



Summary of a Network Coordinating Group on Documentation and Information and the EURISCO Advisory Group



Joint Meeting, 11 April 2005, Bonn, Germany
L. Maggioni, *compiler*

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1. Introduction

A joint meeting of the Documentation and Information Network Coordinating Group and the EURISCO Advisory Group was held on 11 April 2005 at the Information Centre for Biological Diversity, ZADI/IBV, Bonn, Germany.

This summary includes the main discussion, recommendations and decisions taken by the joint groups.

The following background documents and Powerpoint presentations will be uploaded on the Web¹ as Appendices:

- Programme of the meeting
- List of participants
- Update on the Documentation & Information Network (by F. Begemann)
- Data flow in Europe (by F. Begemann)
- Update on EURISCO (by S. Dias)
- The Challenge Programme (by T. van Hintum)
- Presentation of TDWG and GBIF (by D. Endresen)
- UNEP-GEF Project (by S. Gaiji)
- PGR Forum Project (by S. Roscher)
- ICIS - The International Crop Information System (by J. Vorwald, presented by H. Knüpffer)
- Northern Regional Gene Bank cooperation (by D. Endresen)
- Relationship between EURISCO and GBIF (by D. Endresen)
- Relationship between EURISCO and CCDBs (by T. van Hintum)
- International role of EURISCO (by S. Gaiji)
- Exchange format of PGR *in situ* data (by S. Roscher and S. Gaiji)

2. Documentation and Information Network structure

F. Begemann presented the current structure of the Documentation and Information (D&I) Network, consisting of a Network Coordinating Group (NCG), with a supervisory role, and two advisory bodies, with technical support functions, as follows:

- 1) EURISCO Advisory Group, with the function of monitoring the progress of EURISCO and giving advice on its further development;
- 2) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Advisory Group (ICT/AG), which offers its services to help and give advice to database managers.

The question was raised of whether it still served any useful purpose to maintain the ICT/AG in existence. This small group of people, belonging to the so-called Documentation Support Centres (DSCs), historically played the role of promoting initiatives and offering a reference point for the provision of technical support. It was felt that the function of this group does not need to be maintained any longer by only certain centres since several more institutions have now acquired the appropriate knowledge and skills. Moreover, it was confirmed that the services of the ICT/AG have not been requested in the last year and a half, either due to its low visibility or to lack of need.

¹ http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/Networks/Info_doc/Presentations.htm

Decision

The ICT/AG (former Internet Advisory Group) is thanked for its valuable work and the driving function that it played in the past and it is declared terminated. The D&I Network will however continue to offer an advisory role upon request. Requests on PGR documentation issues can be sent to the ECP/GR Secretariat or the Network Coordinator or the appropriate network institution directly. All the requests will then be channelled appropriately in order to provide technical advice and support.

3. PGR data flow in Europe

A PGR data flow chart in Europe was presented by F. Begemann (see Fig. 1) and some questions were raised for discussion:

- Where should *in situ* data be positioned (within or outside EURISCO)?
- What should be the exchange format for *in situ* data?
- How should PGR characterization and evaluation data be channelled from suppliers to users?

