes and livelihoods. First seen in Pakistan in the 1970s, it was detected in southern Africa in 2006. Likely routes of entry into Africa include unregulated fish product imports or bait fish used by sport anglers.

Further information

➤ To access presentations, audio and other materials related to the seminar, please visit: www.standardsfacility.org/en/TAIAS.htm