SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON PLANT HEALTH

144th Panel Plenary meeting

15 October 2026
9:00-13:00
MINUTES - Agreed on 17th November 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, Lara MAISTRELLO, David MAKOWSKI, Panagiotis MILONAS, Nikolaos PAPADOPOULOS, Roel POTTING, Hanna Sinikka SUSI, Dirk Jan VAN DER GAAG

- Hearing Experts[1]: PICARD Camille (EPPO), Hans-Hermann THULKE;

Alex GOBBI and Chiara MORENA participated as Cooperator (Art. 36 Tasking Grant, CREA, Italy - GP/EFSA/PLANTS/2022/02),

Alzbeta MIKULOVA participated – via teleconference - as Cooperator (Art. 36 Tasking Grant, Univ. Padova, Italy - GP/EFSA/PLANTS/2022/11.

- European Commission DG SANTE: Karin NIENSTEDT
- EFSA:

PLANTS: Ewelina CZWIENCZEK, Ciro GARDI, Oumayma JEMEI, Linnea JORGENSEN, Agata KACZMAREK, Andrea MAIORANO, Dora MIJIC, Marco PAUTASSO, Giuseppe STANCANELLI, Franz STREISSL, Emanuela TACCI, Anastasia TERZIDOU,

- 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 this meeting have been identified during the screening process, and no interests were declared orally by the members at the beginning of this meeting.

4. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion and possible adoption

4.1 Endorsement for public consultation of updated draft EFSA Technical report on "Ensemble species distribution modelling for *Xylella fastidiosa* and its three major subspecies *fastidiosa*, *multiplex* and *pauca*" (EFSA-Q-2026-00342)

This technical report documents the application of species distribution modelling (SDM) to assess climatic suitability for *Xylella fastidiosa* and its three major subspecies *fastidiosa, multiplex* and *pauca* across Europe. An ensemble of five algorithms, Generalized Linear Models, Generalized Linear Model with Elastic-Net Regularization, Generalized Additive Models, Random Forest and Multivariate Adaptive Regression Splines, was fitted using global occurrence records for *X. fastidiosa* and climatic predictors. Spatial block cross-validation was used to account for geographic autocorrelation and support model evaluation and uncertainty assessment. Two series of simulations are presented. The first used 19 candidate climatic variables, including four precipitation variables, whereas the second was restricted to the 15 temperature and growing-season variables. In both series, projections of climatic favourability across Europe differed markedly among *X. fastidiosa* subspecies. At the species level, the highest favourability was concentrated in the Mediterranean Member States and the Iberian Peninsula, extending to Ireland in the second series. Moderate favourability extended across the lowlands of western and central Europe, while values declined towards the north-east and dropped sharply across the major mountain ranges. Subspecies-level projections also differed in both series of simulations. Subspecies *fastidiosa* showed the highest favourability in the southern and western Iberian Peninsula, with limited extension northwards. Subspecies *multiplex* had the broadest projected distribution, whereas subsp. *pauca* was largely restricted to Portugal, southern Spain and Mediterranean coastal areas. Agreement among the ensemble algorithms was greatest for subsp. *fastidiosa* in both simulation series. Disagreement was greatest for subsp. *pauca* in the first series and for the species-level model in the second. The outputs described in this report constitute one methodological component of the broader climate suitability assessment supporting the EFSA mandate on *X. fastidiosa*.

The updated Technical Report was endorsed for public consultation on 15 October 2026.