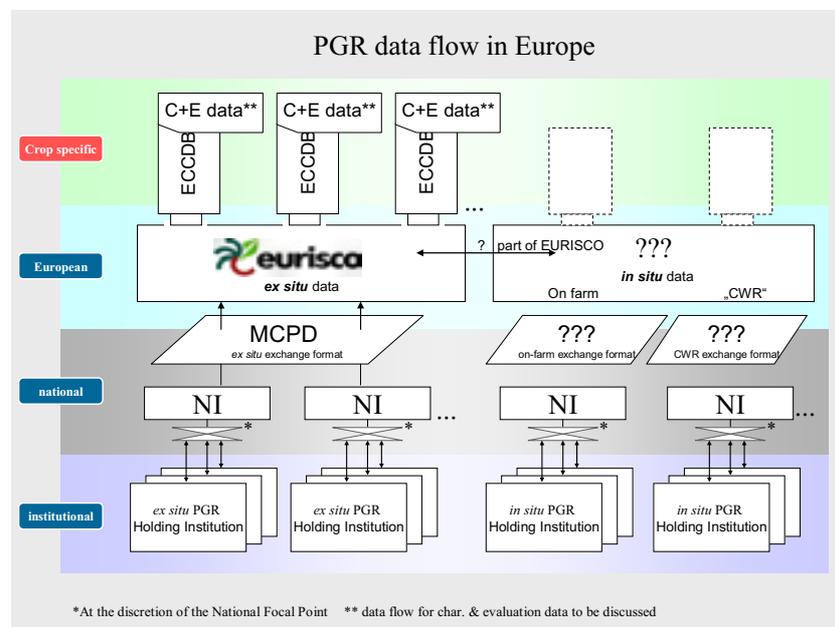


Fig. 1. PGR data flow chart in Europe, presented by F. Begemann

3.1. Relationship between *in situ* and *ex situ* data

To answer a question about the IPGRI position on the preferred structure for data flow in Europe, S. Gaiji and L. Maggioni emphasized the importance of establishing a coherent European Information System under the aegis of ECP/GR, whereby *ex situ* and *in situ* data might be gathered, deposited and displayed through the same type of organizational and technical infrastructure. To further promote this development, an offer was made by the partners of the EU-funded project PGR Forum (European Crop Wild Relative Diversity Assessment and Conservation Forum), to hand over the documentation products from this project (i.e. the Crop Wild Relative Information System), to be maintained by IPGRI on behalf of ECP/GR. IPGRI accepted this task and is currently considering various options for linkage with EURISCO.

Overall, IPGRI would recommend the network to first define what are the scientific or user questions to be addressed and take the solutions preferred by the national partners into account before deciding on the most appropriate organizational structure for data flow.

3.2. Exchange format for PGR *in situ* data

S. Roscher made the point that multicrop descriptors for *ex situ* and *in situ*/on-farm data could be the same to a large extent. For some taxa there is a long tradition and experience of *in situ* data and databases already exist, while data exchange is sometimes an issue.

The group considered that several links already exist between *ex situ* and *in situ*, including on-farm, data and that many passport descriptors are likely to be common to all these categories, therefore it should usually be advantageous to consider all these data together.

S. Gaiji informed the group that IPGRI is in the process of developing CWR (Crop Wild Relative) descriptors, and that the process is open to wide participation by experts.

Decision

Considering that the process of developing in situ descriptors is open to wide participation, it was decided that whoever wishes to get involved in the process should contact Sabine Roscher, ZADI, who will coordinate the efforts from this group and collaborate closely with the IPGRI team which is developing the descriptors.

3.3. EURISCO and GBIF

The various technical options presented by D. Endresen to make genetic resource data available through the Web were discussed, in particular with regard to the opportunity to make them available to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

It was acknowledged that, by integrating EURISCO into GBIF, accessibility of information to the users would be improved, since the GR information would be displayed in a wider context. It was also concluded that the latter service could be a desirable spin-off from the future development of EURISCO, although it was not the most important target which ought to influence the definition of organizational structures for genetic resources data flow in Europe.

In particular, the role of National Inventory Focal Points as essential nodes for data flow and data validation was reaffirmed. These were recognized as the organizational structures which most need to be strengthened in order to improve data flow in a well-regulated manner, thereby complying with the PGR legal framework.

Regarding the opportunity to bring national inventories closer to the data provider, the comment was made that this step would require a simple investment and in some cases it might prove to be an incentive for more frequent updates and accurate data management, since the national focal points would be able to constantly monitor their national data as independent data sets. However, this option would not necessarily be useful for those countries which are already managing more complex national inventories, of which the EURISCO component is only a limited sub-set that is used only for data exchange.

