

**SPS ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ECAC)  
SUMMARY REPORT OF THE SEVENTH VIRTUAL MEETING  
10 MAY 2023****1 INTRODUCTION**

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

**2 KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS**

2. Ms. Ellie Avery from the OECD presented on the work carried out by the OECD on "Electronic Sanitary Certification for Animal Products"<sup>1</sup>. Ms. Avery outlined some of the challenges of implementing e-sanitary certification:

- a. Lack of understanding of the technology and information on the part of decision-makers.
- b. Weak coordination and cooperation among government agencies with different mandates and priorities, and also with the private sector.
- c. Legal framework that may prevent the adoption of digital technology.
- d. Lack of infrastructure and skills / experienced personnel and long-term financial support.

3. Ms. Avery also highlighted some of the actions that governments and international/regional organizations could take to face the challenges of implementing e-sanitary certification:

- a. Government could expand the use of digital technologies within SPS systems to create greater efficiencies and facilitate safe trade.
- b. Update national SPS legislation to allow the use of eCert and strengthen coordination between national SPS authorities, customs and the private sector.
- c. Contribute to studies analyzing the trade impacts of eCert so that trade-facilitating benefits can be quantified.
- d. Continue efforts to raise awareness and promote sharing of information on experiences with e-sanitary and consider a pilot project to support the exchange e-sanitary certificates.
- e. Work with countries and the standard setting bodies, to improve harmonization of eCert systems and the interoperability of the data models.
- f. Develop case studies and exchange best-practice guidance to illustrate successful adoption of digital technologies.

4. In a second presentation, Ms. Edith Laget from the OECD, briefed members on the upcoming analytical work on "SPS electronic certificates: current practices and benefits", which will be divided into three parts and aimed at answering the following questions:

- a. What is the current state of the exchange of SPS e-certificates?
- b. How much trade would have been lost during COVID-19 without SPS e-certificates?
- c. How does e-certification enhance traceability and transparency?

5. The question/answer session focused on the idea of a pilot project involving a limited number of interested countries, to test the different options available to exchange e-sanitary certification and to achieve harmonization. A stock taking approach to understand and build from the experience of the ePhyto solution was suggested, which could provide a solution for the exchange of e-sanitary certificates for animal products with limited investment in technology.

**3 INFORMATION SHARING**

6. Mr. Erik Bosker updated members on the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Food Export and Import Inspection and Certification (CCFICS26), where a side event on WCO's work on paperless trade was held. The revised version of the Codex Derived Information Package (DIP) will be part of

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5417ff4f-en>

the WCO Data Model version 4, which would strengthen coordination and collaboration between customs and SPS authorities.

7. Mr. Bosker also updated members on the "40th UN/CEFACT Forum 2023"<sup>2</sup> and an ongoing research work with UN/CEFACT to identify gaps in paperless trade for transit. The work is expected to be published in August 2023.

8. WOAH briefed members on planned work to update Chapters 5.2. Certification in the Aquatic Code and terrestrial Code to align with Codex's recently revised guidelines on electronic certification. They noted that this work is yet to commence due to resource constraints and will also include the development of data reference models.

9. IPPC updated members on an ePhyto meeting held in Buenos Aires this year as well as ongoing discussions with blockchain companies to foster collaboration as a promising way to build on new knowledge and bring in additional resources. In addition, efforts are underway to organize ePhyto webinars for English (21 June 2023) and French (22 June 2023) speaking African countries to promote IPPC's ePhyto solution in the continent.

10. ISF shared information on past and ongoing ePhyto workshops organized to bring together the public and private sector to adopt not only the ePhyto solution but digitalization of trade documentation for plants and plant products. The ISF World Seed Congress 2023 will be held in Cape Town, South Africa on 5-7 June 2023, with specific panel discussion on digitalization and agri-food supply chains.

11. The GATF shared their support in implementing the ePhyto Solution in partnership with the IPPC in 10 countries. Results of this work has shown how effective electronic exchange of documents could be, drawing from the experience in Fiji, to support simplification of processes for the public and private sectors. In addition, information was provided on a planned initiative to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide a solution to the problem of multitude of requirements, types, and models of sanitary certificates that currently exist.

12. Mr. Rodrigo Robles from Chile pointed out that eCert in animal products is possible with less investment in technology if the Extensible Markup Language (XML), used by the ePhyto Solution, is taken as a model. He added that the experiences with the implementation of the ePhyto Solution could therefore be a useful guide for electronic veterinary/sanitary certification.

13. Mr. Simon Padilla shared information on a joint event that will be organized by the STDF and IICA on 25-27 July 2023 in San José, Costa Rica, to explore the status of electronic SPS certification in IICA's thirty-four (34) member states, with the possibility of pilot testing electronic sanitary certification in selected/pilot countries of the region.

#### **4 NEXT STEPS**

14. Members were informed of available funds in STDF's Work Plan for 2023, for interested ECAC members to jointly develop a knowledge product in areas such as: practical eCert readiness assessment guide or a communication tool.

15. The Secretariat will facilitate follow-up discussions with interested members on the proposed knowledge product and convene a meeting with these interested members in the near future.

16. The Secretariat thanked participants for their inputs and encouraged them to make use of the ECAC website<sup>3</sup> to track various eCert related efforts, including planned and ongoing activities.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://unece.org/trade/cefact/40th-uncefact-forum>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.standardsfacility.org/sps-ecac>

**ANNEX 1**  
**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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