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SPS ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ECAC)
SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FOURTH VIRTUAL MEETING
15 APRIL 2021

INTRODUCTION

1. The Secretariat (Mr Simon Padilla) welcomed participants and provided a brief introduction to the meeting. A list of participants is available in Annex 1.

1 KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

2. Ms. Annelies Deuss, Mr. Tom Baragwanath and Mr. Frank van Tongeren, from the Trade and Agriculture Directorate at the OECD, presented the OECD's recent mixed quantitative-qualitative project research on "Digital opportunities for SPS systems and the trade facilitation effects of SPS electronic certification". The keynote presentation included:

a. An introduction to the background on how digital technologies offer ways to achieve efficiencies within each of the three stages of the SPS regulatory framework:

   i. Risk assessment, e.g. OIE World Animal Health Information System (OIE-WAHIS)

   ii. Risk management, e.g. STDF-funded regional pest detection project; and

   iii. Product movement and compliance verification, e.g. SPS e-certification systems

b. An run-through of the current key trends in the use of digital technologies i.e. the advancing of e-certification through bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral channels; the rapid raise of e-certificates for plant products as compared to animal products; and the opportunity to push for greater adoption of digital technologies such as e-certification in the context of the response to COVID-19; were highlighted.

c. The potential to boost efficiency through e-certification (i.e. increased security, reduced processing time, fast and trusted data flows, greater equity, inclusion, and access within international trade), and the quantification of the positive impact on bilateral trade value and strong market-creation potential of e-certification. In addition, the challenges and conditions that go hand in hand with greater e-certification adoption were highlighted.

3. A question/answer and discussion session focused on a range of themes such as the positive effect of e-Cert to control corruption and fraud alleviation, e-Cert ability to streamline and standardize processes, and the ways in which international and regional collaboration and information exchange can be boosted further.

2 INFORMATION SHARING

4. The OIE updated participants on the completion of the STDF-funded eVet project (STDF/PG/609). The final report was published on the OIE and STDF websites. The OIE highlighted lack of progress on implementation of the recommendation to the OIE on eVet, mainly due to COVID-19. An update on next steps will be provided within this calendar year.

5. The CODEX Secretariat alerted the members of the upcoming virtual 25th Session of the CCFICS in June 2021, which will focus on guidance for the design, production, issuance and use of generic official e-certificates for the exchange of food products.

6. The IPPC Secretariat highlighted the major increase in the usage of the ePhyto Solution. It also thanked the World Bank Group and the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation for its support to developing countries to implement the ePhyto Solution.

7. CITES highlighted that the voluntary efforts of interested Parties to use electronic systems for CITES permits and certificates, for over 10 years, were constrained by the lack of long-term sustainable funding. It further explained that many countries are catching up in using technologies to control trade in general. COVID-19 is affecting the manual process of issuing and controlling permits, which has ushered in a greater push for e-certification.

8. Further, CITES reported on its joint webinar with the WCO on Modern Customs Procedures for Improved Control of Trade in CITES-listed Species held in December 2020. The workshop illustrated the progress made by several CITES Parties in implementing automated permitting systems, which has now expanded to 14 Parties[1], and a few dozen more that are currently developing such systems.[2] CITES noted that most of these Parties are in the stages of automating their internal permit application, issuance, recording and management process, but that the permits that accompany the specimens are still issued on paper. CITES highlighted its interest in providing guidance on the detailed practice of permit printing, signatures, use of QR codes and other authentication-related matters. There are still a limited number of Parties ready to exchange CITES permit information, which is currently based on a P2P (rather than a hub) model.

9. UNECE and CITES jointly drafted Guidelines for the cross-border exchange of electronic CITES permits. The Guidelines have been reviewed by the relevant UN/CEFACT and CITES Working Groups and will be presented to the next meeting of the CITES Standing Committee. In the meantime, UNECE is preparing the publication of the Guidelines.

10. Lastly, CITES drew attention to a Task Force on CITES electronic permit information exchange (EPIX) that provides a platform for Parties interested to pilot electronic eCITES exchanges. The Group meets every second month under the umbrella of UNECE and UNESCAP.

3 NEXT STEPS

11. The Secretariat thanked the OECD and participants for the presentation, discussion and interventions, and encouraged participants to make use of the dedicated ECAC website that tracks the various e-Cert efforts by STDF members and collaborating partners from STDF's wider network.

[1] Parties with some form of electronic CITES permit system in place are: Bahrain, Belgium, China, Czech Republic, France, Norway, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, UAE, USA.

[2] Parties developing/planning electronic CITES permit system are: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, European Union, Germany, Jordan, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, UK and Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Botswana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sweden, Uganda, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

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ANNEX 1
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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