Decision

The group is keeping under review what GBIF is doing. At the moment there does not seem to be a need to modify EURISCO exchange formats in order to match GBIF requirements. The group intends to continue monitoring the GBIF developments and make sure that data remain available at all levels.

3.4. EURISCO and ECCDBs

Documents prepared during the EPGRIS project to discuss the relationship between EURISCO and the ECP/GR Central Crop Databases (ECCDBs) were reviewed by T. van Hintum.

It was felt that the original recommendations were still valid, i.e. 1) the ECCDBs should harmonize their structure with EURISCO and 2) existing and new ECCDBs should continue gathering data in the traditional way until EURISCO becomes the preferred source of passport data.

It was also considered that if EURISCO were to take care of compiling passport data, the ECCDB managers could eventually dedicate themselves to more user-oriented scientific activities. These activities could include: analysis of the data in order to propose PGR conservation actions (collecting, rationalization, etc.), or the creation of interfaces and services aimed at specific user groups.

I. Faberová showed a table comparing the wheat data available from EURISCO and from the ECP/GR Wheat Database. This table showed that, for some countries, EURISCO was more complete, while in other cases more data were offered by the Wheat Database. Overall, several discrepancies were revealed by this comparison, but it looked as if the immediate possibility existed in some cases of enriching the central databases by downloading EURISCO data.

It was noted that it would be useful to study other pairs of test cases and that the Network Coordinating Group on Forages was planning to test the situation of some forage databases in the following week.

Decision

Because there were unexplained discrepancies between data available from EURISCO and the central databases, it was recommended that a few more test cases should be checked, to analyze the reasons for discrepancies and propose actions for the improvement of data consistency. It was suggested that 3-4 ECCDBs should be selected and data comparisons should be analyzed. The role of ECCDBs, also including characterization and evaluation data, will be revisited in two years time, at the EURISCO Advisory Group planned for 2007 in Rome.

4. International role of EURISCO

S. Gaiji reported to the group on several initiatives in the area of PGR documentation at the international level. He recommended the EURISCO Advisory Group to keep monitoring the situation and maintain a strategic presence in the international scene, whenever appropriate. Currently, all the initiatives seem to be well integrated one into another.

He indicated one possible area in need of attention, which is the process of updating the FAO Global Plan of Action. Various key people have been contacted by FAO and accession data have been requested. The risk is that FAO might end up developing a parallel system to EURISCO for updating WIEWS.

Recommendation

The group suggested that IPGRI should call a meeting with FAO and the ECP/GR Network representatives, with the aims of reducing duplication of efforts and revising the process of accession data acquisition.

Regarding the opportunity to link with the Global Crop Diversity Trust and other regions, it was suggested that the ECP/GR Inter-regional cooperation Network could consider organizing documentation workshops in other regions, following the example of the joint ECP/GR – GRENEWCA workshop held in Cotonou, Benin, in 2003. A EURISCO training manual would be also useful for such an initiative.

D. Endresen illustrated the concept, using the example of the Northern Regional Genebank Cooperation, which is making use of a regional PGR information system, SESTO (<http://www.ngb.se/sesto>). The main purpose of SESTO is the management of the plant material in the genebank seed store. The documentation system consists of one physical database with several domains belonging to the various member countries. Individual editing rights are granted for specific national data subsets, while other data sets are shared (on taxonomy, illustrations and the picture archive).

The value of this cooperative scheme in facilitating the involvement of Baltic countries in EURISCO was highlighted as an example of the immediate benefits some countries could derive from sub-regional cooperative support.

5. Guidelines and priorities for EURISCO development at IPGRI

Following the presentation by S. Dias on the status of EURISCO, it was evident that the catalogue, since its launching in September 2003, had made less progress than expected and this was partially due to delays in staff replacement at IPGRI.

The importance of the EURISCO Advisory Group in indicating guidelines and priorities for actions was reaffirmed.

