

Plant Health Directorate

I. BACKGROUND

The Plant Health Directorate is the National Plant Protection Organisation set up within the Rural Development Department within the Parliamentary Secretariat for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights and under the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change to prevent the introduction into the community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products or their spread within the Community, in line with the Community's plant health regime, as established by Council Directive 2000/29/EC of 8 May 2000 on protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the Community. The general principles are based upon provisions laid down in the International Plant Protection Convention concluded at the United Nation Food and Agriculture Organisation and, in the World Trade Organisation Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.

The Plant Health Directorate is also responsible to monitor the market of propagation material in the Maltese territory with the aim of having available in circulation high quality propagation and planting material. The Directorate also deals with plant variety rights and the conservation of plant genetic resources.

2. INTRODUCTION

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate (PHD) persisted with the implementation of measures for the prevention and spread of harmful organisms within the community.

The process of the updating of the Plant Health Malta Official Register (MOR) which was commenced last year ended in August with all MOR Registration Forms entered in database. The aim of this exercise was to update the existing information thus ensuring that any phytosanitary inspections as are deemed necessary are better conducted in order to have more control to further prevent the spread of harmful pests and to promote appropriate measures for their control.

During 2013, the PHD also initiated the compilation of a pest list status database in the Maltese Islands of the organisms indicated in Annex I and II of Council Directive 2000/29 and EPPO A1 list.

The fight against the Red Palm Weevil ensued in 2013 with Comino also defined as a demarcated area for Red Palm Weevil following Gozo. In this regard, during 2013 the PHD carried on with intensive inspections in Gozo as part of the RPW Emergency Management, and also continued to adopt various measures and updating of legislation for the monitoring and the inspections of palm trees besides the eradication of the pest through palm felling especially to address the outbreak of the RPW in Comino and in general.

In 2013, the PHD also continued with its endeavours to continue following preventive steps for an effective control strategy against the eradication of the Citrus *Tristeza* Virus.

During 2013, the PHD carried on with implementation of the project on conservation varieties through EAFRD (M214) after successfully securing funds for such a project which is expected to be completed by 2014.

3. LEGISLATION

A number of directives, regulations and decisions that have been adopted during this year were either transposed or adopted directly.

- L.N. 98 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)
Control of the Red Palm Weevil (Amendment) Regulations, 2013
Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,043 – (05.03.2013)

- LN 320 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)
Examination of Varieties of Agricultural Plant Species
Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,150 – (11.10.2013)

- LN 321 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)
Examination of Varieties of Vegetale Species
Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,150 – (11.10.2013)

- LN 323 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)
Seeds of Agricultural Plants and Vegetables (Amendment) Regulations
Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,150 – (11.10.2013)

- GN No. 992 MSDEC – Red Palm Weevil, *Rhynchophorus Ferrugineus (Oliver)* in Malta

Government Gazette No. 19,152 – (15.10.2013)

- LN 453 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)

Vegetable Propagation and Planting Material (Amendment) Regulations

Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,189 – (31.12.2013)

- LN 454 of 2013 - PLANT QUARANTINE ACT (CAP. 433)

Forest Reproductive Material (Amendment) Regulations

Government Gazette of Malta No. 19,189 – (31.12.2013)

4. EU AFFAIRS

The Plant Health Directorate continued to participate in EU meetings for discussion of new proposals of EU legislation and the review of the Community Acquis on plant health and plant reproductive material. Instructions notes, comments and justification of country positions and reports were drawn up. A number of officials attended the meetings organised by the EU Commission and other EU structures. Also, meetings held by the EU Agency, the Community Plant Variety Office were attended by SPMU officials.

Communications

Feedback on various issues that fall under the remit of the Plant Health Directorate was sent to the EU Commission throughout the year. In addition, the PHD continued to report on a number of directives and decisions in line with its reporting obligations namely:

