

How to communicate on pests and invasive alien plants? Conclusions of the EPPO/CoE/IUCN- ISSG/DGAV/UC/ESAC Workshop

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A workshop to bridge the gap in between disciplines

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Background

EPPO and the Bern Convention have been conducting activities on invasive alien species for more than 60 and 30 years respectively, and dozens of staff and volunteers dedicate their lives to preventing the entry and spread of pests and invasive alien species. Despite this and the myriad of initiatives being held in Ministries, NGOs and universities, communication on pests and invasive alien plants is still scarce. How to communicate on pests and invasive alien plants (IAP) is still an important question as it requires the identification of which information should be provided, to whom and for what purpose. In addition, it is important to determine how the results should be evaluated. Communicating on pests and invasive alien plants requires explanation of complex phenomena that may cause concern (for example, the introduction of a new pest of wheat that may lead to food shortage concerns) or involve abstract ecological theories (for example, the impact of an invasive alien plant on the native flora and ecosystems, which may lead to discussions on what the media sees as ‘xenophobic’ nature of the action being undertaken).

NPOs, Ministries of the Environment, NGOs and universities have developed scientific theories, tools for risk analysis and eradication and methods for listing species. However, their actions are rarely communicated to the general public and those playing a role in the introduction of species, such as the nursery industry. Awareness raising and communication is therefore crucial to the discipline, first of all to make the parties involved and the general public aware of the good practices they should adopt to prevent the entry and spread of pests and IAP. This is the aim of the EPPO poster ‘Don’t risk it’ (see Fig. 1).



**Pests and diseases can hide on plants.
Please do not bring home plants,
seeds, fruit, vegetables or flowers.**

Fig. 1 EPPO Poster ‘Don’t risk it’ to be displayed in airports and seaports.

On a broader scale, the issue needs to be recognized by civil servants so that policy makers understand the need for policy on invasive alien species (IAS) (such as the newly released EU regulation proposal on the 9th of September 2013).

Communicating about pests and invasive alien plants requires different disciplines to be efficient, these may include:

- Biology in a broad sense (to understand the biology of pests, hosts and ecosystems affected) to understand the phenomenon of biological invasions and to undertake appropriate actions;
- Communication, in order to understand how the different media are organized (the press, social media, etc.) and how to convey a useful message;
- Anthropology and sociology, to identify the different actors, their links and their representations.

The workshop: how to communicate on pests and invasive alien plants?

The co-organizers¹ of this workshop brought experts from these disciplines together. Working across the disciplines is not an easy task and requires an openness of mind as well as tolerance for what experts with a different background have to contribute.

This international workshop gathered about 70 participants from more than 20 countries. It was organized with the objective to explore different viewpoints from various disciplines, and intended to allow as much as possible attendants to express their ideas through their talks and through the thematic workshops organized. All the presentations from the Workshop are available at http://archives.epo.int/MEETINGS/2013_conferences/communication_pt.htm. Mr Fernandes wrote an excellent instructive and accessible media article on invasive alien species² which was commissioned by the Council of Europe, this is also available on the website for the Workshop.

The four sessions of the workshop were each composed of presentations followed by 3 concomitant thematic workshops.

The first session presented the communication activities of international organizations such as EPPO, the World Trade Organization, the European Food Safety Authority, the European Environment Agency, the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network and the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group on invasive alien species.

The second session opened the floor to other disciplines, including communication, psychology and anthropology. Experiences from countries on communication on IAS were then presented in the 3rd and 4th sessions, and the reasons

¹EPPO, the Council of Europe (Bern Convention), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Invasive Species Specialist group, the Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária (Portuguese Plant Protection Organization), the Centre for Functional Ecology (University of Coimbra) and the Agrarian School of Coimbra (Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra).

²Fernandes JM (2013) Communicating on IAS issues to media. EPPO-Council of Europe workshop “Communicating Invasive Alien Species” Oeiras, Portugal, 8–10 October 2013. Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. T–PVS/Inf (2013) 28. 6 p.

why some initiatives worked better than others was examined.

The thematic workshops included opportunities to either get briefly acquainted with how to communicate with the media, how to target the message or how to draft a press communiqué. It also allowed National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) to express their needs. The following topics were covered:

- What do you expect from EPPO and other organizations?
- Communicating on pests and invasive alien plants with a media audience.
- How to draft a press communiqué?
- Social communication: the linguistic and anthropological dimensions
- How to convey positive messages to the horticulture industry?
- Can ‘hands-on’ activities be an effective tool to engage people with IAPs problem and change behaviours?