Decision

The EURISCO Advisory Group and the NCG took into consideration the list of actions proposed by IPGRI to re-establish momentum in the development of EURISCO. The amended prioritized list of actions is listed below (priority level: H=High; M=Medium; L= Low):

Status review

H - Review National Focal Point (NFP) status: status of National Inventory, technical possibilities and timing of uploads (through bilateral communications + questionnaire and surveys), follow-up actions to achieve the necessary momentum

L - Provide status reports to NFPs (e.g. statistics, error reports) => Newsletter (minimum 4 per year but also when relevant)

L - Monitor data quality and availability

Web site

H - Review, improve, and update, also including new search/download possibilities

H - Make downloads easier

M - Monitor visitors (also what they do, where they go)

L - Get feedback from end users and respond to it

L - Promote links with other relevant databases

Dissemination

H - Public awareness materials (including Newsletter)

M - Capacity building (training for NFP staff, on-line tutorials, manuals etc.)

L - Look for linkages with other relevant databases

L - Compile Frequently Asked Questions (problem solving)

Other priorities:

- Organize workshops, seminars
- Representation in international fora
- EURISCO News (Newsletter)
- Release frequent data analysis and feedback to NFPs
- Provide advice on updates and uploads
- Improved alert system
- Make statistics available

6. Budget assigned to EURISCO by ECP/GR

The Network's budget allocation and breakdown for Phase VII, as proposed in November 2004 and approved by the Steering Committee, was reviewed. In particular, the decision taken by the ECP/GR Steering Committee in Izmir (October 2003) in relation to the budget assigned to EURISCO by ECP/GR (i.e. 50 000 euro per five years) was discussed.

Decision

It was agreed to re-adopt the Documentation and Information Network budget without changes (see Table 1). It was also concluded that the ECP/GR Secretariat was expected to spend the available funds in order to accomplish progress in the actions recommended by the EURISCO Advisory Group (see above). During the current Phase it would not be asked to specify the EURISCO budget and work programme in more detail, but this might be requested in the future.

Table 1. D&I Network Budget

Date	Activity	ECP/GR contribution (euro)
Part A: Meetings		
(Such meetings should ideally be organized "back-to-back" with other meetings in such a way as to exploit maximum synergies)		
2005	Meeting of EURISCO Advisory Group & NCG meeting (Bonn)	7353
2006	Training / meeting of National Inventory Focal Points (NFP/NI); (on a self-financing basis; limited support upon request if justified)	5000
2007	Meeting of EURISCO Advisory Group (Rome)	5000
2008	Meeting of NFP/NI and ECCDB manager (entire Network); (only co-financing possible; additional funding to be sought from other sources)	10000
Part B: Projects		
	Limited support of non-participants in D&I network-related projects upon request and in selected cases to be approved by D&I network coordinating group	10000
	Limited support to selected and highly-relevant D&I network-related activities (i.e. NFP/NI support in selected cases)	5000
	Total	42353
Part C: EURISCO		
	Future maintenance and selected development activities to be funded through specific ECP/GR budget line "EURISCO"	50000

7. Other business

H. Knüpffer informed the group that an EU-funded meeting was planned to take place in Poland in October 2005 for the preparation of a project on compiling national checklists of cultivated crop species, improving the quality of scientific names in databases and defining backbone lists of PGR crop wild relatives. Within the next two months an agenda will be available and a request for funds might be submitted to the Network Coordinating Group through the ECP/GR Secretariat.

T. van Hintum informed the group that the finalization of the report of the Prague ECP/GR – EPGRIS workshop (September 2003) had been delayed and a report will not be printed. However, all the presentations and available papers will be soon uploaded onto the ECP/GR Web site.²

It was decided that the minutes of the current meeting should also be published only in electronic format and will be uploaded onto the ECP/GR Documentation and Information Network Web page.

² http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/Networks/Info_doc/FinalMeetingReports.htm

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