

**EWRS WG on Invasive Plants,**  
 Synthesis account of the first meeting,



Changins (CH), 6<sup>th</sup> February 2006

***Preliminary remarks***

This inaugural meeting gathered specialists and professionals from very diverse backgrounds and generated extensive discussion. The report of the meeting proposed here is a synthetic account of the main points discussed, the agreement reached and the concrete propositions. For clarity, it does not always respect the chronology of the discussions, but, hopefully, it integrates accurately the contribution of everyone.

***Participants***

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## ***Introduction, definition and interests***

All participants introduced themselves, briefly highlighting their interest in invasive plants issues.

As an example aiming at proposing an introduction to the discussion, Christian Bohren presented the situation in Switzerland with *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* and the concerted action developed recently to limit its spreading. The necessity to build bridges between different disciplines and professions to best manage such species was emphasised.

A general discussion about the term “invasive plant” revealed the different approaches (agronomic, biological, environmental, economic,... ) possible to address the issue. A global definition has been proposed for the WG: *a plants, exotic to Europe e.g. Ambrosia artemisiifolia and not exotic to Europe e.g. Rhododendron ponticum, those establishment and spreading damages crop yields and/or threatens native biodiversity*. Participants agreed, that the issues raised by invasive plants constitute a scientific and political challenge that must be addressed by concerted actions.

## ***Existing actions and uniqueness of a EWRS-WG***

Several academic teams (Universities, Research station,...) already study invasive plants and/or the biological and ecological aspects of invasion. Moreover, numerous groups and institutions already deal with invasive plant species at regional, national and international levels (IUCN, EPPO SKEW,...) by establishing lists of invasive plants, sometimes with specific fact or data sheets, recommendations or control measures. Also, databases gathering information on experts working on invasive species are presently developed (DAISIE,...). This context raises the question of the justification of developing, in the frame of the EWRS, a new working group dealing with these species. One unique point of this WG could be that it would facilitate the transfer of knowledge, experiences and know-how, developed by weed scientists in agricultural systems, in order to contribute to solve the issues raised in other areas, particularly environmental weeds. Conversely, experience gained by professionals dealing with environmental weeds, for instance in the biological, ecological and phyto-sociological aspects of plant invasion, can be valuable for agronomists. Three bridges to promote such exchanges of experiences have been defined:

- *Some agricultural weeds are also environmental weeds* (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*, *Senecio inaequidens*,...). With such species, exchanges on strategies developed to control the species in the different areas can benefit all stakeholders. More generally, with such species growing in different habitats, a concerted action is obviously justified.
- More generally, *knowledge and tools developed by agronomists to control weeds in cultivated fields* (chemical, mechanical, biological, cultural,...) *could help in the management of environmental weeds*, including aquatic weeds. Conversely, knowledge and know-how developed by conservationists and natural area managers can also be of benefit to agricultural weed scientists.
- *Several habitats*, such as set-asides, pastures,... *are in fact at the interface between cultivated and natural ecosystems*. The study of invasive process in such habitats can benefit both disciplines.

To promote exchanges in the working group, projects could be developed on species or on special habitats. It has also been proposed to deal with methodology (Jordi Recasens), especially to improve the early detection of potential invaders.

Heinz Müller-Schärer proposed a description of different types of joint projects frameworks that could be developed.

- 1) Joint research framework: putting resources together on a specific project.
- 2) COST project: funding for coordination (workshop, short term exchanges, publications,...), but not for research.
- 3) EU framework: overall funded research program requiring highly motivated and dedicated coordinators

### ***Mission and topics***

In order to give a framework for the wide discussion, a global formulation of the mission for the WG was proposed (by Ivan Stefanic) and discussed. The following formulation was unanimously retained:

*The WG will develop an international an interdisciplinary platform dedicated to monitor, study, warn and advise on the management of invasive plant species in Europe. This mission will be achieved through the integration of existing and/or execution of especially designed research taking into account agronomic, environmental, health and economic aspects of invasion.*

At this stage, four topics have been proposed and retained to develop the activities and concerted action of the WG.

#### 1) *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* (Christian Gauvrit and others)

Ragweed was the most frequently cited species during all the discussions. The species clearly match all the criteria defined in the mission of the WG as its spreading raises important agronomic, environmental, health and economic issues. The situation is very variable in Europe with areas highly infested (Eastern Europe, Northern Italy, Southern France), others at the onsets of invasion (Switzerland, Germany,...) and still others not (yet) concerned. Exchanging information and carrying out common experiments could contribute to better management of this plant in infested areas and prevent its spread in other places. Evolution, public health, economy, management control, and information was mentioned as field of activity.

#### 2) *Set-asides, ecological surfaces and semi-natural habitats* (Nicolas Delabays)

With the “extensification” of agricultural practices in several places in Europe, new types of areas are emerging in the agricultural landscape (set-asides with the problem of *thistles*). Moreover, management of semi-natural habitats such as pastures are also evolving. These new practices can foster invasive species (e.g. *Solidago sp.*, *Senecio sp.*). A species monitoring could be helpful.

#### 3) *Woody invasive plants* (Luis Silva)

Several of the most invasive and threatening plants are woody species. Management options and management technologies as well as research for databases was mentioned as necessary.

4) *Further priorities* were identified which might form foci for interested parties who were not able to attend:

- a) Knowledge transfer outside intensive cropping (agronomic toolkit). The following terms were discussed: wet lands, still waters, river boards, road sides, parasitic weeds.
- b) Early detection of plant invaders. As possible fields of activity the introduction pathways (seeds, supermarkets, golf courses) and the possibilities to push legal basis for control of plant invaders were discussed as points of interest.

***ISIW & PI: International Symposium on Intractable Weeds and Plant Invaders***

Luis Silva presented the Symposium that will take place 17-21 July 2006 in Ponta Delgada in the Azores (Portugal). This Symposium aims at gathering researchers from the fields of weed biology and plant invasions in the same meeting in order to promote the exchange of knowledge between these two complementary fields.

Luis Silva presented the tentative program of the Symposium; he is looking for sessions and workshop organizers, and also candidates to joint the scientific committee.

Several members of the group expressed spontaneously their intention to participate to the Symposium : Ether Gerber, Sarah Brunel, Christian Gauvrit, Bruno Chauvel, Jordi Recasens, Heinz Müller-Schärer, Edita and Ivan Stefanic, Nicolas Delabays and Christian Bohren.

It was decided that Luis Silva organises in close collaboration with Christian Bohren one or two sessions on invasive plants.

The WG decided to organize its next meeting during the Symposium.

The minutes secretary Nicolas Delabays  
Changins, the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2006