

Minutes PestNet Meeting Skype 3.30pm 12 June 2011

Agenda

- How to finance PestNet?
 - PHAMA
 - INEA
 - ACIAR
 - evaluation (combine with Caripestnet?)
 - website, leaflets, posters, fact sheets
 - Others
- Meetings to advertise PestNet
 - Hawaii
 - Kenya
- Regional diagnostics (Pacific islands)
- Housekeeping issues
 - Standards for messages:
 - trivial messages
 - messages with small photos
 - out of office emails
 - start new email with each new topics not using cold emails
 - Bouncing emails - when to remove
- Summaries - how can we continue to improve/edit them?
- Twitter

Those taking part were: Bob Macfarlane (New Zealand), Wilco Liebrechts (Fiji) and Grahame Jackson (Australia).

1) Finance

i) Situation

PestNet has two accounts in Fiji: a) 7146409 (F\$): balance not exactly known (no recent statement), but less than AUD450; b) 7527701 (US\$): balance at US\$1821.68 (1 July 2010). This account has been dormant for some 2 years, and is costing PestNet US\$2 per month, plus a quarterly account-keeping fee of US\$15. Current balance would be approx. US\$1730.

Amounts outstanding are: A\$600 for the video, A\$693 for the website (Grahame), and A\$450 for the 2010 web hosting (Wilco).

ii) Potential income

a) PHAMA, *The Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access* programme. PHAMA has agreed verbally that it will pay PestNet a sum of A\$5000 for the assistance it gave in commenting on the *Draft Review of Import Conditions for Fresh Taro Corms* produced by the Govt. of Australia. Subsequently, PestNet was told that the funds are to be dispersed by SPC. This may delay payment.

WL will discuss payment with Rob Duthie as a matter of urgency.

b) INEA, *The International Network of Edible Aroids*. A contract has been signed between SPC and PestNet to carry out the communication and visibility activities of

this global taro network. A sum of Euro51,000 has been agreed, of which Euro15,000 will be paid this year, and Euro9000 on 1 January for the next 4 years. PestNet will have a separate contract with GJ, taking 10% of his fee. Costs of designing the website by the University of Queensland, and annual hosting charges will be paid from the PestNet allocation.

c) ACIAR, *Strengthening integrated crop management research in the Pacific Islands in support of sustainable intensification of high-value crop production* (PC/2010/090). Under this project PestNet will be involved in pest fact sheet writing, and possibly the republication of the book, *Diseases of Cultivated Crops in Pacific Islands Countries*. Funds will also be available for reprinting of PestNet leaflets and posters, and revamp the website. There will also be involvement under a Plant Health Clinic component, as yet unspecified. Perhaps the most important aspect of this collaboration is a sum of money for a PestNet evaluation. The project is still being designed although it has gone through one ACIAR in-house review. A recent budget allocated A\$10,000 for the evaluation. WL suggested that CTA be asked to carry out the review as it was involved in the establishment of CariPestnet so it knows PestNet well. CTA also paid for the backlog of messages to be summarised. As soon as the budget has been agreed GJ will let the other moderators know.

d) Others. Two concept papers have been written and presented to SPC for forwarding to donors.

The first concerns PestNet and climate change; this project describes the success of PestNet in helping Pacific island countries and describes ways that the service can be improved in the context for climate change. It is well known that changing climates will affect pest and diseases in several ways: warmer moisture conditions will favour pest and disease outbreaks, more frequent movements of pests across borders will require assistance to quarantine services, and as farmers diversify into new crops, new pest problems are likely to arise. The project suggests an evaluation of PestNet, and number of changes to make the service more responsive to members' needs. This project concept is being considered under a World Bank project involving SPC.

The second project concerns writing more fact sheets on pests and diseases for Pacific island countries. To date, under an ACIAR project for Solomon Islands, 86 facts sheets (for extension officers and farmers) have been written. Funds are now required to complete the fact sheets for that country and to make them available in hard copy for government and NGO extension services. Following that a regional committee will be established to revise the Solomon Islands fact sheets for the rest of the region, and to make a list of priority pests for additional fact sheets. The Solomon Islands' fact sheets are on the PestNet website. This project concept has been sent to CTA.

2) Meetings

There are two meetings this year that would be helpful for PestNet to attend.

a) The American Phytopathological Society / International Association for the Plant Protection Sciences are holding a meeting in Hawaii 6-10 August. On the last day, there is a special meeting *Digital Identification Tools: Their role in Biosecurity and Pest Management*. In the write up for the meeting the following is said.

