

# UK Plant Genetic Resources Group

Minutes of the UKPGR meeting on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018, 11:00 – 16:00  
At Defra, Nobel House, London

**Nigel Maxted**, University of Birmingham (Chair: NM)  
**Matt Ordidge**, University of Reading (MO)  
**John Dickie**, Kew (JD)  
**Lydia Smith**, NIAB EMR (LS)  
**Hilary Papworth**, NIAB EMR (HP)  
**Glenn Bryan**, James Hutton Institute (GB)  
**Sean May**, University of Nottingham (SM)  
**Solomy Nantege**, Defra (SN)

**Kalani Seymour**, Plant Heritage (KL)  
**Catrina Fenton**, Garden Organic (CF)  
**Noam Chayut**, JIC (NC)  
**Julian Hosking**, (JH)  
**Tom Christie**, SASA (TC)  
**Rachel Davis**, Defra (RD)  
**Caroline Liddell**, Defra (CL)

## 18/22 Apologies (NM)

Andrew Daymond, (Univ. Reading), Peter Hoebe (SRUC), Joanne Russell (James Hutton Institute), Penny Maplestone (BSPB), Simon Toomer (Natural England), Ruth Eastwood (Kew), Gerard Hoppe (AFBI Crossnacreevy), Abi Johnson (NIAB EMR), Ianto Thomas (Aberystwyth Univ.), Sue Goligher (Defra), Felicidad Fernandez (NIAB EMR), Charlotte Allender (Univ. Warwick), Frances Gawthrop (Tozer Seeds), Ian Taylor (Natural England)

The meeting was chaired by Nigel Maxted (NM).

## 18/23 Minutes of meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018 (NM)

TS questioned the first bullet point of agenda point 18/18 about fruit testing and suggested it was incorrect that there will be no DUS testing facilities in the UK and therefore should be removed. LS agreed explaining that while CPVO testing for ornamental PBR (Plant Breeder's Rights) has been redistributed across the remaining member states of Europe, NIAB has retained its capacity for testing on behalf of the UK at Defra's request. However the work they have will diminish considerably.

**Action secretary: Remove this sentence from the minutes.**

## 18/24 Matters Arising (NM)

NM reminded the group that a discussion was going to take place between James Williams and Ianto Thomas about providing data for back casting with the new plant agrobiodiversity indicator rather than starting with no data. NM asked if this discussion had happened yet and made clear that if not it should happen urgently as Ianto will retire by the end of this year and before next UKPGR meeting at which point the data may no longer be available. TS volunteered to follow up with James and Ianto about this issue.

**Action TS: Facilitate discussion between James and Ianto about data for new indicator.**

NM described to the group that he had followed up on his action from the last meeting to contact the dean at Aberystwyth University to discuss a replacement for Ianto but has not received a reply. LS and SM proposed that the group could suggest potential candidates for the replacement or some sort of contingency plan. NM did not feel that was appropriate until we know if Ianto is being replaced at all and whether it will be part of the replacement's job remit, as Ianto may have been submitting national inventory data to the ECPGR voluntarily.

**18/25 Breadth of material included in UK national PGR inventory (NM)**

NM explained that historically the UKPGR group had focused primarily on PGR food and agriculture but had recently expanded to include the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and Plant Heritage (PH) who have a broader remit. Having been included in the group, representatives of RHS and PH feel the group should have a broader remit as well to include species of interest to them. NM prompted the group to discuss whether it wanted to remain purely PGR food and agriculture focussed or extend its remit, and if it did extend where it would draw the line. The group was asked to give feedback on what additions should be made to the original list of taxa which was circulated by NM together with KS's much larger list.

Asked by LS if there was any reason not to expand NM explained his initial concerns that the group might lose its unique selling point of being experts on genetic resources as expanding may lead to a loss of that focus. NC was concerned that if the remit becomes too broad the group may eventually split. LS added that including all the botanicals the RHS might be interested in would lead to the remit becoming enormous. NM pointed out that the group would continue to focus on the conservation of genetic diversity within taxa rather than conservation per se. Furthermore, the RHS and PH are only two collections representing the broader remit so if membership is kept as it is they will not dominate the group. Finally, the group will continue to provide its unique selling point as the same experts will remain members while also adding new expertise. KS pointed out that the UKPGR website says the group represents botanical gardens and was wondering if BGCI (Botanic Gardens Conservation International) or a representative of UK botanic gardens had been approached? NM said we would not be actively seeking out new members to join the group and that anyone wishing to join would be considered on a one-by-one basis.

In conclusion the group as a whole was in favour of expanding the remit to extend beyond plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to include all plant species for which there is a link between genetic diversity and commercial or scientific use and agreed that there should not be a list as this may limit the species that can be included.

**18/26 Update on European funding opportunities (CB)**

Chris Barker was unable to attend the meeting but sent an update on Horizon 2020 which was circulated to the group prior to the meeting. LS pointed out that what is covered in the update does not include other relevant areas of funding e.g. ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) which includes programmes such as INTERREG that provide enormous amounts of money. LS would like to know if any discussion is being held about these and would also appreciate more information on Marie Curie funding, specifically which project areas will continue to receive funding and which not. NM does not think anyone can say anything definitively at this stage because no one knows what is going to happen so no valid reassurance can be given (apologised for being pessimistic).

**18/27 EU Exit (Defra)**

Charlotte Hill and Fiona Hopkins (Defra) dialled in to the meeting to give an update on the potential impact of EU exit on phytosanitary issues and plant variety rights, respectively. More detailed information including technical notices on these topics can be found on the Defra website.