The general conclusions and recommendations of the workshop were elaborated to guide the future work of EPPO and possibly other organizations involved in communication and are provided at the end of this paper.

Last but not least, the ‘clean-up of invasive alien plants afternoon’ represented an integral part of a communication event during which participants all together not only visited a beautiful natural reserve but also helped remove the invasive alien plant *Acacia longifolia* (see Figs 2 and 3).

Summaries of thematic workshops

What do you expect from EPPO and international organizations?

Chaired by AS Roy and R Arnitis, EPPO

During this thematic workshop, participants discussed the possible role of international organizations in communicat-



Fig. 2 Group picture of the participants attending the EPPO/CoE/IUCN ISSG International Workshop ‘How to communicate on pests and invasive alien plants?’ during the field trip to remove *Acacia longifolia*.



Fig. 3 Participants learning about *Acacia longifolia* and how to manage it.

ing about invasive alien species. It was acknowledged that by nature, international organizations are dealing with many different cultures and languages which render direct communication with the general public more complicated. As international organizations are driven by their members, communication strategies or campaigns are generally subject to decision-making processes which might prevent rapid communication action(s). The complexity of the scientific aspects related to invasive alien species was also underlined. For example, in the field of risk analysis, the time which is necessary for researchers and international bodies to clarify scientific questions does not always allow the urgent demands from the media or the citizens about a given 'risk' to be answered.

However, even if communication is a challenge for international organizations, it was generally agreed that they should play an important role in helping their members to communicate better. It was suggested that examples of successful communication campaigns carried out by international bodies should be collected and studied. A repository of these successful campaigns could be established to stimulate further discussions (e.g. on EPPO's website). In addition, international organizations could usefully develop guidelines or tools to help their members on specific topics or particular aspects of communication. They should also try to develop their own communication and image in order to be recognized as valid partners by other stakeholders. Finally, it was also underlined that international bodies should continue establishing active communication networks among themselves.

The main conclusions of the thematic workshop are summarized below:

1. It seems more appropriate for international organizations to provide communication tools to their member countries, rather than engage directly with the general public.
2. International organizations should try to develop guidelines or standards to help their member countries to communicate more effectively.
3. International organizations (e.g. EPPO) could establish a repository of successful communication campaigns.

4. Communication between international organizations should continue.

Communicating on pests and invasive alien plants with a media audience

Chaired by S Claudet, journalist and communications consultant, France

The purpose of this thematic workshop was to introduce participants to the best approach when communicating with journalists on pests and invasive alien plants. It included which information to share, and how to adapt the information to the type of media (e.g. print, radio, TV and web including social networks).

Five examples given during the thematic workshop and subsequent recommendations are presented below:

1. Most participants said they had experienced problems when communicating with journalists, and thus mistrusted them. They cited instances when information they shared was not properly relayed, distorted and even exaggerated.

They were advised to deliver a clear and simple message, accessible to a non-scientific audience and to focus on one main message at a time. A possibility is to try it on your own entourage (spouse, children) to see if they understand. Some participants admitted that they were strict about the use of scientific terms but eventually acknowledged that simplification was acceptable as long as the main information was not compromised.

2. Participants that had given recorded TV interviews did not understand that a 20-minute interview would be edited down to a few minutes.

Journalists need to cut some of the interview for it to appear in a news segment. Even longer-format pieces will be edited to shorten them and keep the audience's interest. Participants were advised to be concise and convey the main message at the beginning of the interview.

3. There was a widely shared consensus on the need to make young audiences (teenagers and children) aware of the environmental and health threat posed by invasive alien plants and pests.

Participants were advised to approach TV channels, print media and even publishing houses targeting children. Some participants said they were already giving talks in schools.

4. Some participants said they had understood they needed to cultivate relations of trust with journalists. Some reported they occasionally had lunch or coffee with them.

It is important indeed to maintain relations with journalists you trust. It should be possible to identify who in the profession best understands your field and is interested in reporting about it.

5. A scientist is (not) necessarily a communications specialist.

For those organizations that don't have on-staff communications specialists, learning from professionals is advised.

