

UK Plant Genetic Resources Group Meeting
DATE & TIME: Wednesday 21st October 2020 from 11am – 1:30pm
LOCATION: Via Zoom

Nigel Maxted , University of Birmingham (NM – Chair)	Lesley McCarthy , SASA (LM)
Charlotte Allender , University of Warwick (CA)	Lydia Smith , NIAB EMR (LS)
Joanne Russell , James Hutton Institute (JR)	James Williams , JNCC (JW)
Glenn Bryan , James Hutton Institute (GB)	Solomy Nantege , Defra (SN)
Sarah Trinder , University of Warwick (ST)	Caroline Liddell , Defra (CL)
Matt Ordidge , University of Reading (MO)	Elizabeth Scott , NIAB (ES)
Sean May , University of Nottingham (SM)	Karen Thomas , Defra (KT)
Lin Huang , Aberystwyth University (LH)	Rachel Davis , Defra (RD)
Frances Gawthrop , Tozer Seeds (FG)	Chris Barker , Defra (CB)
Catrina Fenton , Garden Organic (CF)	Noam Chayut , JIC (NC)
Kalani Seymour , Plant Heritage (KS)	John Dickie , Kew (JD)
Simon Toomer , National Trust (ST)	Julian Hosking (JH)
Vicki Cooke , Plant Heritage (VC)	Ian Smith , Defra (IS)

20/14 Apologies (NM)
Felicidad Fernandez – NIAB EMR, **Ian Taylor** – Natural England (IT)

The meeting was chaired by Nigel Maxted (NM).

20/15 Minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2020 (NM)
The group agreed that the minutes from the previous meeting held on 10th March 2020 reflected a true and accurate account of proceedings.

20/16 Matters arising (NM)
No matters arising from the minutes from the previous meeting.

20/17 AHDB's role in the implementation of genetic resources conservation schemes (IS)
Ian Smith, from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Relationship team in Defra gave a brief overview of the team's role and recent activities. The team ran a Request for Views in 2018 on the future of the AHDB including what its future role and activities should be. Responses from the consultation showed that the majority of respondents supported the existence of the Board and a need for a statutory levy to continue. It was however too early to know what the Board's possible role would be in terms of plant genetic resources namely the implementation of genetic resources conservation schemes. **NM** requested **IS** to circulate a link to the consultation summary of views and government response to the group.
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/880143/ahdb-consult-sum-resp.pdf)

The UKPGR group asked that AHDB support the use and conservation of plant genetic resources as this would be beneficial to the levy payers. **NM** mentioned that he had had a meeting with Dr. Georgina Key, a Resource Management Scientist at AHDB, who agreed to attend the next UKPGR meeting (March 2021) to discuss this further.

20/18 Update on the PGR indicator (JW)

JW presented a “Developing a new Plant Genetic Resources indicator” paper written by himself and Graham French from JNCC and Karen Thomas from the Defra Statistics team, using data from the Millennium Seed Bank combined with data from the National Fruit Collections, National Vegetable Genebank, and the Germplasm Resource Unit at Aberystwyth to guide the indicator discussion. As a reminder, the UKPGR group feel that the current indicator which is based on Enrichment Index data is unsatisfactory and misrepresentative and thus an improved, scientifically justifiable indicator is needed.

MO felt that the graphs in the paper still presented a retrospective picture of how the UK has got to where it currently is which does not help monitor whether or not the UK is maintaining its position. He advised that there should be a graph showing how the UK genebanks are changing on a year-to-year basis in terms of their content and not necessarily on how they got to where they currently are in order to fulfil the numerous targets looking at maintaining genetic diversity. In addition, **NM** highlighted that the graphs were based on acquisitions and did not include lost and used material and therefore not showing an actual estimate of genebank holdings.

ST reminded the group that the conservation of genetic resources target covers all cultivated plants and the group should thus look beyond genebanks e.g. botanical gardens for data to include as discussed in previous meetings. The group agreed that other sources of plant genetic resources should also be considered in terms of the indicator because genebanks only represented a small proportion. However, it was suggested that **JW** uses the data currently and easily available to produce an indicator immediately while considering ways of accessing and integrating the additional datasets.