Guidance on importing and exporting plants and plant products if there's no Brexit deal: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/importing-and-exporting-plants-if-theres-no-brex-it-deal/importing-and-exporting-plants-and-plant-products-if-theres-no-brex-it-deal>

Guidance on variety rights and marketing of seeds and propagating material if there's no Brexit deal: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-variety-rights-and-marketing-of->

**18/28 ECPGR Update (NM)**

Since raising the issues of chairs doing all the work but not being given the opportunity to input into the decisions made by the steering committee there is now a chair's group that meets twice each phase to give input to ECPGR. During the most recent chair group meeting it was agreed that a structure for change would be created in the chair's meetings. Also, at the ECPGR steering committee meeting attended by NM on behalf of Defra the decision was made by secretariat that they would receive input from the chairs once per phase. There was also a lot of debate on ECPGR steering committee about the input of ECPGR to the CAP reform. NM gave a talk to the European parliament in December 2017 and was told that this was exactly the kind of input needed for the CAP reform yet he has not been involved in any further discussions. NM feels that the ECPGR is not making use of the expertise of its chairs in different groups especially as those chairs who are not also national coordinators have no input.

**18/29 PGR applications/project news (NM)**

LS reported they were concentrating their work on GCRA on top of the TIGR2ESS project. They have also put in a bid with the University of Cambridge for a project looking at millet and the variety of accessions for utilisation in two key areas of use in Africa. There is also a lot of interest and work going on around *Phaseolus*.

SM reported that they were mid-grant and had nothing particular to add, except that their US sister centre (ABRC in OSU) had appointed a new Director: Dave Somers.

JD said there was not much to report on CWR work apart from the slight extension on some of the posts but a lot of contracts are now finishing. NM asked what will happen to the expertise in CWR. JD replied they are trying to get an extension but are not there yet.

TS had nothing to report

CF reported that they were waiting for the outcome of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for national heritage seed search. The Warwickshire Wildlife Trust have a 3yr project to grow oak saplings from ancient woodland acorns. They are also involved in an ongoing project with Coventry University comparing heritage vegetables with modern commercial varieties. Finally, there is ongoing involvement with the H2020 Dynaversity SKEP programme.

GB said they have put bids in to GCRF (BBSRC's Global Challenges Research Fund) for different calls all around potatoes but none successful so far. They have also put in a bid for the sustainable systems call for a project looking into the quality of repatriated landraces and the development of novel potato products from these landraces in Argentina. They are also involved in a big H2020 project called G2P-SOL: a global research alliance to preserve and revive the genetic resources of Solanaceous crops. As part of their role in this project they have just genotyped 7000 accessions of potatoes using GBS. The next phase of the project will focus on phenotyping and crop collections.

NC reported they have mainly been engaging in internal projects such as the regeneration of all the material collected from breeders in the late 70s comprising around 10,000 accessions per year over the next two years. They have also added two new collections to the website.

MO reported that the main application news was that the NFC contract negotiations for 2019 onwards were underway with Defra. Reading were also involved in a consortium developing a

proposal for the upcoming Horizon 2020 call, and were due to host a meeting to begin to establish a local cultivar register, in order to recognise some of the unique material that had been found in local collections by community led genetic fingerprinting.

KS reported that Plant Heritage have lost their CEO and 2 other staff who are not currently being replaced although they are advertising for a full time conservation manager for 3 years. KS described how her job role is changing slightly to focus on getting more active conservation work carried out by established and experienced collection holders

JH had nothing to report

NM reported that he and JH attended a stakeholder workshop held at Defra in Bristol to discuss the future of the AHDB with the aim of having PGR included in the remit. Also, the first stakeholder discussion workshop for the Farmer's Pride meeting was taking place in Denmark in the week after this meeting. Finally, NM described their work as partners in a new H2020 project called GenRes Bridge attempting to bring together the Crop, Forestry and animal GR sectors and write an integrated conservation and use strategy for all three sectors

**18/30 Update on plant material export fees stakeholder group (NC)**

NC attended a stakeholder meeting of mainly industry representatives to discuss Defra and APHA fees for phytosanitary services, tests, inspections, etc. Among other issues, the different needs of genebanks and industry were also discussed. Following this meeting an APHA officer visited the JIC, so there seemed to be interest. Together with Charlotte Allender (CA) and MO, NC tried to connect the stakeholder group and UKPGR group but never heard back. NM asked if it would be worth writing a letter on behalf of the committee. NC said that had already been discussed between them and that he thought CA had agreed to write a letter on behalf of the committee but would follow up with her about this. NM said the letter should point out our need for clarity on what the various fees will be, including within and outside the EU. MO pointed out that no one knows what the situation will be but that it is a good opportunity to flag up the needs of genetic resources which are distinct from those of industry to be considered as these decisions on fees are being made. NC explained that the fees for plant materials are so high already it is already impeding work with the JIC reporting they have had orders cancelled by developing countries which cannot afford to pay the fees. SM suggested that we make the case that these fees are preventing access and benefit sharing. NC added that people and countries who donated materials in the first place can no longer afford to access them.

**Action NC: Follow up with CA about letter to be written on behalf of the committee.**

**18/31 AOB (NM)**

MO updated the group about an ECPGR workshop he and NC will be attending in December with the aim of strengthening AEGIS, the European Genebank Integrated System. NM pointed out that not enough collections are being added to AEGIS and suggested a discussion needs to be held with Defra about the feasibility of AEGIS for the UK.

SM will be updating the UKPGR mailing list. Everyone will be asked to confirm whether they want to be on the list.

**18/32 Date of next meeting (NM)**

The date of the next meeting was not discussed. A date will be suggested by email.