4.2 Endorsement for public consultation of updated draft Scientific Opinion on "climate suitability for *Xylella fastidiosa* for the EU" (EFSA-Q-2026-00038)

This Scientific Opinion assesses the climate suitability for *Xylella fastidiosa* in the EU territory, at species level and for the subspecies *fastidiosa, multiplex* and *pauca*. The assessment used an updated global occurrence dataset and combined three approaches: Köppen-Geiger climate-class screening, the bio06 bioclim variable (mean daily minimum near-surface air temperature of the coldest month), and risk maps derived from Ensemble Species Distribution Model (Ensemble-SDM) and Bayesian Additive Regression Trees (BART). At species level, Köppen-Geiger and bio06 approaches retained most of the EU territory as climatically suitable, with areas not retained mainly corresponding to colder northern regions and high-mountain areas. Subspecies-level outputs showed consistent differences, with subsp. *multiplex* associated with the broadest climatic range, followed by subsp. *fastidiosa*, while in general subsp. *pauca* showed the most restricted retained areas. The climate suitability assessment for subsp. *pauca* was affected by the restricted distribution of occurrence data. As a result, suitability was also projected to areas that the Panel did not consider biologically reliable for this subspecies. In general, the areas of southern Europe, from the south-western area of the Iberian Peninsula to the Mediterranean coastal and inland regions are consistently reported as climatically suitable for establishment. The outputs should

be interpreted as evidence on the climatic component of establishment and integrated with information on the host availability and vector presence, analysed in other outputs prepared under the same mandate. The approaches used only allow interpretations on climate suitability regarding pathogen occurrence, and no conclusions can be drawn about disease severity or impact

The updated Scientific Opinion was endorsed for public consultation on 15 October 2026.

4.3 Scientific Endorsement for public consultation of updated draft Scientific Opinion on "Update of the pest risk assessment of *Xylella fastidiosa* for the EU" (EFSA-Q-2026-00037)

EFSA was requested to update its 2019 risk assessment for *Xylella fastidiosa* focusing on subspecies involved in EU outbreaks. The assessment is based on several EFSA outputs covering mainly establishment, incubation periods, spread, impact and risk reduction options. Establishment is possible beyond currently affected areas with subsp. *multiplex* having the broadest potential extent followed by subsp. *fastidiosa* and *pauca*. Incubation periods vary markedly among host-subspecies combinations with median values ranging from 2 months for grapevine to approximately 2.5 years in olive, confirming that symptom-based surveillance alone is insufficient. Movement of infected plants-for-planting is a confirmed and important human-assisted spread pathway. Regarding impact, high losses are expected for olive (subsp. *pauca*), followed by almond (subsp. *multiplex* and *fastidiosa*) and citrus (subsp. *pauca*), while grapevine (subsp. *fastidiosa*) is expected to be less severely affected. Epidemiological modelling indicated that the minimum legislated requirements for surveillance and removal are insufficient for eradication. More intensive surveillance and larger removal radii improved success but required substantially greater control effort. Containment was more effective while outbreaks were still limited in extent, whereas even stringent measures had little effect once outbreaks were relatively large, supporting the need for early detection and rapid, intensive intervention. No in planta treatment has been shown to reliably eliminate *X. fastidiosa* from infected plants under field conditions, although some can mitigate symptoms. Hot water treatment of propagation material can be effective for curing some woody plants. Effective control methods for vectors exist, however, the magnitude of corresponding epidemic spread rate reductions remains uncertain. Resistant or tolerant plant material is available for several major crops and can reduce disease severity, bacterial populations or systemic colonisation. No single risk reduction option can provide effective control across all epidemiological situations. Integrated strategies combining measures targeting inoculum, vectors and plant material therefore provide the most appropriate basis for risk reduction.

The updated Scientific Opinion was endorsed for public consultation on 15 October 2026.

