



Editorial - December 2011: Publish and be damned? - Sensitivities over release of records relevant to plant quarantine

The last editorial (September 2011) focused on the origin of submissions to *New Disease Reports* (NDR) from a geographical point of view and their subject matter. Many, if not most NDRs are submitted from academic institutions or research organisations. This contrasts with the lower frequency of submissions from official bodies for plant health/plant protection, referred to as the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) under the *International Plant Protection Convention* (IPPC). The question examined in this editorial is whether disease notes published in NDR should have the approval of NPPO or at least the NPPO be notified of intended publication.

'Pest reporting' is an obligation on NPPOs under the IPPC. 'Pest reporting' is not defined in the IPPC. However, the *International Standards For Phytosanitary Measures* (ISPMs) under the IPPC include ISPM 17 that starts with the following explanation:

OUTLINE OF REQUIREMENTS

The International Plant Protection Convention (1997) requires countries to report on the occurrence outbreak, and spread of pests with the purpose of communicating immediate or potential danger. National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) have the responsibility to collect pest information **by surveillance** and to verify the pest records thus collected. (Editor's emphasis.)

Further on the text continues:

2. Purpose of Pest Reporting

The main purpose of pest reporting is to communicate immediate or potential danger. Immediate or potential danger normally arises from the occurrence, outbreak or spread of a pest that is a **quarantine pest** in the country in which it is detected, or a **quarantine pest** for neighbouring countries and trading partners. (Editor's emphasis.)

Still further on, ISPM 17 refers in Section 3.2 to *sources* for 'pest reporting' that include *scientific journals*. From this it follows that there is and must be a distinction between *official* pest reporting to fulfil obligations under IPPC and *scientific/educational* reporting. Only official reports should have regulatory status. NDR's editorial and publication policy is clear on this matter: **every paper should have at least one**

author from the country concerned but not necessarily in an official position in relation to plant health. Alternatively, the text should state that the NPPO has been informed. If, on final scrutiny of a submitted paper prior to approval, it is found that the paper is lacking in either of these criteria, the authors will be asked to bring the manuscript into compliance.

The *British Society for Plant Pathology* (BSPP) has the charitable aims of promotion of plant pathology and education and we do not require prior 'approval' for publication from the NPPO. It is also doubtful whether NPPOs in some developing countries (from where the majority of NDR reports originate) would have the technical capacity to verify and approve the reports. We see this as a function of the peer review process in journals receiving pest reports. Moreover many NDR reports do not concern quarantine pests (or other regulated pests); attempting to obtain approval from an NPPO might therefore be unnecessary as well as being very difficult bureaucratically. Finally, in distinguishing scientific/educational reporting and official reporting, we have had for a long time a carefully worded disclaimer that accords with BSPP's charitable aims. This is available at <http://ndrs.org.uk/legal.php>.

NDR recognises that there are sensitivities in reporting the occurrence of some pests and that there is an obligation on national authors to contact their NPPO when quarantine and other pests are detected. However, the spirit of the IPPC requires good relations between scientists and NPPOs so that pest occurrences are communicated openly and transparently. Restricting the publication of scientific endeavours to officially approved reports may not be the best way to address pest problems. The editors of NDR are confident that the publication policy on this issue simultaneously furthers BSPP's charitable aims and complies with the spirit of the IPPC.

International Plant Protection Convention is available at https://www.ippc.int/index.php?id=convention&no_cache=1&L=0

ISPM 17 is available at https://www.ippc.int/index.php?id=ispms&no_cache=1&L=0