- With reference to Commission Decision 2007/365/EC of 25 May 2007 and amendments on emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* (Olivier) and its amendments
- With reference to Council Directive 2000/29/EC of 8 May 2000 and amendments on protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the Community
- With reference to Council Directive 2000/29/EC of 8 May 2000 and amendments on protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the Community
- With reference to Council Directive 2007/33/EC of 11 June 2007 on the control of Potato Cyst Nematodes and repealing Directive 69/465/EEC
- With reference to Commission Implementing Decision 2012/535/EU of 26 September 2012 repealing Commission Decision 2006/133/EC of 13 February 2006; on emergency measures to prevent the spread within the Union of *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus* (Steiner et Buhner) Nickle et al. (the pine wood nematode)
- With reference to Commission Implementing Decision 2012/270/EU as regards emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Union of *E.cucumeris* (Harris), *E. similaris* (Gentner), *E. subcrinita* (Lec.) and *E. tuberis* (Gentner)
- With reference to Commission Implementing Decision 2012/138/EU as regards emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Union of *Anoplophora chinensis* (Forster)
- With reference to Council Directive 93/85/EEC (and amendments) on the control of potato ring rot (*Clavibacter michiganensis* spp. *Sepedonicus*) and Council Directive 98/57/EEC (and amendments) on the control of potato brown rot (*Ralstonia solanacearum*),
- Commission Decision 2003/63/EC (Potatoes from Cuba) Commission Decision 2003/63/EC as amended by Commission Decision 2005/649/EC authorising Member States to provide for temporary derogations from Council Directive 2000/29/EC in respect of potatoes, other than potatoes intended for planting, originating in certain provinces of Cuba in which it is stipulated that Member States of importation shall provide the Commission and the other Member States, before 1 September of each calendar year in which importation takes place, with the information on the quantities imported pursuant to this Decision and with a detailed technical report of the official examination referred to in point 2(f) of the Annex sent to EU Affairs
- Commission Decision 95/44/EC of 26 July 1995 (Materials for Research) establishing the conditions under which certain harmful organisms, plants, plant products and other objects listed in Annexes I to V to Council Directive 77/93/EEC may be introduced into or moved within the Community or certain protected zones thereof, for trial or scientific purposes and for work on varietal selections, Article 3.

- With reference to Commission Decision 2004/200/EC of 27 February 2004 and its amendments on measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Pepino Mosaic Virus*
- With reference to Commission Decision 2002/757/EC of 19 September 2002 and its amendments on provisional emergency phytosanitary measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Phytophthora ramorum* Werres
- With reference to Commission Decision 2007/433/EC of 18 June 2007, on provisional emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Giberella circinata* Nirenberg & O'Donnell
- With reference to Commission Decision 2003/766/EC of 24 October 2003 on emergency measures to prevent the spread within the Community of *Diabrotica virgifera* Le. Conte
- With reference to Commission Decision 2006/464/EC of 27 June 2006, on provisional emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Dryocosmus kuriphilus* Yasumatsu
- With reference to Commission Decision 2012/697/EU as regards measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Union of the genus *Pomacea*
- With reference to Commission Regulation 1756/2004 on reduced frequency inspections
- With reference to Commission Decision 2004/4/EC and amendment (Egypt potatoes) authorizing Member States temporarily to take necessary measures against the dissemination of *Pseudomonas solanacearum* (Smith) Smith as regards Egypt, imports in Malta of potatoes from Egypt during 2012/2013 import season
- With reference to Commission Decision 2003/248, 2003/249 and 2003/250 and subsequent amendments – on the import of plants of strawberry intended for planting, other than seeds, originating in the Republic of South Africa, Chile and Argentina
- With reference to Commission Decision 2004/416/EC of 29 April 2004 on temporary emergency measures in respect of certain citrus fruits originating in Argentina or Brazil

Notifications

During this 2013, 28 notifications were sent to the European Commission through the online EUROPHYT database. These notifications were related to infringements of wood packaging material, which were not stamped in accordance with ISPM No. 15 Standard; finding of PepMV and missing information on the phytosanitary certificates and the presence of the CTV. Another 2 notifications were sent to European Commission in accordance with Article 16 of Council Directive 2000/29 and amendments. These notifications were on the

interception of the RPW in Comino and the presence of *Hypocryphalus scabricollis* on *Ficus carica* trees in Malta.

Notifications from various other Member States on the availability of seeds of cereals, fodder plants and oil and fibre plants and derogations to market seeds which do not satisfy the minimum germination capacity specified in EU legislation were reviewed on a regular basis.

Notifications on authorisations for the marketing of seeds of not yet listed varieties according to Commission Decision 2004/842/EC, modifications to the status of already listed varieties of seeds of agricultural plants and vegetables that are authorised for marketing at EU level and new varieties accepted at national level and which eventually will be marketed in the EU were reviewed daily.