New web technology is being used to develop online, digital identification tools such as image databases and interactive keys. Aimed at a range of users, from taxonomists and professional identifiers to practitioners, scouts, and surveillance teams, these digital identification tools are currently being used to provide diagnostic aids and pest information for insect pests, weeds, and diseases. Presentations in this special session will describe the development and use of these tools by quarantine agencies and for other pest management purposes. This special session will also provide an opportunity to discuss opportunities for international collaboration and sharing of these digital resources.

If the moderators have any thoughts here, it would be interesting to hear them.

It was decided that GJ would go to the meeting. The costs are \$A1000 for airfares (taxi will be extra), accommodation for three nights \$A750 (three nights only to reduce costs). The organisers have agreed to waive the registration fee, and will give PestNet US\$500 to help with costs. GJ will pay his way there and, at a later date, be reimbursed by PestNet.

An abstract has already been sent to the meeting organisers. It is given here:

PestNet is a free advisory service that gives fast expert answers on all crop protection matters via email (pestnet@yahoogroups.com). This includes advice on pests and diseases and quarantine matters, plus regular updates on research.

PestNet addresses the constraints that are associated with sustaining agriculture and forestry-based livelihoods, particularly when pests and diseases abound and there is no advice readily available.

There are five volunteer moderators in Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Thailand and Uganda.

The service is available for farmers, extension workers and crop protection specialists worldwide. There are now 1000 members, representing some 80 countries. Over 10 years, nearly 8000 messages have been exchanged, and many of the discussions have been summarised and placed on the PestNet website (<http://www.pestnet.org/>).

b) Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services: Linking Knowledge to Policy and Action for Food and Livelihoods, 15–18 November 2011, Nairobi, Kenya, at the Hilton Nairobi Hotel, Kenya. The objective of the Conferences is:

To provide a space for sharing current thinking and practice and building coalitions of farmers, practitioners, policymakers and other key actors to advocate and implement policy reforms and innovations in extension and advisory services; especially those that benefit smallholder and resource poor farmers, including women and marginalized rural communities.

There are four cross cutting themes: Policy; b) Capacity development; c) Tools and Approaches; and d) Learning networks. Under Tools and approaches, the introduction to the meeting states:

Tools and Approaches: *What innovative tools (including the use of ICTs and the mass media) and approaches are proving effective in the delivery of extension and advisory services? How can the islands of successes be captured and the lessons and best practices shared within countries and across regions with policymakers, development actors and extension practitioners? How can they be up-and-out-scaled to ensure quality, cost-effectiveness, sustainability and impact of these services on agricultural productivity, sustainable livelihoods and natural resource management?*

WL will attend the meeting. He is traveling to Ethiopia in November and will take in the meeting enroute. PestNet will pay for his attendance – food and accommodation and a portion of the airfare, if necessary.

Both GJ and WL will report back to the other moderators (and the list) after attending the meetings (i.e. a short report is needed!).

3) Regional diagnostics – Pacific islands

In the April 2011 Edition of the SPC Land Resources Division Newsletter it states:

"The ExCo members (of the PPPO) also discussed a proposal to establish a centre of phytosanitary excellence - a Pacific regional diagnostic service centre - under the current portfolio of the Australian Centre for International Cultural (sic) Research. A highlight of this would allow a remote microscope connected on-line to examine a pest for a panel of experts at different sites to comment on. The proposed hub for such a diagnostic centre is SPC, which would be linked to other PICTs. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service already has a similar system in operations, but the challenge will be firewalls between SPC and other organisations, once on-line.

The capacity to conduct science-based pest risk analysis and import risk analysis is critical, and there is an acute shortage of such capacity in the Pacific region. The meeting also wanted to emphasise the need for biosecurity legislation to facilitate trade, and compliance with international standards-setting programmes.

BM mentioned several systems developed or under development that involve distance diagnostics. One idea being considered is the generation of images that PaDIL would host. Presumably, PaDIL would send these images to experts for identification. Whether the images would go to eg SPC in the first instance to be filtered was not known. It was mentioned that Australia and New Zealand already have such systems. There are even systems in both countries that can manipulate a microscope at distance.

What does this mean for PestNet. Will it make the service obsolete in time?

The obvious question is why no one has thought to involve PestNet in the discussion to set up a regional digital pest identification service. SPC at present has no capability to do this, as it has only one plant protection staff member apart from those associated with quarantine issues in its trade facilitation section.

PestNet has taken on this role for the region and offers a similar service to anyone who joins. And, importantly, it is free.

Surely we should be exploring different models than those of the past and which have been shown to be wanting? We know what the problems are.

- Countries do not have taxonomists, and so the pests cannot be identified reliably and quickly
- Establishing diagnostic units within SPC is expensive
- Most – probably 90 per cent - of the pests and diseases that need to be identified are well known and can be identified from images sent by email
- Of the remainder, specimens will need to be sent somewhere for identification
- Sending specimens to SPC Fiji only delays matters: there are quarantine concerns and the Pacific collections are not there
- The Pacific collections are in New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii.