Further possibilities

A follow-up, practical workshop would be highly recommended where participants would be taught to write press releases, interview techniques for print, radio and TV media, and learn how to use social networks. The workshop, led by professional journalists, would have a short theoretical introduction and then focus on highly practical exercises – including mock (practice) but filmed sit-down TV interviews in live and recorded situations, mock interviews with radio (recorded) and print journalists. Timed writing of press releases, web postings, tweets, etc. The produced material would then be shared with individual participants for feedback and advice and with the whole group.

Organizations should also consider taking on temporary staff on internships from journalism and communication schools to help them refine their communication strategy. Those involved should ideally be advanced in their studies to truly contribute their acquired knowledge to the organization concerned.

Social communication: the linguistic and anthropological dimensions

Chaired by F Alvarez-Pereyre, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, France.

A person who is engaged in a given activity is confronted with fellow people. In the course of a defined set of actions, these protagonists may include those from different institutions, professions and cultures. The protagonists may not share the same status or position, the same values and norms. They might have differing objectives, linked to specific agendas. They may master different sets of tools, know-how and procedures even if they agree on the aims. All these differences have an impact upon the most trivial communication process, and also on agreed professional goals. The differences can systematically account for some of the conflicts and difficulties that occur in social communication. Awareness of the differences and of their impacts can help building bridges and achieving common goals.

Participants were asked to imagine that they put themselves inside the most central circle in a series of concentric circles where their partners linked to a specific project would be arranged. Some of these were quite close, and others more distant. They were then asked to imagine that another protagonist is placed in the most central circle. How will the other protagonists be placed then? Each time a new actor is added to the central circle, the relationship between all the others will change. The same holds true if each of the protagonists is ordered according to their respective objectives and agendas, or their respective ways of handling the matter. How is the whole process to proceed, each time one of the agendas, or methods and tools, is placed in the most central circles, with the other ones

being dispatched through the other circles? Since each of the protagonists might be tempted to consider himself/herself to be in the most central circle, what are the chances that the finalised set of actions will be successful?

Participants were then asked to consider conceptions and representations, and ask the question ‘what is being shared?’. During an agreed set of actions, individuals behave as scientists, or as policy makers, or as someone who is acting in the legal sphere, or as a member of a given administration, or as a citizen. As such, entire sets of conceptions, representations and convictions are mobilised. These partly reflect the agendas and the routines of the sphere of activity, partly the linguistic and social community and partly the commitments towards different types of issues. All of this might have a direct or indirect impact on individuals’ daily capacity to interact with others.

Being aware of these factors might be helpful to participants throughout the communication process. Such awareness requires attention to be paid to our own interpretations, conceptions and convictions. It calls also for a clear consciousness of the partners, on the same topics. It is important to pay attention to the ways individuals’ interpretations and other actors interpretations play a role in the whole process.

To sum up, it may be beneficial to understand the culture behind our own routines and values, as well as understanding partners’ cultures, values and routines. The different actors in the process can then become aware of the multiple interactions in play and of their effects.

How to draft a press communiqué?

Chaired by JM Fernandez, Journalist, Portugal

The following seven points were presented to help future authors of press releases:

1. Write a press communiqué as if it was an article for immediate release. Be aware your audience is everyone, so avoid technicalities and explain complex issues in a simple way;
2. Be brief, be direct, focus on attractive stories, not concepts. Focus on the essential points of the problem, not on technical details that may be important to you but not to others;
3. Work on the title, making it attractive and easy to understand. The first sentence is fundamental to capture the attention of the reader. It should be short and catch the reader’s attention;
4. Avoid unnecessary jargon, long sentences and do not be exhaustive. Short sentences are better than long ones, examples better than theory (preferably examples should move the reader because they speak about something familiar to him/her, a garden, own county, etc.);
5. In addition to the communiqué provide information on where the journalist can learn more about the issue (specialised websites, newspaper articles on the issue).

Provide images, examples and contact details of people for possible interviews so the journalist may easily acquire more information;

6. Avoid nice pictures of 'invaders' that would make the common reader feel sympathy for them. Do not exaggerate the problem of invaders to a point to which you will not look credible. Be moderate, clear, with precise examples on which type of health is at risk or economy at stake, also pointing out well-known species that are threatened by IAS;
7. 'Try' your communiqué on a person not connected to biodiversity to see whether he/she understands the language, the purpose of the news, the problem of IAS, etc.

How to convey positive messages to the horticulture industry?