ACTION: The PGR indicator sub-group to look into how groups that do not submit data to EURISCO can be included in the indicator data collection exercise and report back at the next meeting. The group includes Nigel Maxted, John Dickie, Kalani Seymour, Matt Ordidge, Charlotte Allender, James Williams and Karen Thomas.

20/19

Update on European funding opportunities (CB)

The first tranche of new projects from the 2020 work programme call of Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 2 have been awarded, including three PGR-related projects focused on addressing the GenRes-user interface and pre-breeding activities. This concludes the PGR-related projects to be funded under the Horizon 2020 programme.

CB indicated Defra was aware that some UK partners in project consortia have been asked how they will be funded when the transition period ends on 31 December 2020. He reminded the group that the Withdrawal Agreement guarantees that for all EU programmes funded under the 2014-20 Multiannual Financial Framework, UK entities will continue to receive EU funding for the duration of their projects. This includes existing projects and for any new projects that will start after 1st January 2021.

The European Commission was still working to finalise the legislative package for Horizon Europe, which will replace Horizon 2020. The process had reached the Trilogue stage involving discussions between the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. The Council aimed to conclude these before the end of 2020 so that Horizon

Europe could start in January 2021. It was envisaged that the first work programme calls would be adopted and published in mid-April 2021.

Discussions with the European Commission on UK participation in Horizon Europe were continuing as part of the wider UK-EU negotiations. The UK's ambition is to fully associate to the programme subject to agreeing a fair and balanced deal. If the UK does not associate, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will implement alternative domestic schemes (under development) to address the funding gap. However, under all scenarios, it is the Government's aim that UK organisations and entities can participate in Horizon Europe collaborative projects open to third countries.

20/20

National PGR Strategy and Action Plan (NM)

NM reminded the group about the need to have an integrated UK PGR strategy and thus provided an action plan with a draft structure for discussion. However, with a genetic resources chapter within the Nature Strategy 2030 planned to be published in Spring 2021 **RD** did not think Defra could commit to a separate detailed PGR strategy. She will report back on Defra's position once she has discussed this with the Nature Strategy team and the relevant Defra senior team. **RD** advised that the UK PGR strategy could be developed as a detailed extension to the genetic resources chapter in the Nature Strategy 2030 should it not go into satisfactory detail. **JH** recommended the addition of a statement within the Nature Strategy 2030 from Defra encouraging and recognizing the development of supporting strategies.

20/21

Defra update including Nature Strategy, ELMs, etc. (RD/CL)

The publication of the Nature Strategy 2030 has been postponed to Autumn 2021 due to covid-19. However, the team has already coordinated with stakeholders to produce a scoping document for the genetic resources chapter, with drafting of the chapter to begin in early Spring 2021 and be finalized at the end of Summer 2021.

Additionally, the team is currently engaging with the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELM) team to consider what support could be available for genetic resources. As a reminder, the suggestions need to be linked to the six public goods and land management. **RD** mentioned that the team had suggested several potential actions but asked the group if there were more suggestions that could be covered under the scheme. However, should these suggestions not be included in the ELM scheme, there could be other routes under which these may be covered e.g. the new funding power in the Ag. Bill.

20/22

Orchard network update (MO)

No update to give.

20/23

PGR applications/project news (All)

Each member of the UKPGR group gave an update on current projects and activities they were undertaking.

20/24

AOB

- The next Summer Technical meeting (July 2021) may have to be cancelled due to the uncertainties caused by covid-19. A final decision will be made at the Spring meeting (March 2021).
- **CA** mentioned that The UK Vegetable Genebank (UKVGB) celebrated its 40th anniversary virtually on 8th October.

- **NM** suggested having Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) representatives to the UKPGR group meetings.

20/25

Date of next meeting (NM) – 17th March 2021