4.4 Scientific opinion on the smallest diameter of young trees for PWN spread and their survival after infestation (EFSA-Q-2026-00324)

Pinewood nematode (PWN) (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*) is a destructive pest of *Pinus* trees worldwide which is transmitted by cerambycid insects of the genus *Monochamus*. EFSA was asked to assess if the trading of young host trees from an infested area must be considered as risk of spreading the pest into pest-free regions, with particular focus on trees with stem diameters ranging from 20 to 30 mm. The assessment covered entry including transfer through this pathway. Establishment, subsequent spread and impact were outside the scope of this assessment, as these processes are no longer specific to the traded young trees and therefore do not affect the evaluation of the selected pathways. The assessment considered two potential pathways. First, an immediate pathway, in which traded young trees are already sufficiently large to support complete development of *Monochamus galloprovincialis*. This was assessed by eliciting the minimum stem diameter at root collar required for complete vector development. Second, a delayed pathway, in which a young tree becomes infested with PWN through *M. galloprovincialis* feeding in the nursery, survives subsequent handling, transport and planting, retains the nematode without detectable symptoms, and eventually grows large enough to support vector development and subsequent transmission. This pathway was assessed by eliciting the probabilities of infestation and survival

through the successive steps until the tree reached a size sufficient for vector development in two scenarios with different symptoms expression. Prior to elicitation, the accessible evidence from scientific literature and praxis knowledge regarding the pest, the host and the vector was collated in the evidence dossier. The assessment resulted in a critical diameter of 34 mm for complete vector development (90%-uncertainty interval: 26–40 mm). For the delayed pathway, the estimated frequency was approximately one surviving infested tree per 4,8 billion traded young trees destined for with mean summer temperature (MST) >19.14°C (90%-uncertainty interval: one per 52 billion to one per 980 million) and about one per 7,9 billion young trees destined for regions with MST <19.14°C (one per 228 billion to one per 820 million). The difference between the temperature scenarios and the assessed risk related to the delayed pathway are considered marginal.

The Scientific Opinion was adopted on 15 October 2026.

4.5 Scientific Opinion on Commodity risk assessment of sawn birch wood from Canada produced under systems approaches targeting *Agrilus anxius* (EFSA-Q-2026-00248)

The European Commission requested the EFSA Panel on Plant Health to deliver a risk assessment on the likelihood of pest freedom from *Agrilus anxius* of wood of *Betula papyrifera* and *B. alleghaniensis* originating or processed in Canada and subject to two different systems approaches as described in the dossier submitted by the applicant country. The assessment was conducted on sawn wood with a thickness ranging from 1.3 to 18 cm. Both systems approaches include a combination of debarking of logs, sawing and subsequent heat treatment of sawn wood, but they differ in this last phase, reaching 56°C at the core of the wood for 30 minutes in one systems approach and 71°C at the core of the wood for 1200 minutes in the other. The heat treatment step in this last systems approach (i.e., 71°C at the core of the wood for 1200 minutes), taken alone, is expected to be effective against the pest, without uncertainties, making that systems approach fully effective. For the other systems approach including a heat treatment phase reaching 56°C at the core of the wood for 30 minutes, an expert judgement is given on the likelihood of pest freedom taking into consideration the measures acting on the pest, including uncertainties associated with the assessment. For this systems approach, the Expert Knowledge Elicitation indicated, with 95% certainty, that between 9993 m3 and 10,000 m3 of sawn wood per 10,000 m3 will be free from living *A. anxius*.

The Scientific Opinion was adopted on 15 October 2026.

5. Any other business

The Panel Coordinator provided an overview of the public consultation process for the *Xylella fastidiosa* risk assessment outputs. Several technical reports had already been launched for public consultation, while a further set of outputs concerning climate suitability, spread modelling and the updated risk assessment would follow. Comments received would be reviewed by the relevant Working Group before the revised documents were returned to the Panel for final endorsement or adoption.

The Panel Coordinator explained that the outputs would be presented progressively at the November, December and January plenary meetings, allowing sufficient time to consider comments and incorporate newly available evidence. Member States were also being actively involved in the consultation through dedicated network meetings.

The PLH Panel Chair thanked the Panel Coordinator for the update and highlighted the importance of public consultation in ensuring transparency and stakeholder involvement. The Chair also marked the International Day of Rural Women, recognising the contribution of women working in the Panel, EFSA, universities, research institutes and related services, and emphasising the role of plant health in sustaining agriculture and ecosystem services in rural areas.

The meeting was then closed