Chaired by M Halford, Université de Liège, Belgium and Johan van Valkenburg, Dutch Plant Protection Organization, The Netherlands

To start the discussion within the thematic workshop, some examples of messages on invasive alien plants (IAP) used in the press were shown to participants. The audience associated the messages displayed with the notions of threat, danger, enemy, attack and fight. Some logos and headline titles of communication materials dedicated to invasive alien plants were also displayed. The audience associated the images with feelings related to scare, fear and 'don't'. But the audience considered that the images used do not always match actual plants that pose a threat.

Other messages used in awareness campaigns related to IAP were perceived as positive, engaging for behaviour change, with positive colour and without mentioning the prohibitive 'don't'. Indeed positive messages are focused on bringing solutions instead of highlighting the problems. Alternative plants were considered as a positive solution to propose. This has the potential to create a new market for the horticulture industry. Different points of view were expressed concerning this topic:

- Who should propose alternatives: botanical gardens, producers?
- Which alternative plants should be proposed: natives species only or native and exotics species? Several participants were favourable to the idea of promoting native plants only.

The promotion of native plants nevertheless needs to go alongside alternatives in a broad sense. The feasibility of promoting native plants only depends on the country and on the cultural and/or economical context. In some regions (e.g. South Africa, Reunion Island), native plants can exclusively be proposed. In these situations it is culturally accepted. In other cases and/or countries, the exclusive pro-

motion of native plants may lead to opposition from the horticulture industry because most ornamental plants available in the market are exotic and are useful for gardening or landscape plantings. Most of these species pose no problem for the environment. It was highlighted that if exotic plants are proposed, it should be ensured that the plants present no risks of becoming invasive.

The following conclusions and recommendations were also proposed:

1. It is important not to blame the horticulture industry for the IAP problem and to find solutions together. The horticulture industry also wants to protect nature. This is a common ground with ecologists/environmentalists.
2. Education of growers/landscape architects is essential to prevent problems.
3. The 'polluter-pays' principle was proposed as a solution, but the feasibility of such a principle is questionable. Genetic tools could nevertheless allow the origin of invasive alien plants established in nature to be identified.
4. Solutions such as Codes of conduct must be considered as a first step in prevention. The main goal is to raise awareness. But if it does not work, then legislation may follow.
5. Consumers must also be informed and it is important to enlarge communication to informal trade exchange of plants/seeds.

How to develop an awareness campaign on pests and invasive alien plants for an international exhibition or event

Chaired by M Ciampitti, Plant Health Service, Italy and S Brunel, EPPO

Italy will host the Universal Exhibition in 2015 in Milan, and the Lombardia Plant Health Service is in charge of elaborating an awareness campaign so that participants and visitors from all over the world do not bring plants or plant products that could be invasive or carry pests.

International exhibitions are increasingly common, and bringing the attention of participants to pests and invasive alien plants, and what they should do in order to avoid their introduction represents a powerful communication tool.

The risk of introduction and movement of alien species is common to many events, but in this case the theme of the event is 'Feeding the Planet' and as a consequence vegetables and plants from all over the world will arrive in Milan.

The participants of the thematic workshops considered that there are 2 target publics, exhibitors and visitors and that messages and tools should be clearly adapted to them.

Guidelines on phytosanitary requirements had already been sent to exhibitors. It was suggested that these requirements could also include countries lists of invasive alien species.

During the Universal Exhibition, a communication campaign will also target the visitors, and exhibitors should be the ones conveying the message. It was suggested for this campaign:

- To start the campaign before visitors leave their home country, e.g. at the airports (the suggestion was made to use in all the airports the EPPO campaign ‘Don’t risk it’) or through emailing to provide informative material;
- To focus on damages caused by pests and IAPs, including impacts in gardens/local areas, but also to use some positive examples;
- To involve visitors in some activities linked with this topic and perhaps also in simulated official checks (e.g. shoe check) or in plants destruction;
- To choose and present only 3 or 4 case studies and to make use of the experience gained in Italy with *Anoplophora* spp.;
- To organize special programs for children within the exhibition;
- To adapt the message on the threats for different parts of the world (e.g. by showing pests and procedures specific to crops grown in different regions, or each continent).

Can ‘hands on’ activities be an effective tool to engage people with IAPs problem and change behaviours?