EU Documentation

A number of documents related to EU Affairs have been received by the Plant Health Directorate and which have been reviewed throughout the year and comments/updates/clearance/instruction notes/briefing notes were forwarded when requested. These included amongst others:

Derogations:

- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – Soybean (*Glycine max*)
- Derogation request according to Commission Regulation (EC) No. 217/2006 *Triticum Aestivum* and *Avena Sativa*
- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – Finland (pea, field bean, red clover, alsike clover, meadow fescue)
- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – Field Pea Sweden
- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – Slovakian Soy Bean
- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – Hungary Zea Mays
- Derogation Request according to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 217/2006 – *Glycine Max* Varieties

- Directive 2002/499/EC and Directive 2002/887/EC and amendments on authorising derogations from certain provisions of Council Directive 2000/29/EC in respect of naturally or artificially dwarfed plants of *Chamaecyparis* Spach, *Juniperus* L. and *Pinus* L., originating in the Republic of Korea and Japan respectively
- Commission Decision 2004/96/EC authorising Member States temporarily to provide for derogations from certain provisions of Council Directive 2000/29/EC in respect of plants of *Vitis* L., other than fruits, originating in Switzerland (notified under document number C(2004) 122)
- Commission Decision 2005/51/EC authorising Member States temporarily to provide for derogations from certain provisions of Council Directive 2000/29/EC in respect of the importation of soil contaminated by pesticides or persistent organic pollutants for decontamination purposes (notified under document number C(2005) 92)

EU Reports

- 2012/270/EU Commission Implementing Decision of 16th May 2012 as regards emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Union of *Epitrix cucumeris* (Harris), *Epitrix similaris* (Gentner), *Epitrix subcrinita* (Lec.) and *Epitrix tuberis* (Gentner)
- Commission Decision 2008/840/EC on emergency measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Anoplophora chinensis* (Forster)
- Council Directive 93/85/EEC and 98/57/EEC and their amendments re: Brown Rot and Ring Rot
- Council Directive 2000/29 on Protected Zones (Colorado Beetles)
- Council Directive 2000/29 on Protected Zones (CTV)
- Directive 2008/61/EC – Invitation to MS and CH for comments on specific quarantine and testing requirements for *Petunia* and *Calibrachoa*
- Council Directive 2007/33/EC of 11th June 2007 on the control of Potato Cyst Nematodes and repealing Directive 69/465/EEC
- Reporting obligation as regards the communication of data concerning seeds, in particular the requirement that Member States inform the Commission by 1st October of each year about the total quantities of seeds harvested (in tonnes) and stocks held by wholesalers at end of marketing year (in tonnes)

- Intra - Community Notification (In accordance with Art. 16 (1) of Council Directive 2000/29/EC) and as per Article 5 (3) of Commission Decision 2010/467/EU for the presence of *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* (Olivier) specimens in the island of Comino
- Terms of reply re EU points of entry authorised for the import of potatoes from Egypt, in accordance with point 3.1 of the Annex of Commission Implementing Decision of 29 November 2011 authorising Member States temporarily to take emergency measures against the dissemination of *Ralstonia solanacearum* (Smith) Yabuuchi et al. as regards Egypt (2011/787/EU)

Malta Comments

- MT Comments regarding Orchid cut flowers originating in Thailand
- On the new regimes and other topics of concern
- Commission Regulation 1756/2004 on Reduced Frequency inspections

Instructions notes on Standing Committees

Instructions notes were drawn up in relation to Standing Committees on Plant Health SCPH, Standing Committee on Propagating Material and Plants of Fruit Genera and Species, Standing Committee on Seeds and Plant Propagating Material, Standing Committee on Plant Variety Rights and Ornamentals.

Instructions notes on Working Parties

- Working Parties on Official Controls, Plant Health, Plant Reproductive Material and Food and Feed Expenditure and COPHS Chief Plant Health Officers.
- Negotiations regarding a comprehensive trade and investment agreement between the EU and USA in relation to the importation of seeds and other propagation material.
- Importation of soil contaminated by pesticides

Written comments and Explanatory Memoranda

On the revision of the regimes namely on COM 327 2013, COM 265 2013, COM 267 2013 and COM 262 2013

- COPHS comments on South Africa paper in relation to protected zones

Questionnaires

- CION's questionnaire on technical assistance and cooperation activities in the field of plant breeder rights
- Questionnaire by a local private entity on the implementation of Commission Decision 2004/842/EC on the marketing of seed varieties that are in the process of registration in national and EU catalogues of varieties of agricultural plants and vegetables
- Replies to the questionnaire by the European Commission on the composition of enterprises involved in the production and marketing of plant reproductive material that are present in every EU Member State
- Questionnaire on the financial regulation 327 2013.
- Questionnaire on the harmful organisms regulation COM 267 2013.

