



GSF BRIEFING NOTE

Outcomes of the 18th meeting of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM 18)
held at UN FAO Headquarters, Rome, on 15 to 19 April 2024

The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures, the UN body responsible for the implementation of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) met from 15 to 19 April to consider, amongst other matters, the work of its Focus Group on Sea Containers and adopt a revised CPM Recommendation on reducing risks of pest contamination in the sea container pathway. GSF was invited to attend as an Observer and the Secretary General attended in-person for part of the meeting.

The official Report of the CPM 18 meeting will be issued at the end of May by the IPPC Secretariat. This report is based on personal observations and information contained in available working papers and is subject to confirmation in the final report.

The meeting was chaired by Mr Greg Wolff of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, who is also the chair of the Sea Containers Focus Group that has been developing possible mandatory measures for container cleanliness. Following the meeting of GSF's Container Cleanliness Working Group on 10 April, GSF had written to Mr Wolff setting out our concerns regarding the details of Custodial Responsibility and the proposals in the Focus Group's report for the declarations of container cleanliness to be made to Customs authorities by importers.

Meeting with the CPM Chair

GSF secured a private meeting with Mr Wolff to discuss these concerns but also to emphasise GSF's commitment to the principle of shared responsibility for container cleanliness and the need to reduce the risks of pest transfer by this means. Mr Wolff reassured GSF that it was the intention of the Focus Group to create a third seat for Industry and that this should be for representatives of the users of containers and the shippers of goods. GSF's commitment to the work of the Focus Group was recognised and valued and it was acknowledged that some of the proposed measures would affect shippers.

Sea Containers Focus Group

The CPM meeting considered four separate outputs from the Sea Containers Focus Group:

1. The report of the SCFG work to date.
2. A request that the term of the Focus Group be extended for three years, to 2027.
3. That the Terms of Reference of the Focus Group be amended to provide for a third representative of Industry to participate
4. A revised CPM Recommendation on Sea Containers, providing guidance and advice on the management of pest risks in the sea container pathway.

1. Report of the Sea Containers Focus Group (SCFG)

The main findings of the SCTF report were presented by Wendy Beltz (representing the North American PPO) and Rama Kari (representing the Pacific Regional PPO). There were no specific discussion points arising from the report, which was adopted

2. Extension of the term of the SCFG and its Terms of Reference

A majority of CPM members agreed to the extension of Sea Containers Focus Group to 2027, meaning it will present its final report to CPM 21 that year. However, several delegates raised concerns about the need for the Focus Group to prioritise the development of mandatory measures, such as an International Standard of Phytosanitary Measures rather than voluntary guidelines, such as Custodial Responsibility.

3. Industry representation in the Focus Group

A proposal to expand the number of Industry representatives to three was contested by several delegations, with one noting that only Observer status should be granted. Given the views expressed on the Terms of Reference, the Chair convened a private meeting of interested delegations to resolve the different views. Agreement was reached on:

- Extension of the SCFG mandate to 2027
- Amended Terms of Reference that require the Focus Group to consider mandatory measures
- An increase in the number of Industry representatives to three.

4. CPM Recommendation on Sea Containers

The draft Recommendation, which was consulted on in August 2023, was widely supported but adopted with an amendment to the sequence in which its recommendations to NPPOs appear. This will have the effect for prioritising the development of 'appropriate regulatory tools' over 'collaboration with other multilateral bodies', emphasising the frustration of some delegations at the lack of decisive action on the sea container pathway risks since the commencement of CPM's work in 2008.

The next steps are for the IPPC Secretariat to invite the (dormant) Sea Containers Industry Advisory Group to nominate a third representative to the Focus Group, in addition to the World Shipping Council and the Container Owners Association. This is expected to be offered to GSF as a representative of cargo owners and container users' interests. However, GSF will continue to report and discuss developments on this issue in its Container Cleanliness Working Group and continue to invite participation by other allied and interested global associations. GSF policy positions will be determined by its Policy Council.

Discussions with the World Shipping Council

WSC attended the CPM 18 meeting, and this gave the opportunity for the two secretariats to review the need for, and scope of, continued dialogue between the two organisations on this issue. Given the admittance of GSF to the Focus Group GSF believes the asymmetry of information in these discussions has been rectified and future discussions on the detail of container cleanliness can be more structured and specific. A revised Container Cleanliness strategy will be presented to Policy Council for adoption.

WSC also suggested that the concerns expressed by China for more decisive action arose from high numbers of empty containers entering the country that have been found to contain debris, packaging materials and other contamination from previous shipments. These discoveries were driving demands for a mandatory standard for the inspection of all empty containers prior to use. Given these pressures, GSF and WSC agreed that the need to develop the details of Custodial Responsibility as an alternative to new regulations remains a priority.