Chaired by H Marchante, Escola Superior Agrária de Coimbra, Portugal and E Marchante, Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal

All participants agreed that ‘hands on’ activities (such as the field trip of the workshop) can be an effective communication tool despite some negative points/constraints, e.g. only a few people can participate at the same time (compared with other kinds of communication strategies); Another disadvantage is that it involves longer ‘contact time’ to be effective and some actions can be more expensive.

The variety of ‘hands on’ activities on invasive alien plants, both undertaken by participants and suggested were diverse and included the removal of species, restoration practices after control (to focus on a positive message), participation in scientific experiments or monitoring schemes, contribution to information collected in field (e.g. reporting invasive alien plants sightings), etc. Some of the activities mentioned can involve participants for periods longer than 1 day (both the action and its follow up) which can be important to increase success as can be potentially much more engaging motivating the participants to continue spreading the key message.

A key point that was underlined was the importance to address clear messages about both the invasive alien species topic and general goals of the projects/areas/management interventions where the activities are conducted in order to avoid instilling the feeling that some activities can be useless. E.g. ‘hands on’ actions involving invasive alien plants control in particularly difficult situations should make very clear what the final goals are and what can be the (limited) contribution of the particular action occurring, in order to show that it is not an impossible task.

Another conclusion was that ‘hands on’ activities need to be adapted to contexts (e.g. in different countries) and to different publics (children/school communities, stakeholders, politicians, journalists, nurseries, etc.).

It was also mentioned that it would be important to perform a cost analysis/evaluation of the real efficacy of ‘hands on’ vs. others actions including topics such as transfer of knowledge, behaviour changes, costs, problems prevented, etc. Involving interdisciplinary teams including social sciences into that evaluation would be fundamental and a most valuable contribution.

As a final suggestion, the group agreed that it would be interesting trying to organize some ‘hands on’ activities with an international scope, simultaneously in several countries, and then get social scientists to evaluate it considering all the cultural and contextual differences. Such action could be, e.g., a ‘week-long field work project’ to control invasive alien plants, or activities somewhat inspired in the spirit of the ‘weed busters’ week’.

Final conclusions and recommendations

EPPO/CoE/IUCN-ISSG/DGAV/UC/ESAC Workshop ‘How to communicate on pests and invasive alien plants’ conclusions

The participants of the EPPO/CoE/IUCN-ISSG/DGAV/UC/ESAC Workshop are aware that pests, including invasive alien plants, are a major cause of damage to crops, health concerns and biodiversity loss. In order to contribute to the implementation of Aichi target 9 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), they agreed on the following conclusions concerning communication on pests and invasive alien plants:

1. As biological invasions are intrinsically linked to human behaviour, communication is an essential component of policy and measures dealing with this issue;
2. It is essential to improve co-operation and to share information in between all sectors, in particular the plant health sector and environment sectors;
3. It is necessary to strengthen communication on the damage caused by pests - including invasive alien plants – particularly in urban areas, which are home to most of the European population, and which can facilitate the identification of potential strategic partners to

work with (e.g. municipalities, botanic gardens, etc.) when developing information campaigns and other outreach activities;

4. There is a clear need to improve communication in the field of biological invasions and it is particularly important and urgent to explore all the facets of the issue and to develop a more interdisciplinary approach based on the involvement of social sciences (i.e. communication science, sociology, anthropology, etc.) in this field;
5. Effective communication requires: the definition of target audience, objectives, clear messages and the tools to be used, and evaluation of the outcomes; it is important to involve professional staff with adequate skills and to take into account existing experiences around the world;
6. When addressing mass media (both formal media and the many varied web-based instruments) messages should be adapted for non-specialist audiences, avoiding technical and complex language, and giving preference to 'stories' and other elements (visual and other) that make the message attractive;
7. Improving communication requires capacity building and training in the relevant disciplines and tools;
8. Communication efforts need to be carefully planned, form an integral part of programmes and projects aimed at preventing entry, containment or eradication of pests and invasive alien plants and receive long-term funding; results of communication and awareness efforts need to be carefully evaluated to assess their impact on public perceptions and behaviour;
9. An international, web-based platform to share experiences on communication on pests including invasive alien plants would be a much welcomed step in the efforts to improve methods and achieve a better public understanding on the impacts of pests including invasive alien plants on nature, crops, health and livelihoods; such a platform should be able to help publicise interesting experiences and allow research on public attitudes on the topic.