5. MULTILATERAL, INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Plant Health Directorate continued to respond to questionnaires and take part in consultations on draft standards and other items circulated for members' opinion by the International Plant Protection Convention Office, the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation, the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO), the European and Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

The Plant Health Directorate continued to participate in a number of national committees including the Plant Protection Board, the Pesticides Control Board, the Food Safety Commission, the National Accreditation Board, The Red Palm Weevil Commission and had various consultations with EU Affairs and MEPA.

6. MONITORING AND CONTROL UNIT

Monitoring and Surveys

As in previous years, in 2013, the Plant Health Directorate continued its programme of annual surveys/monitoring to assess the local situation with respect to emerging pests. The monitoring and testing of certain quarantine and harmful organisms is also regulated by Council Decisions and Directives.

During 2013 a total of 23 surveys/monitoring plus monitoring of other pests and diseases that arise from time to time were carried out in relation to the following areas of diagnosis – virology, bacteriology, mycology, entomology, and nematology covering approximately 371.69 hectares during which a total of 1,857 samples were collected. A more detailed list of the surveys conducted in 2013, including details of the commodity surveyed, the inspection sites, the number of inspections carried out and the area covered, as well as the number of samples collected, is found in Annex I.

Outbreak of Pests

Comino was defined as a demarcated area for Red Palm Weevil in October 2013. (GN No. 992 dated 15th October, 2013)

Contingency, Emergency and Eradication Plans

During 2013, action Plans for the following pests and diseases have been drawn up and/or updated: Red Palm Weevil, which were also submitted to the Commission.

Control of Red Palm Weevil

The control against the Red Palm Weevil ensued as in previous years. Continuous monitoring and observation which was carried out in Malta and Gozo resulted in the pest still being active but under control. However it has now also been intercepted on the island of Comino.

Tuta Absoluta

As in the previous years, in 2013 the Plant Health Directorate continued with its efforts to fight the *Tuta absoluta* pest. The dissemination of information and further education about this pest continued either through direct contact or through the use of information material such as leaflets about the pest and its control, posters and published articles. The PHD also pursued with the monitoring inspections for *Tuta absoluta* in marketplaces, greenhouses and fields.

7. SEEDS AND OTHER PROPAGATION MATERIAL

Production and marketing of plant material

During this year, 62 physical and documentary inspections (a number of which were follow-ups) were carried out on plant material being produced and/or marketed in Malta and Gozo. On the whole, minor shortcomings were noted. Information was gathered in one of the visits on the viewing of the tomato seed extraction process. The detailed reports on each inspection were drafted and forwarded to the relevant supplier/producer. Communication was held with a number of producers and traders on various aspects such as labelling of plant material.

During the beginning of the year, the SPMU assisted SIU officials on their MoR update visits. Visits consisted in a visual inspection and updating of the MoR application forms.

The SPMU started dealing with farmers which cultivate wheat for the production and trade of seeds. These farmers were assisted through the registration with the Malta Official Register and the SPMU helped the SIU in identifying such farmers.

The SPMU was supplied by the SIU with third country notification forms for the latter to perform administrative checks on the registration of varieties of seeds to be imported in Malta in the latest editions of the EU Common Catalogues of varieties. Lists of varieties that are intended to be marketed by certain local suppliers have also been received by the SPMU for checks on the registration of varieties.

The SPMU continued working together with the Agriculture Directorate on the local production and sale of onion seeds and seedlings and quality testing abroad of onion seeds. A site was selected for the planting of the onion bulbs for seed production for the selection process and 36 bulbs were selected and records taken by SPMU officials. Soil samples were collected from the site for soil testing and the bulbs were planted. Regular monitoring of the crops was conducted and observations documented. The resulting seed was collected and sown once again for plantlet production.

A comprehensive set of guidelines on the production of seeds of agricultural plants and vegetables in Malta for future marketing was also finalised by the SPMU with the assistance of the SIU. The guidelines consist of a brief overview of the technical, legislative and administrative rules that need to be followed during seed production and a set of forms that need to be filled in accordingly. This document is to be used as a reference by interested parties.

