

Subcommittee on Plant Health Diagnostics – Meeting 25

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 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources hosted SPHD members, observers and advisors at AgriBio, La Trobe University, Melbourne, on the 10-11 October 2017.

Enhancing the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Network (NPBDN)

Professional development

Following the Annual Diagnosticians Workshop (ADW) in April this year, SPHD expanded the scope of Laboratory Residentials to encompass all diagnostic activities including those performed outside the laboratory, renaming them as Diagnostic Residentials. There are currently six diagnosticians undertaking Diagnostic Residentials, those that have been completed will present their findings at the ADW 2018.

The 2018 round of Diagnostic Residentials will open for expressions of interest shortly. SPHD will include the gap analysis from the CSIRO audits (more information on this below) and the Modern Diagnostics project as a foundation for assessing applications. However, as this is an open round all applications and proposals are welcome and will be considered equally in merit and importance.

Preparations have begun for the ADW 2018. The workshop will be run on the 20th and 21st of March in Adelaide. General diagnostic training will also be delivered in conjunction with the workshop. The theme for the ADW 2018 and associated training will be *New and Emerging Diagnostics*. Due to strong support in the feedback received at the ADW 2017, the ADW 2018 will have a number of member-driven, science-based presentation sessions. Details of the agenda and the Expressions of Interest for attendees will be released prior to the end of the year.

Professional development activities for White Fly, Bee Mite Identification and Botryosphaeriaceae were run earlier this year. Participants were taught morphological, molecular and taxonomic identification methods for those high priority pests.

Network enhancement

SPHD are using feedback received at the ADW 2017 to inform upgrades to the NPBDN website. SPHD are investigating how to enhance communications between diagnosticians and with administrators through personalised profiles, improved functionality and increased engagement from network members through forums and shared spaces.

Capability and capacity audit

SPHD reviewed the outcomes from the completed audit into human capability and capacity for diagnostic protocols, reference collections, human resources, imaging and molecular information. SPHD agree with the review that there is a greater need for succession planning, particularly in human capability, and are using the outcomes from these audits to inform capability and capacity building exercises. In particular they are comparing the results with the National Priority Plant Pests (NPPPs) to prioritise diagnostic resource development including developing new National Diagnostic Protocols or targeted human capability building exercises.

Developing and maintaining capability to identify High Priority Pests

Protocol development

SPHD endorsed two National Diagnostic Protocols (Table 1) bringing the total number of endorsed NDPs to 39.

Table 1 – endorsed NDPs

NDP No.	Scientific name of pest	Common name of pest
13 V2	<i>Phyllosticta ampellicida</i>	Black rot on grapevine
39	<i>Phytoptus avellanae</i> Nalepa	Hazelnut big bud mite

SPHD continue to investigate laboratory surge capacity for *Xylella fastidiosa*. SPHD are working with New Zealand to develop a tool that will assess laboratory workflow for participating laboratories and using the findings from this analysis will suggest methods for increasing laboratory throughput. Once completed, SPHD will role the surge capacity tool out to all interested laboratories and for all NPPPs.

Implementing quality management systems

Round six of the National Plant Health Proficiency Testing Program has concluded and all results have been received. An assessment on proficiency of participating laboratories will be released shortly and presented at SPHD 26.

Facilitating the development of relevant national information systems supporting diagnostics

SPHD have endorsed a *National Plant Pest Reference Collections Strategy* (NPPRCS) as a sub-strategy to the National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Strategy, which will support reference collections across Australia to meet the demands on them from trade and biosecurity.

Next meeting and further information

The next SPHD meeting will be held in Darwin in May 2018. 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.

The activities facilitated by SPHD have been made possible through grants from the Australian Government Modern Diagnostics Initiative and the Plant Biosecurity and Response Reform Program.

