

The Market Access Column

International standards development: have your say!

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Every northern hemisphere spring, plant health officials gather in Rome to consider, negotiate, cajole and exercise their minds over the latest batch of international standards that they are about to approve. Their decisions affect your businesses, so it is important that you and your industry organisations are aware of the international standard setting process and make your views known to your representatives. This month's column looks at the international standard setting process, its relevance to the horticultural industry, and how you can have your say on matters of interest.

How do international standards affect the horticultural industry?

The international standards are more properly known as "International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures" (ISPMs) and they form the basis of New Zealand's export certification system, plant pest surveillance activities, pest risk analysis methodology, and pest incursion response systems. In short, they can affect all aspects of trade in plants and plant products.

As an example of how ISPMs affect horticulture, consider the ISPM that was recently adopted relating to regulation of wooden packaging material. As of January 2004 the United States of America, Canada, Mexico and the European Union will be adopting this standard as the basis for their import requirements. All wooden packaging material accompanying your exports to these countries will need to comply with this ISPM - pallets and other wooden packaging will need to be sterilised by a MAF approved or supervised treatment operator and be

labelled with a special mark.

Another example of how ISPMs influence trade is the recent World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling against Japan's measures for fire blight. The Panel decision was made, in part, on the basis that a proper risk analysis had not been performed by Japan: there are ISPMs providing guidance on international best practice for risk analysis and the Panel found that the expected standard had not been met.

Why do we need ISPMs?

The ISPMs are adopted by the Interim Commission on Phytosanitary Measures. The Interim Commission governs the implementation of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and Interim Commission representatives have the authority of member Governments to adopt technical standards, as well as to engage in a range of other plant protection related activities.

Many of you may not have heard of the IPPC, but one of the most important trading documents that you use - the Phytosanitary Certificate - forms part of the IPPC. When MAF issues a phytosanitary certificate for your exports MAF provides an assurance to the Government of the importing country under the auspices of this international agreement. That's why MAF takes its role very seriously.

However the IPPC on its own provides very little guidance to members on how they should meet the objectives of the agreement. In order to assist members to better meet their obligations and to reach a level of uniformity in how the objectives are met, the IPPC Secretariat develops ISPMs. The standards are generally drafted by a small group of experts who are selected on the basis of their technical expertise as well as providing experience from a range of geographic regions. A standards committee then refines the standards before they are sent to member

Governments for country consultation. Once their comments have been incorporated the draft ISPMs are put forward to the Interim Commission for adoption. The ISPMs are then issued by the IPPC in five languages. So far the IPPC Secretariat has issued 19 ISPMs as well as several supplementary standards. These standards can be downloaded from the IPPC website: <http://www.ippc.int/IPPC/En/ispm.jsp>

The status of ISPMs

As well being standards under the International Plant Protection Convention, the IPPC Secretariat has been recognised by the World Trade Organisation as a standard setting body. The World Trade Organisation aims to facilitate the development of a rules-based trading system and the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures was a milestone in ensuring that plant, animal, or human health regulations do not constitute disguised barriers to trade. Clearly the protection of plant, animal and human health is extremely important and the WTO recognised the need for the development of technical guidelines on what might be considered reasonable measures to protect health.

The bodies that the WTO recognises as having the expertise to establish such standards are the IPPC Secretariat (plant health), Codex Alimentarius Commission (human health, including pesticide residue levels) and the OIE (animal health). Once adopted by the Interim Commission the ISPMs effectively become an extension of the SPS agreement and are binding upon WTO members. Further clarification of the relationship between international agreements, standards, and domestic standards is provided in the diagram.

ISPMs for country consultation

Three draft ISPMs have recently been released for country consultation: Guidelines for an import regulatory

system; Pest risk analysis for regulated non-quarantine pests; and Supplement to ISPM No. 11 (Pest Risk Analysis for quarantine pests) on Pest Risk Analysis for living modified organisms.

The import regulatory system standard provides guidance on the structure and operation of a phytosanitary import regulatory system and describes the rights, obligations and responsibilities which should be considered when an import regulatory system is developed and operated. Most countries already have an import regulatory system in some form, however this ISPM will describe international best practice to which members should aspire.

The second draft ISPM being considered is for pest risk analysis for regulated non-quarantine pests. These are pests that are not quarantine pests (for example because they may already be present in a country) but whose presence in plants for planting affects the intended use of those plants with an economically unacceptable impact.

Pests that affect such commodities are required to be subject to some form of official control and the measures applied to imported planting material should be similar to those applied to domestically produced planting material. The purpose of the ISPM is to provide guidance on identification of pests associated with plants for planting, evaluation of their risk and, if appropriate, identification of risk management options.

The Commission will also consider a supplement to an existing ISPM for pest risk analysis. The supplement will provide guidance on the criteria for evaluating potential risks to plants and plant health posed by living modified organisms (LMOs). LMOs are genetically modified organisms that are also living organisms (for example genetically modified seeds, tubers, whole plants).

Details of the draft ISPMs can be downloaded from the IPPC website at: <http://www.ippc.int/IPP/En/Publ/>

[ISPM/Drafts03/drafts03e.htm](http://www.ippc.int/IPP/En/Publ/ISPM/Drafts03/drafts03e.htm)

Have your say!

ISPMs are generally developed over a period of about two years, so there is ample opportunity for interested parties to consider the implications of standards development and to make your views known. You can find out what is going on by contacting MAF, by visiting the IPPC website (<http://www.ippc.int/IPP/En/default.htm>), by contacting the Plants Market Access Council, or by checking for notifications in MAF's magazine "Biosecurity".

Each year a small number of draft ISPMs are released for country consultation, giving a 3 month comment period. This year the three draft standards described above have been released for consultation, and comments are due by 24 October. If you want to have your say on these important standards you, or your industry organisation, should contact MAF Biosecurity Authority.