The SPMU was consulted by the SIU on issues relating to the presence of scab on seed potatoes in Malta. The SPMU provided feedback on the standards/tolerances on the marketing of potato seeds in relation to the presence of scab as stated by the national legislation on seeds, checks on seeds for diseases and UNECE standards on seed potatoes, classification/certification schemes of the country from where the seed potatoes originated.

During this year, the relationship between the registration by the Plant Health Directorate of persons/entities involved in the production and marketing of propagation material and plants and the trade licences that are issued in Malta was tackled. Discussions were held with the Commerce Department on the development of collaboration for the registration of plant propagation traders was held.

The memorandum that has been prepared by the SPMU and which was submitted to the Maltese Cabinet regarding the introduction of the service in Malta for the registration of varieties of vegetables and agricultural plants to be provided by the Plant Health Directorate was approved by the Cabinet at the end of this month. Due to the change in the state governance, the memorandum shall be submitted to Cabinet once again.

The SPMU, the MCU and the DCU communicated with each other regarding the pest risk assessment and national surveys that are envisaged to be held in connection with the common bunt disease that has been found during the seed testing that is carried out by the SPMU.

Genetically-modified organisms

The SPMU provided its replies to an FAO survey on accidental presence of low level and adventitious presence of GMOs in internationally traded food crops.

It also updated the current lists of varieties of genetically modified seeds of maize and potatoes that can be marketed in the EU and which are included in the EU Common Catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species were published in the Official Journal of the EU.

The SPMU provided its replies to a questionnaire on different uses of GMOs - food, feed, cultivation, field trials and contained use.

Fruit trees and vines

The SPMU, DCU and the FM&M were in communication with each other regarding the trees of local peach trees and vines that have been clonally selected in previous years and that are in the screenhouses of the PBC. These trees were sorted in 3 groups by the SPMU and the FM&M at in accordance to their labelling and health status. A detailed list with all the new codes and varieties when known was compiled. Dead peach trees were disposed of. Communication was held with the Viticulture Unit as regards the way forward on the dead labelled and unlabelled vines which were found in the screenhouses.

Communication was held by the SPMU with the two Government nurseries on the current activities and future plans on the production for marketing purposes of local varieties of fruit trees and vines. Information of local varieties of certain species was searched for by the SPMU as this shall be used in future morphological characterisation of such varieties.

Agri-measures and rural development funds

As regards the PHD project funded under measure 214 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 on the support for the conservation of genetic resources in agriculture, the SPMU carried out a considerable amount of administrative and technical work during the whole year. Also, work on the sub-project on the clonal and sanitary selection of local citrus trees was carried out during this month as indicated in other points of this report. (Please vide under heading 12. Projects)

During this year, 16 old carobs trees have been registered with the SPMU by 2 farmers during this year in connection with agri-environmental measure 9 of the Rural Development Programme that provides financial aid on old fruit trees that are in danger of genetic erosion.

8. SURVEILLANCE AND INSPECTORATE

Registration

During 2013 there were 29 new entries in the Traders Registration as per LN 97/2004 regulation 6. Thus the total number of importers, traders of various agricultural products and timber imports now amounts to 230 and one applied for exemption. In all the MOR register contains 337 files; 230 files of which are active, 1 file is exempt and 106 files are closed.

Certification

During 2013, 108 inspections took place in nurseries and garden centres in accordance with LN 97/2004 regarding the annual inspections for plant passports. A total of 1,576 plant passports and 36 export phytosanitary certificates were issued. There were no re-export phytosanitary certificates issued during 2013.

Market Surveillance

All consignments imported in Malta are subject to documentary checks. A total of 307 documentary checks took place in 2013. A total of 306 consignments were also inspected both for identity and for phytosanitary checks. One consignment was not inspected for identity and phytosanitary check since this lacked the additional declaration in the Phytosanitary Certificate and so the consignment was destructed. In addition, all consignments containing any wood packaging material (WPM) which varies from dunnage to pallets were also physically inspected. These were inspected to check if they conform with

the ISPM no.15 standards (WPM) and for the presence of Pine Wood Nematode and *Monochamus* spp. There were 167 inspections on wood packaging material accompanying commodities from third countries, 72 inspections on wood shavings imported from third countries, 12 inspections on WPM coming from EU Member States and 17 inspections in warehouses having both WPM coming from third countries and EU Member States. Throughout 2013 a total of 51 samples were collected. No positive samples were recorded for Pine Wood Nematode.

