SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON PLANT HEALTH

138th Panel Plenary meeting

28 & 29 January 2026
9:00-18:00 / 9:00-13:00
MINUTES - Agreed on 13 March 2026

EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Location: Online

Attendees:

- Panel Members:

Paula BAPTISTA, Anna BERLIN, Elisavet CHATZIVASSILIOU, Antonio Vicent CIVERA, Jaime CUBERO, Nik CUNNIFFE, Eduardo DE LA PEÑA, Nicolas DESNEUX, Francesco DI SERIO, Anna FILIPIAK, Paolo GONTHIER, Beata Anna HASIÓW-JAROSZEWSKA, Hervé JACTEL, Blanca LANDA, Lara MAISTRELLO, David MAKOWSKI, Panagiotis MILONAS, Nikolaos PAPADOPOULOS, Roel POTTING, Hanna Sinikka SUSI, Dirk Jan VAN DER GAAG

- Hearing Experts[1]: Camille PICARD (EPPO), Anita BENKO; Tarla MURPHY

  Alex GOBBI and Chiara MORENA, (participated as Contractor (Art. 36 Tasking Grant, CREA, Italy, (GP/EFSA/PLANTS/2022/02) for agenda item 5.6, attendance was via teleconference

  Alzbeta MIKULOVA, participated as Contractor (Art. 36 Tasking Grant, Univ. Padova, Italy) (GP/EFSA/PLANTS/2022/11) for agenda item 6.2 (via teleconference)

  Oresteia SFYRA (Art. 36 Tasking Grant, Benaki Phytopathological Institute, Greece) (SA 03-2023-BPI under FPA GP/EFSA/PLANTS/2022/02) for agenda item 5.6 and 5.7 (via teleconference)

- European Commission DG SANTE: MARQUEZ GARCIA Maria Belen, Wolfgang REINERT, Paul ROQUINY

- EFSA:

PLANTS: Efterpi ADAMOU, Etienne BABIN, Paula CALUSINSKA, Matteo CROTTA, Ewelina CZWIENCZEK, Ciro GARDI, Oumayma JEMEI, Agata KACZMAREK, Florian KUNTZE, Andrea MAIORANO, Dora MIJIC, Marco PAUTASSO, Marica SCALA, Goda SIMONELYTE, Giuseppe STANCANELLI, Franz STREISSL, Emanuela TACCI, Anastasia TERZIDOU, Rachel VAUGHN, Beatriz WINTER,

MESE: Olaf MOSBACH-SCHULZ

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Panel Chair welcomed the participants.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Declarations of Interest of Panel members

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence[2] and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management[3], EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest filled out by the Working Group members invited to the present meeting.

[1] As defined in Article 34 of the document "Implementing Rule of the Management Board of the European Food Safety Authority laying down the rules on the selection, appointment and operations of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and of their Working Groups": https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/paneloperation.pdf

[2] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/policy_independence.pdf

[3] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/competing_interest_management_17.pdf

No Conflicts of Interest related to the issues discussed in these meetings have been identified during the screening process, and no interests were declared orally by the members at the beginning of this meeting.

4. Report on the written approval procedure of the 137th PLH Panel plenary meeting

The Panel was informed that the minutes were published on time.

5. Feedback from EFSA, Scientific Committee and European Commission

5.1 Presentation of the Scientific Opinion on the control of vectors of *Xylella fastidiosa* (tabled for endorsement for public consultation at February plenary)

The sub-WG on *Xylella* direct vector control presented the global systematic literature review and meta-analysis (up to March 2025) of vector control strategies across xylem-feeding insects, narrowing 1248 studies to 55 for quantitative meta-analysis. The WG took the feedback from the EFSA PLH Panel. Synthetic substances authorized in the EU showed the highest efficacy, reducing vector survival by 60–80%, although rankings among individual compounds remain uncertain due to limited data. Other control categories showed lower and more uncertain effectiveness, with several methodological gaps limiting the overall strength of evidence.