A more efficient way would be for PestNet to obtain funding to pay a retainer for on-going identification services at CABI, CSIRO, Landcare, Bishop Museum, Australian Museum.

PestNet, perhaps together with Pacinet and SPC, could contact the key people at these institutions to see if the provision of backstopping identification services look to be a viable option. This would not be a problem for PestNet as the key people of these institutions (Trevor Crosby, Landcare; Kim Pullen, CSIRO; Ron Randall, DAF, Western Australia; Eric Boa, CABI Plantwise, and Chris Reid, Australian Museum) are already members of PestNet, so they would immediately understand the regional context and needs. And of course Peter Maddison, who has encyclopedia knowledge of the fauna and flora of Pacific island countries, is a PestNet moderator.

At present, members do the identifications if they have the time. Mostly, they are being done, but it would be better if there were greater certainty. This can only occur if the institutions mentioned were engaged to the task, for a fee.

The problems are obvious:

- a) raising the funds
- b) doing what a regional organization might be expected to do
- c) it is an on-going commitment, and most donors don't like such arrangements.

But if PestNet can bring SPC, Pacinet and the institutes together, the system could operate like this:

- Messages would go from countries to PestNet, and to the institutes that had a retainer
- Identification made, if possible
- If specimens were required then one of the moderators would have the responsibility to assist countries to send specimens to the relevant institute, according to established guidelines.
- Identification made and messages sent directly to the country of origin
- The country of origin to decide if and when to make the identification public following the rules of the IPPC.

How much donors would be asked to contribute to the key institutes for identification services would need to be worked out, but it would not be more than A\$5000 a year, surely? The number of specimens requiring identification is not great. Specimens collected during pest surveys would not be included in the arrangements; separate costs would have to be negotiated.

Comments from Peter Madison and others are needed.

4) Housekeeping issues

Comments from other moderators are welcomed.

a) Standards for messages

Members are still not giving all the information needed. Often names are incomplete, places of work absent, even the country of the writer is not given. Worse, there is insufficient detail about the problem. Time and time again BM and GJ have told members that the more information given the greater the chances of getting a satisfactory response. All we can do is to keep on repeating the message.

b) Trivial messages

There have been attempts at humour recently, which some members may not appreciate. It is best not to allow such messages, realising that what is acceptable to one society may not be acceptable in another.

c) Photos

Some messages are too small and some too large. As Yahoo now stores images, does PestNet have to set a limit, as the images can be downloaded one at a time? If there is need for a download limit, what should it be? Is 150kb about right for **each** image?

d) Out of office messages

They are annoying, although there are less of these now, but we need to remind members every so often.

e) Start a new subject

Members should always be encouraged to start a new subject in a blank email; they should not use one on an entirely different subject.

f) Bouncing emails

There are 154 bouncing email members from among the 1135 registered. Should they be removed or not? A bouncing member is one that Yahoo has sent messages to but the messages have been returned, either the email box is full or the ISP is not operating. However, if a message is delivered and not returned as undeliverable within 5 days after it was sent, the account will automatically be reactivated. Members may also manually reactivate their accounts by visiting their My Groups page. Moderators can send a reactivation message too.

It was recommended that nothing be done to bouncing members. Leave them as they are. However, occasionally a moderator will send out a reactivation message in the hope that the message will get through. Mostly, the reason for bouncing messages is that members change their email address, but fail to inform PestNet of the change, or they just leave the list.

5) Summaries of messages

GJ spends a lot of time summarising the messages and putting them on the PestNet website. Recently, UQ has changed the format of these so they are much, much easier to access. Recently, too, additional keywords have been added, plus the name of the country where the message originated. It can be seen from this how

much the Pacific island countries have used PestNet. Asian members do not dominate the service as was once thought likely if they were offered membership.

Are there any ways to further improve the messages? One obvious way is for someone to go through the unidentified section and name the insects, weeds, etc. Could Peter M do this, and PestNet give a small honorarium? Chris Reid said he would look at beetles.

6) Twitter

PestNet has a Twitter account and the occasional entry notes interesting emails to PestNet or the accomplishments of the moderators. It is simply a way of trying to get PestNet noticed and perhaps attracting more members, nothing more. But to get noticed, messages Tweets have to be posted. Unfortunately, most moderators have thought it unnecessary to join in; only BM has joined. Pity. PestNet should try out these new social networking tools.

The next Skype meeting will be in 6 months, in early December. There being no other matters to discuss the meeting ended at 6 pm.

Grahame Jackson
Chair
PestNet
Sydney 16 June 2011