

Minutes of the ERFP Steering Committee meeting

March 10th 2021 - webconference

Participants:

Chair: Sipke Joost Hiemstra, The Netherlands

National coordinators, members of the SC:

Christina Ligda, Greece

Srdjan Stojanović, Serbia

Montserrat Castellanos Moncho, Spain

Ruta Šveistienė, Lithuania

Jan Hendrik Schneider, Germany

Secretariat:

Coralie Danchin-Burge and Eleonore Charvolin-Lemaire (France)

Sipke Hiemstra welcomes the participants and introduces the agenda.

1. Brief information about the budget and bank payments

Cf. slides.

It is reminded that the 2020 budget will need to be formally approved during the General Assembly.

Due to the Covid situation, the amount of savings has increased in 2020/2021 which is conflicting with the general message that in the long run ERFP needs to increase its budget due to a constant raise of its activities and for strengthening the Secretariat role. The financial situation and future outlook will be presented and discussed during the 2021 General Assembly. The General Assembly may want to decide to invest more budget in communication on a structural basis (including the payment of scientific articles, see later), to invest additional budget for management of ERFP coordinated databases and interoperability between databases, and to offer the possibility of funding more ad hoc actions. It will be suggested that each WG comes up with at least one proposal for an ad hoc action, may be for a longer term than a year.

2. Follow up of the GenRes Bridge project

Cf. slides.

The feedback workshop was held virtually in November. The terms of the following draft needed a long process of negotiation in small groups between the three networks. The new version can be defined as a very advanced draft.

The animal and plant domains are both in favour of the establishment of a European Genetic Resources Information and Coordination centre to better coordinate GR actions at European level, with potential links to the reference centre mentioned in the Animal breeding regulation. The forest domain decided not to join this initiative.

The GenResBridge consortium, supported by the three networks ECPGR, ERFP and EUFORGEN, will submit the European Genetic Resources Strategy (EGRS) to the Commission. However, future adoption of (elements of) the Strategy by the EC will require that NCs and Member States put pressure on the Commission and highlight the relevance of the EU adopting the EGRS. . The General Assembly could be a good time to discuss this and to define a plan of action for NCs.

Meeting with EU representatives of the permanent zootechnical committee (Montserrat Castellanos)

Thanks to Montserrat Castellanos initiative, the DG SANTE Zootechnical Committee offered to discuss the implementation of the future strategy thanks to the setting up of a specific working group. The first meeting was held March 5th 2021 with Montserrat Castellanos plus two representatives from the zootechnical committee, including Ewa Camara. A main issue is that the Animal Breeding legislation is the most important AnGR specific regulation (DG SANTE). Since the Commission priority is animal health, there has been lot of budget cuts that affected all the programs. However the commission members agreed to include the strategy in the agenda of the next zootechnical committee in November. Montserrat Castellanos also suggested the Committee to include members of other DGs (such as AGRI and ENVIRONMENT), which was agreed upon. The Head of Unit of DG SANTE agreed to get in contact with others DG.

Horizon Europe Opportunities

Cf. slides.

New opportunities are coming and the ERFP network should be aware of and organised to be able to answer in a timely manner. The calls should also be seen as opportunities to follow up the strategy. A quick review of the calls give the feeling that the CL6 – CLI – 2022 call, “Fostering the resilience of food security”, would give more opportunities than the second one, “User-oriented solutions building on environmental observation to monitor critical ecosystems and biodiversity loss and vulnerability”.

3. Update on the work done by the *ad hoc* actions

a. Merino network

A webinar was held on line and also available on Facebook live. A dedicated Facebook page was created about the *Ad Hoc Action* where the webinar can be displayed (<https://www.facebook.com/adhocmerinonetwork>). The initiative was attended by more than 170 people mostly from Europe but also from countries of other continents. An assessment of the meeting is expected as well as new development actions.

b. Transboundary breeds

The AHA group is meeting about once a week and is planning to write a scientific article, which means a specific budget will probably be needed (see communication §). A first publication will be submitted to the Genetic Resources journal and more articles might be published depending on the material to be found.

Since this topic is relevant in the long run, it might become a more permanent activity. This will be discussed further as work is maturing in the group.

c. Genebank awareness

Following the last SC recommendations, Christina Ligda drafted a new version of the AHA which was validated by Fernando Tejerina, as the chair of the *ex situ* WG. The new draft will be circulated to the members of the *ex situ* WG.