5.2 Feedback from EFSA; plenary meeting open to observers on 18 February 2026; update on EFSA grants and procurement in support of plant health risk assessment: awarded projects and ongoing Call for proposals

EFSA informed the Panel that the PLH plenary meeting scheduled for 18 February 2026 will be open to observers, in line with EFSA's transparency policy. Practical arrangements for observer participation were outlined, and it was noted that observers would be able to follow the discussions without taking part in deliberations or decision-making. An email with the link to the registration will be sent to the Panel by EFSA.

EFSA provided an update on **grants and procurement activities** supporting plant health risk assessment. Information was shared on:

- **Awarded projects**, including projects contributing data, tools and methodological support relevant to pest risk assessment and risk reduction options.
- **Ongoing Calls for Proposals**, aimed at strengthening the scientific evidence base in areas such as pest biology, epidemiology, vector ecology and risk reduction measures.

It was noted that results from several projects are expected to become available in the coming months, while others are still ongoing. EFSA highlighted that, where relevant, outputs from these projects will be considered in future updates of scientific opinions, subject to publication and data availability.

5.3 Feedback from the Scientific Committee

The Panel received feedback from the EFSA Scientific Committee, in particular regarding methodological consistency across Panels, including:

- The importance of clearly documenting evidence selection, appraisal and uncertainty.
- The need to distinguish clearly between quantitative evidence suitable for metanalysis and qualitative or descriptive evidence-analysis and qualitative or descriptive evidence.
- The value of maintaining coherence across related opinions addressing different components of a complex risk (e.g. pathogen, vector, and risk reduction measures).

The Panel took note of the feedback and acknowledged its relevance for the ongoing and forthcoming PLH opinions.

5.4 Feedback from the European Commission

Nothing to report.

5.5 Presentation of the Scientific Opinion on the update on in planta control measures and other risk reduction options for *Xylella fastidiosa* (tabled for endorsement for public consultation at February plenary)

The sub-WG for *in planta* control and other risk reduction options for *Xylella fastidiosa* presented extensively the work done on the related opinion and asked for feedback from the PLH Panel members. *In planta* control measures and other risk reduction options included in the selected literature were critically evaluated by the experts of the sub-WG for their fitness-for-purpose. Chemical and biological control measures against the bacterium *X. fastidiosa* have been tested in plants, both in controlled and field conditions. Occasionally reduction of bacterial population has been achieved, but total elimination of the bacterium has not been demonstrated. Suppression of disease symptoms has been observed at various levels, depending on the control measure applied.

5.6 Breakout groups discussion on protocol for pest risk assessment with a focus on pest identity and biology aspects

Overall feedback

- The breakout groups provided substantive and technically robust input to refine the protocol sections on pest identity, with strong emphasis on:
  - use of authoritative taxonomic sources,
  - handling of species complexes, cryptic species and intraspecific variability,
  - and ensuring regulatory relevance of taxonomic units (species vs subspecies/pathovars).
- The discussion confirmed the need for a common, cross-taxa framework, complemented by taxon-specific guidance, rather than a single rigid approach for all organisms.
- Participants consistently stressed the importance of:
  - traceability of evidence (original descriptions, revisions),
  - clear justification when deviating from species-level assessment, and
  - alignment with existing international standards where available.
- The exercise was considered highly useful to improve methodological consistency across opinions and Panels, and to support future engagement with EURLs, EPPO and Member States.

5.7 Short presentations from breakout groups:

Insects group feedback:

The group proposed a stepwise decision approach for pest identity:

- starting from global taxonomic databases and reference collections,
- integrating peer-reviewed literature,
- and consulting experts only as a last step.

Key challenges were well identified, notably:

treatment of subspecies, biotypes and races, handling of species complexes, and correct use of synonyms across literature and databases.

The group agreed that decisions on splitting taxa should be made case by case, based on biological relevance for risk assessment, not taxonomy alone.

Fungi group feedback

The fungi group confirmed Index Fungorum as the primary reference source, for consistency with previous EFSA work, complemented by:

- recent peer-reviewed literature,
- curated databases for specific genera (e.g. Fusarium, Phytophthora),
- and molecular data where appropriate.

