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Question and answers: Task Force for the control of pine wood nematode (PWN): a new approach implemented by the European Commission in order to help Portugal and Spain in controlling pine wood nematode

1. What is the situation of pine wood nematode in the European Union?

Pine wood nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*) is a microscopic worm native to North America, and the causal agent of the pine wilt disease. It is spread by an insect vector (*Monochamus* sp.) which is present in the European Union (EU). Pine wood nematode is a quarantine harmful organism in the EU where its spread would cause significant damage to the pine forests and serious economic impacts on the EU export trade of coniferous wood. Following the first detection of pine wood nematode in the EU in 1999, the European Commission has adopted specific emergency control measures which apply to all Member States (the latest of which is Commission Implementing Decision 2012/535/EU).

Pine wood nematode is now present under containment in continental Portugal and in the Autonomous Region of Madeira. In Spain, five (four at the time of the report) outbreaks of a limited extent have been detected since 2008, which were or are being eradicated. In the rest of the EU territory, presence of pine wood nematode is not known to occur as demonstrated by annual specific surveys performed by all Member States.

2. What is the Task Force for the control of pine wood nematode in Portugal and Spain?

The Task Force is a group of Member States' experts coordinated by the Commission services (Directorate General for Health and Food Safety) set up in order to provide technical support to Portugal and Spain in controlling pine wood nematode. The thirteen experts from eleven Member States were nominated by the Commission services based on Member States proposals, in order to cover a range of pre-defined expertise. The Task Force pooled together scientists, technicians and managers who worked together and used their expertise in order to assess the situation on-the-spot and develop tailor-made proposals with the objective of addressing the problem of pine wood nematode control in its entirety.

3. Why was this new approach (Task Force) initiated by the Commission?

Since 1999, Commission services (Directorate General for Health and Food Safety) carried out 20 audits in Portugal and 5 to Spain which revealed several non-compliances by both Member States with EU legislation. The latest audit to Portugal, performed in 2014, concluded that, if appropriate actions were not urgently taken, there would be a significant risk of spread outside the delimited infested zone of Portugal. Against this background, DG SANTE decided to implement a new approach, complementary to audits, geared at identifying efficient ways of overcoming difficulties in controlling the pine wood nematode and to propose suggestions for improvement.

4. What is the outcome of the Task Force operating from November 2014 to October 2015?

The report of the Task Force operating between November 2014 and October 2015 presents conclusions on the review of the situation of PWN in Portugal and Spain and proposes recommendations which provide technical support to these Member States in the control of pine wood nematode. They are based on the expertise of the Task Force and on new scientific knowledge available to the Task Force, in particular the EU funded research projects PHRAME and REPHRAME¹. These recommendations aim at refocusing attention on risks and measures helping to ensure the greatest prospect of success as well as maximising the use of resources. These do not constitute a legally or binding standard and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Commission services or the Commission.

5. Are these recommendations valid for the control of PWN in other parts of the EU territory or of other harmful organisms?

The recommendations are only applicable to the control of pine wood nematode in continental Portugal and adjacent parts of Spain. They have been developed based on new scientific knowledge available to the Task Force, taking into account the specific epidemiology of the nematode and the biology of the insect vector, the local environmental conditions and the well-defined range of host plants.

6. How will the Commission follow up on the recommendations made by the Task Force?

Portugal and Spain have informed the Commission that they have already started to implement some of the recommendations of the Task force. A small number of the recommendations will be considered in the framework of the forthcoming review of the EU Decision and could only be implemented if new legal provisions were adopted. Furthermore, the activities of the Task Force will be extended throughout 2016 in order to provide technical support to Portugal for the implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

7. What are the main advantages of this initiative?

The comprehensive approach followed by the Task Force in order to address the phytosanitary challenge raised by the pine wood nematode in continental Portugal and adjacent part of Spain provided an opportunity to understand the root cause of local difficulties and to develop innovative solutions. It also provided feedback to the Commission on the effectiveness of EU requirements in force. The Task Force largely supported the current legal framework and proposed technical advice for their optimal implementation. However a few of existing requirements were not considered the most efficient to control pine wood nematode in this part of the EU territories. The Commission will be starting shortly the review of some elements of the current EU emergency measures against Pine wood nematode. As regards the specific Task-Force recommendation stating that in some circumstances the current "clear-cut" requirement may be counterproductive, the Commission may look for further scientific guidance as this would deviate from the existing European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation standard² for the control of PWN, developed in 2012. The Task Force work has therefore not only contributed to set up the basis for a better implementation of EU requirements but also put forward some suggestions for the forthcoming review of the current legal framework.

¹ <http://www.rephrame.eu/>

² EPPO (2012) National regulatory control systems PM 9/1(5). *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus* and its vectors: procedures for official control. *Bulletin OEPP/EPPO Bulletin* **42**, 477–485