Inspections, eradication and enforcement

During 2013, a number of inspections were carried out in relation to quarantine harmful organisms, and samples were collected. These were sent to the various laboratories within the Plant Health Directorate for further analyses.

The surveillance of Red Palm Weevil continued and there were 334 inspections of which 200 were in private residences (both Malta and Gozo), 72 in public areas (both Malta and Gozo) and 62 in Government entities (both Malta and Gozo). Out of these 334 inspections, 263 were conducted in Malta, whereas 71 were conducted in Gozo. During these visits, the stakeholders were informed about pesticide treatment which could be utilized for control purposes. Inspections were carried out during the different stages of growth. A total of 741 palms had to be destroyed, of which 596 palm trees were destroyed as a consequence of RPW, whereas 145 palm trees were destroyed but were not infected with the RPW. In total 3 enforcement letters were fixed on site for palm removal, 49 letters were sent to clients to conduct curative treatments, 186 notifications were sent to individuals for the removal of infected /dead palm trees and 168 telephone calls (advisory & reporting) were received regarding RPW.

During 2013, also as part of its enforcement endeavours, the SIU continued to follow court cases and also issue warning letters and implemented enforcement measures with regards to the illegal movement of palm trees without a prior written approval from the PHD, the treatment of palm trees, pending bills and missing and tarred tags.

The SIU also carried out enforcement actions with regards to movement of citrus fruits with leaves and peduncles, aquatic plants which were not released due to missing additional declaration and two wood shaving consignments from Egypt which were rejected from entry to Malta and the EU.

During 2013, 52 inspections took place with regards to *Tuta Absoluta* and tomato viruses. 20 inspections took place on the market place whereas 32 inspections were conducted in greenhouses and open fields.

Update of Plant Health Malta Official Register

The Plant Health Directorate continued to update the Plant Health Malta Official Register according to Government Notice 774, an exercise which was concluded in 2013. Up till the end of this year, the Register contained 337 registered activities all of which had their

information updated (some were closed as they were no longer involved in any activities related to LN 97 of 2004 and amendments). PHD officials also conducted MOR update visits which consisted in visual inspections.

9. LABORATORIES

Lab quality systems

LIMS – Laboratory Information Management System:

Following the award of tender of “Procurement of a Laboratory Information Management System relating to Plant Health PE08/010” to MITA in 2012, during 2013 ongoing meetings with regards to the LIMS project have been carried out with MITA, ABACO, SEASUS, CIO office and PA on the project. PHD has prepared a list of user cases in connection to the new layer dedicated to plant health and this has been heavily discussed with SEASUS and MITA. The project has been divided in 5 phases. Phase 1 to 3 dedicated to Lab, more specifically to BIKA, while Phase 4 and 5 will be dealing with GIS. The gap analysis has been finalised in December and ready for signature to be carried out in the following year. Preliminary indications indicate that there might be budgetary constraints to finance Phase 4 and 5.

Good laboratory practice:

Guidelines for the Good Laboratory Practice for all the Labs have been finalised and brought to the attention of the labs concerned. PHDU has provided feedback in relation to these guidelines.

Lab fees:

The Plant Health Directorate continued to work on the cabinet memo on the application of fees for the analysis of samples and other services at the laboratories of such Directorate.

Plant Health Diagnostic Unit

The diagnostic laboratories within the Plant Health Directorate are responsible for the detection and identification of plant diseases caused by plant pests and pathogens with special reference to Council Directive 2000/29/EC and the Plant Quarantine Act 2001. Diagnostic techniques implemented in the laboratories are in accordance with EU Directives and EPPO standards where applicable. In 2013, the labs were segregated into two different Units namely the Monitoring and Control Unit (MCU) and the Plant Health Diagnostic Unit (PHDU).

During 2013 a total of 1,855 samples were received at the lab and a total number of 1,808 were tested in relation to the following areas of diagnosis – virology, bacteriology, mycology, entomology, and nematology. A more detailed breakdown of the number of samples collected and tested in relation to the target organism and the number of positive or suspect samples detected can be found in Annex 1.

Seed Testing Laboratory

In 2013, the Seed Testing Laboratory continued seed testing for purity determination. This is being carried out in connection with the use of high quality local seeds of cereals and fodder plants for which financial aid is being given to local farmers under agri-environmental measure 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. The number of samples received by the laboratory during the year 2013 was 181 commencing from July to October 2013. The number of tests was identical to the number of samples received.