The group clarified how to manage:

- species complexes and cryptic species, obligate vs non-obligate synonyms, and the preference for multi-locus approaches when molecular data are used.

It was agreed that the "one fungus – one name" principle is now standard practice and does not require further elaboration in the protocol.

Viruses group feedback

The group confirmed the ICTV taxonomy as the authoritative basis for virus identity, including the transition to binomial nomenclature.

Clear guidance was proposed for:

- linking new binomial names with historical virus names and acronyms,
- handling viruses not yet formally classified by ICTV.

The group highlighted limits to categorisation where:

- viruses are known only from sequences,
- or lack sufficient biological or epidemiological information.

It was agreed that identifiability alone is not sufficient if key biological information is missing.

Nematodes group feedback

Nemaplex was identified as the primary curated database for nematode identity, integrated with:

- original species descriptions, subsequent taxonomic revisions, and EFSA/EPPO documentation where relevant.

The group stressed that:

- morphology and morphometrics remain essential for nematode identification,
- molecular data are particularly important for species complexes and cryptic species.

The proposal to include a general introductory text on how to deal with taxonomic uncertainty across taxa was positively received.

Bacteria group feedback

The bacteria group clearly highlighted the dynamic nature of bacterial taxonomy and its implications for risk assessment.

Strong emphasis was placed on:

- regulatory relevance of subspecific units (e.g. pathovars),
- the need to justify assessment below species level based on host range, virulence or epidemiology.

The group clarified that:

- not all taxonomic distinctions are meaningful for regulation,
- and that pathovars are not formal taxonomic units but may be critical for PRA.

The approach was considered well aligned with IPPC principles and past EFSA practice.

OVERALL CONCLUSION (CROSS-CUTTING)

The breakout sessions and short presentations significantly strengthened the protocol by:

- improving clarity on pest identity,
- reducing ambiguity in handling complex taxa, and

- reinforcing scientific justification for regulatory decisions.

The Panel broadly agreed that the material should now be:

- refined by the working group, shared with EURLs and EPPO for technical alignment, and later circulated through the Plant Health Network.

6. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion and possible adoption/endorsement

6.1 Scientific Opinion on CRA Hamamelis mollis plants from UK (EFSA-Q-2025-00412)

The European Commission requested the EFSA Panel on Plant Health to prepare and deliver risk assessments for commodities listed in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/2019 as 'High risk plants, plant products and other objects'. This Scientific Opinion covers plant health risks posed by rooted plants in pots of *Hamamelis mollis* imported from the United Kingdom (UK). The assessment was performed considering the available scientific information, including the technical information provided by the UK. All pests associated with the commodities were evaluated against specific criteria. Two EU Regulated pests (*Phytophthora ramorum* non-EU isolates and *Scirtothrips dorsalis*), present in the UK and potentially associated with the commodity, were considered as relevant for this Opinion. No pests non-regulated in the EU were identified to be selected for further evaluation.

The scientific opinion was adopted on 28 January 2026.

6.2 Scientific Opinion on CRA Salix unrooted cuttings from the UK (EFSA-Q-2025-00003)

The European Commission requested the EFSA Panel on Plant Health to prepare and deliver risk assessments for commodities listed in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/2019 as 'High risk plants, plant products and other objects'. This Scientific Opinion covers plant health risks posed by unrooted cuttings of *Salix* species (*S. aegyptiaca, S. eriocephala, S. gmelinii, S. miyabeana, S. purpurea, S. rehderiana, S. schwerinii, S. udensis, S. viminalis*) imported from the United Kingdom (UK). The assessment was performed considering the available scientific information, including the technical information provided by the UK. All pests potentially associated with the commodities were evaluated against specific criteria. Only two EU Regulated pests (the fungus *Entoleuca mammata* and the oomycete *Phytophthora ramorum* (non-EU isolates)), present in the UK and potentially associated with the commodity, were considered relevant for this Opinion. No pests non-regulated in the EU were identified to be selected for further evaluation.

The scientific opinion was adopted on 28 January 2026.

7. AOB

Nothing to report