

Transfer of invasive pests by the sea container pathway – **progress report** July 2026

Reference

Final

Date

24 July 2026

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TRANSFER OF INVASIVE PESTS BY THE SEA CONTAINER PATHWAY – PROGRESS REPORT JULY 2026

These notes draw on a Global Shippers Forum (GSF) Container Cleanliness Working Group meeting held on 22 July 2026, which ICHCA attended as a guest. They summarise discussion of work being taken forward by a Focus Group on Sea Containers established in 2023 by the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM). The content should be treated as a progress report only, based on information available at the time of drafting; it does not necessarily represent the settled views of organisations named and may change as formal processes continue.

Executive Summary

The CPM Focus Group is moving towards a package of risk-reduction measures rather than recommending immediate development of a new International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures. The current direction appears to favour practical and voluntary measures: pest-resistant container design specifications, wider use of the revised CTU Code, voluntary custodial responsibility clauses, national accreditation or recognition schemes, and targeted awareness or education packages. ICHCA's main interest is to ensure that any pest-prevention measures are practical, proportionate and do not introduce new safety risks for people involved in packing, handling, inspection, cleaning or transport operations.

The parallel and separate work on an Asia-Pacific Regional Plant protection Standard could have a trade impact if implemented, potentially affecting movements from, to or through APPPC and PPPO member states.

CPM Focus Group

The CPM Focus Group has operated since 2003 and is due to report by the end of 2026. Its membership is mainly made up of National Plant Protection Organisation representatives, with BIC, GSF and the World Shipping Council (WSC) acting as industry representatives. The Focus Group's task is to recommend steps to reduce the transfer of invasive pest species into non-native environments via shipping containers. That task is difficult because pest prevention measures must be balanced against maintenance of the smooth movement of trade. The need to check and clean containers of visible pest contamination is not disputed but the potential routine inspection and washing of all containers has been challenged as it would introduce, what is seen by some parties as, impracticable cost and disruption across the supply chain. ICHCA's principal concern is the safety of people who may be affected by any pest prevention measures.

Focus Group Decisions

The final in-person Focus Group meeting (6-10 July 2026) met to discuss and agree the measures it will recommend to CPM in its concluding report. That report is due to be submitted by the end of 2026. These outcomes remain subject to review and revision until that time. CPM will decide whether to implement the recommendations at its meeting in April 2027

Plant Protection Regulation

Consideration: whether to recommend an International Phytosanitary Measure (ISPM) be developed by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

Draft text was developed to define possible scope and requirements of ‘mandatory measures’. Aimed at National Plant Protection Organisations (NPPOs) requiring them to: conduct container contamination surveys, introduce measures based on survey results and promote awareness of risk reduction measures amongst industry stakeholders, including custodial responsibilities.

Outcome: ISPM development considered feasible, but not recommended at this stage. The Focus Group position appears to be that other measures should be tried first before moving towards a formal international phytosanitary standard.

Container Design

Consideration: whether to recommend development of pest-resistant containers by addressing holes, gaps, ledges and other design features that can harbour invasive pests or make cleaning more difficult.

Outcome: recommend a draft specification for pest-resistant containers to CPM (see Annex 1)

Note: CPM endorsement would be needed to justify a new ISO workstream and eventual incorporation into ISO standards. This is likely to take at least two to three years, meaning pest-resistant container designs are unlikely to enter production before 2030.

CTU Code

Consideration: the role of the *revised* IMO/ILO/UNECE Code of Practice for Packing of Cargo Transport Units (CTU Code) with new pest related content.

Outcome: recommend that the revised CTU Code be treated as the go-to source for container packing techniques and practices, including pest-related cleanliness provisions.

Note: CTU Code container cleanliness provisions developed by Focus Group. Revised code passing through IMO, ILO and UNECE approval. Publication expected during 2027.

Industry Voluntary Measures

Considered: future role of the joint GSF/WSC Custodial Responsibility model.

Outcome: GSF and WSC will develop Custodial Responsibility into voluntary 'Performance Specification' clauses for inclusion in contracted arrangements. These clauses could then be used by individual shippers and container operators when procuring packing, haulage, storage and handling services from other parties.

Note: For ICHCA, any voluntary performance specification should make clear that pest prevention duties must be compatible with safe systems of work. Requirements to inspect, clean, reject or document container condition should be achievable by the parties expected to carry them out, with suitable information, competence, equipment and controls.

Customs Regulation

Considered: whether to recommend that Customs Declarations include declarations on container cleanliness. Draft wording: "The container(s) and their cargoes covered by this declaration are free from any visible material of animal and/or plant origin, soil and insects"

Outcome: This issue was not discussed due to lack of time. It remains an active proposal that will be considered at a future (on-line) meeting of the FG.

Accreditation Route

Considered: whether to recommend accreditation programmes that benefit pest prevention diligence by shippers.

Outcome: recommend that NPPOs be encouraged to develop recognition (accreditation) programmes for shippers able to meet mandatory standards.

Note: The carrot here is that recognition would qualify shippers for reduced inspections at borders, or other facilitations. Negotiated nationally.

Awareness/Education

Considered: whether to recommend an educational/outreach programme.

Outcome: recommend that educational packages be developed for clearly defined target audiences.

Other standards in play

Considered: how any recommendations intersect with the draft Asia-Pacific proposed Regional Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (RSPM).

Outcome: proceed with recommendations independent of RSPM progress.

Regional Standard for Phytosanitary Management

A draft has been in circulation since 2025 for Regional Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (RSPM) affecting Asia-Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC) and Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (PPPO) member states (see annex 2 and 3 for member state listings).

Such a standard, if implemented, would be expected to affect container movements from, to and through the relevant member states. A non-attributed estimate suggests that up to 30% of the world's container movements could fall within scope.

Development and implementation of RSPMs sits outside the CPM Focus Group remit.

Timeline

October 2026	Estimated first draft of GSF/WSC voluntary Custodial Responsibility Performance Specification
December 2026	Final Focus Group report, including recommended measures
April 2027	CPM 21 to consider Focus Group recommendations for new global measures

Annex 1 – Pest-resistant container design features

Under structure:

- Fully coated (painted) components
- Bitumastic coatings not acceptable

Vents:

- labyrinth design, stainless steel
- insect-proof screen (1 mm aperture)

Sills & bolster:

- Fully closed design with no protruding lower flanges

Floor:

- Durable material with all joints permanently closed;
- Ends, sides & panel joints permanently hermetically sealed

Cross members:

- Avoid lower ledges, flanges or protrusions
- Closed design, if possible
- Open lower flanges not acceptable

Annex 2 – Asia-Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC) member states

Australia	Indonesia	Samoa
Bangladesh	Malaysia	Solomon Islands
Cambodia	Myanmar	Sri Lanka
China	Nepal	Thailand
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	New Zealand	Timor-Leste
Fiji	Pakistan	Tonga
France	Papua New Guinea	Viet Nam
India	Philippines	
	Republic of Korea	

Annex 3 - Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (PPPO) member states

American Samoa	Marshall Islands	Pitcairn Islands
Cook Islands	Nauru	Samoa
Federated States of Micronesia	New Caledonia	Solomon Islands
Fiji Islands	Niue	Tokelau
French Polynesia	Northern Mariana Islands	Tonga
Guam	Palau	Tuvalu
Kiribati	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu
		Wallis and Futuna

International Cargo Handling Coordination Association

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Contact

secretariat@ichca.com for further information or visit the web site www.ichca.com. ICHCA International Ltd
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