Subcommittee on Plant Health Diagnostics – Meeting 24 Communiqué

The Subcommittee on Plant Health Diagnostics (SPHD) reports to Plant Health Committee (PHC) and provides national leadership in plant health diagnostics to sustain and improve biosecurity. SPHD delivers on the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Strategy (NPBDS), which aligns with Schedule 4 of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB).

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources hosted SPHD members, observers and advisors in Cairns, on the 6-7 April 2017, in association with the Annual Diagnostics Workshop (ADW2017).

Enhancing the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Network (NPBDN)

Professional development

Members of the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Network (NPBDN) engaged in the ADW2017 in Cairns. Centred on the tropical node of the NPBDN, participants engaged with the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) and the *Modern Diagnostics Project* initiative (funded under the *Northern Australia White Paper*). Highlights from the ADW2017 was the exposure of diagnosticians to the challenges of conducting diagnostics in the tropics through field trips, a critical analysis of the NPBDN with input on future directions, and the delivery of slide making workshops. SPHD would like to acknowledge the Australian Government for the provision of funding for the ADW2017.

Network enhancement

Following the successful first five years in operation, an evaluation of the NPBDN was initiated by SPHD, looking to ensure network activities continue to remain relevant and meet member's needs. Enhancements to the NPBDN will start to roll out over the next year, and will include a significant upgrade to the NPBDN website, which has been made possible by additional funding provided by the Australian Government.

Capability and capacity for the delivery of plant biosecurity diagnostics

Preliminary outcomes from the *Enhancing Diagnostic Capability for Priority Pests: collections and capability audit* were presented to SPHD. The subcommittee provided feedback to the CSIRO team who undertook the project, supporting the delivery of valuable data that will shape the strategic direction of the plant biosecurity diagnostic system.

SPHD also progressed investigations of surge capacity within laboratories identifying *Xylella fastidiosa* as a case pathogen and utilising workflow modelling software. Members are working with New Zealand to develop models that will eventually empower laboratories to increase their sample processing throughput by identifying and addressing workflow bottlenecks.

Developing and maintaining capability to identify High Priority Pests

Two new National Diagnostic Protocols (NDPs) for Dutch elm disease (NDP37; *Ophiostoma* spp.) and Barley stripe rust (NDP38; *Puccinia striiformis* f. sp. *hordei*) were endorsed.

Instructions for the inclusion of diagnostics to support surveillance into NDPs through the update of the Reference Standards were endorsed by SPHD. The prioritisation of NDPs suitable for update to include this additional information is currently underway.

The draft *National Plant Pest Biological Collections Strategy* was presented to SPHD, which will ensure that nationally significant reference collections in Australia meet the needs of trade, biosecurity and science, by being current, relevant, sustainable, connected and accessible.

Implementing quality management systems

The successful completion of the 5th round of the National Plant Health Proficiency Testing Programme was reported to, and assessed by, SPHD. This round included 81 discrete tests in 14 laboratories across Australia, with strong results achieved across the board.

Next meeting and further information

The next scheduled face-to-face meeting is in October 2017, hosted in Melbourne, Victoria.

Further information about SPHD and its activities can be found at the NPBDN website, provided by the local SPHD representative or the SPHD secretariat at sphd@agriculture.gov.au.

SPHD
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