Most of the work will be done in March and April so the *ex situ* WG members have time to review the final proposal before the WG meeting.

d. Interoperability of databases and portals

A workshop related to this item, which is part of the GenResBridge project, will be organized end of August 2021 in Switzerland by Enrico Sturaro and Zhivko Ducheve. A first draft of the AHA has been drafted by Zhivko Ducheve and proofread by Sipke Hiemstra.

e. Call for new AHA

Due to the Covid situation, part of the ERFP budget such as the expenses expected for the WG meeting are not going to be spent. This is an opportunity to develop new AHA's and a clear message should be sent to NCs and WG experts to propose and implement new actions. The secretariat will draft examples of items to give ideas to the NCs.

Montserrat Castellanos would like to start an AHA to assess breeding programs, including conservation programs. Spain has set up a grid which can give an overview of the effectiveness of the program, its strong points as well as its gaps and weak points. A brief presentation could be given during the joint part of the WGs which could be used as a starting point for an AHA.

Ruta Šveistienė informs the SC that the idea of an AHA about pony breeds in Baltic countries is processing.

4. Communication and valorization of ERFP work

Alcandora drafted a first version of an interview of Sipke Hiemstra, as ERFP chair, by a person who has a large number of followers. A first proposal was reviewed by the Secretariat then by Sipke Hiemstra but both were limited by the suggested frame of the interview that did not seem right. The interview is planned for June, but Sipke Hiemstra will have preparatory meeting with the interviewer first

Another output of the GenResBridge project is the implementation of a Genetic Resources gateway, which is to be realised spring 2021. The administration of the gateway is the responsibility of the three secretariats and it is to be continued for three more years under the responsibility of the Forest Genetic Resources secretariat. The maintenance of the portal in the long run will have to be discussed, as well as the task of its implementation. It is difficult to predict how time consuming this task will be for the Secretariat, it will depend of its popularity.

A discussion is dedicated on the focus of the ERP communication; most items published on the social media are meant for the general public but it seems that we might be missing some focus on our own network. It seems that the number of committed NCs on ERFP topic is declining therefore we should commit some our communication efforts toward them.

5. Relationship with EAAP; Chairs for EAAP session

Montserrat Castellanos took the advantage of the Spanish Presidency to exchange about the ERFP interrogations. Thanks to her intervention, most items were clarified.

A challenge session is organized about the GenResBridge project and chaired by Sipke Hiemstra. He will exchange further with the SC on the persons to be invited and the setup of the session.

6. Planning of the further ERFP activities in 2021:

a. WG planning; organization; first agenda proposal

The agenda proposal of each individual WG is presented by the Secretariat.

The EGRS will be presented briefly since it is almost final and NCs had opportunities to react. The focus will be set on the AnGR since we need inputs from the WG members.

The meeting will be 100% virtual with no costs for the ERFP network; therefore NCs that are not part of a WG will be also invited but they will not vote on any decisions from the WG (such as elections).

The SC suggests to add a discussion about breeding programs in the joint session, and may be also a the AHA about Interoperability of databases. Each WG should also promote the implementation of new AHA.

b. ITWG 2021

Nina Saether agreed to chair the AHA; the Secretariat will ask her if she can proceed with its preparation.

Neither Coralie Danchin nor Eleonore Charvolin-Lemaire are NC, therefore they do not receive FAO information about the organization of the ITWG. The Secretariat will ask FAO if the ERFP secretariat can be included as a permanent observer.

7. Organizations of the next General Assembly (GA)

The Swiss NC (Melissa Raemy) is working hard with its team to organize the logistic of a physical venue in Bernt (Switzerland). There were thorough exchanges with the secretariat about the organization that is thought to follow preCovid schedule, with the SC being held the Friday before the GA, and the GA lasting 1,5 day before a half a day tour. People should be able to join Davos by train for the EAAP congress at the end of the weekend.

The local committee will be asked if it is possible to organize a mixed meeting, both physical and virtual, since it is not sure that all the NCs and potential participants will be vaccinated by August.

The Agenda will be divided in two parts, “business meeting”, and other topics for general discussion. One item should be the Animal Genetic Resources Strategy. The final version of the EGRS will be presented just for the context. Another part of the meeting could be devoted to the new CAP and exchanges of point of views on how the AnGR could be included in the strategic plans.

The secretariat will draft a first version of the GA agenda before the next SC.

8. Replacements members for the SC and chair

The SC is asked to suggest names to replace the ERFP chair (Sipke Hiemstra) and one SC member (Srdjan Stojanović). NCs will also be asked for suggestions prior the GA.

9. AOB

The ERFP secretariat is involved in two PRIMA projects that are going to be funded, as a member of the advisory board. The secretariat will be the contact point for the project

coordinators but members of the SC can also be called to participate to the advisory boards depending on the issue debated or the secretariat agenda.

The next webmeeting of the SC will be held 8th of June 2021

The meeting closed at 12h30.