Soil and Irrigation Water Laboratory

The main aim of the Soil and Irrigation Water Laboratory is to provide a service to farmers and the general public through the testing of soil and irrigation water in support of fertiliser planning and irrigation control.

In 2013, the laboratory received a total of 297 samples which consisted of 159 soil samples and 138 water samples and conducted a total of 1864 tests. These tests include routine and non-routine analysis for various nutrients and characteristics of soil as well as irrigation water quality (salinity).

Tissue Culture Lab

Micropropagation

Ornamental plants:

Micropropagation of the ornamental plants, namely Boston ferns and African violets, was continued during 2013. During this year a total of 315 Boston ferns and 1,222 African violet plantlets were produced and acclimatised in the glass house. *In vitro ex situ* conservation of local tulips and orchids was also continued throughout the year. The Tissue Culture Lab communicated with MEPA officials regarding the necessary MEPA permits allowing the Plant Health Directorate to maintain local orchid and tulip accessions.

Globe artichokes:

The trial on the micropropagation of globe artichokes (*Cynara scolymus*) was at a standstill during the year 2013. The reason for this being that the Plant Health Directorate was supposed to have received a supply of sterile plastic containers in which to root the globe artichokes as well as the hormone utilised for their rooting from the Italian counterparts as

agreed during a meeting held at the Plant Health Directorate in May 2012. Further communication between the Plant Health Directorate and the Italian counterparts was often attempted; however replies from the Italian counterparts were few and far apart. Towards the end of the year 2013 the Plant Health Directorate was officially informed that the Italian counterparts would not continue with the project. The Plant Health Directorate therefore decided to attempt to maintain the available globe artichoke plantlets under *in vitro* conservation. In this regard the remaining 38 jars of globe artichokes (around 608 plantlets) were removed from cold storage and the surviving plantlets were transferred to fresh nutrient medium (1 jar).

Sanitation of local varieties

With regards to sanitation of local citrus species through somatic embryogenesis, the trials commenced during the previous year on three local lemon varieties were continued and new trials were commenced on a further three local lemon varieties and on three local orange varieties. Some of the explants from the new trials responded well as callus, followed by somatic embryogenesis, was produced on all lemon trees and on two orange trees. A total of 281 plantlets obtained from the trial commenced in the year 2012 have so far been forwarded to the glass house for acclimatisation purposes and following upgrades to the glass house bench system further acclimatisation trials will take place. Throughout the trials commenced this year it has been noted that the lemon trees have been more successful when compared to the orange trees.

During 2013 ongoing communication between the Plant Health Directorate, the Agricultural Directorate and the Viticulture Unit took place so as to discuss the way forward with regards to the attempted sanitation of the local vine accessions of *Girgentina* and *Gellewza* which formed part of an FP7 project on the valorisation of the vine varieties of Malta.

Tulips and Orchids

No further updates during 2013.

Others

Revision of the part of the PHD website on tissue culture lab has been done by the Tissue Culture Lab officials.

The Tissue Culture Lab communicated with MEPA officials regarding the MEPA permits that had to be issued for the PHD to keep accessions of local orchids and tulips during 2011 and 2012.

Replies to the NSO's R & D questionnaire for the years 2011 and 2012 were compiled by the SPMU and forwarded to the STCU.

Initial research has been carried out on the local plant *Phillyrea latifolia* for which a request for micro propagation has been made to the PHD.

10. ADVISORY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate continued to assist farmers and the general public on a number of phytosanitary issues. Most queries are resolved by the telephone, by email and others investigated on site and samples taken when necessary.

In addition during 2013, the Plant Health Directorate has organised meetings and information seminars for stakeholders as part of awareness and information campaigns.

Officials also participated in a number of radio programmes.

A number of press releases and notices were published during 2013 to solicit further the control of harmful organisms. These include:

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic addressed</u>
PR 0438	22nd March, 2013	Guidelines for palms to be used during Palm Sunday (Hadd il-Palm)
PR 1273	17th June, 2013	Red Palm Weevil in Malta and Gozo
PR 1692	7th August, 2013	Press Release regarding palms to be used by fishermen

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate also updated and published a number of leaflets on plant health pests and diseases of local importance.

The PHD laboratories hosted a number of visits by students from various local primary and secondary schools, colleges and post-secondary institutions during this year. During such visits, students were given a general overview of the work carried out on in the respective laboratories visited. Training on micro-propagation techniques and acclimatisation of plants was carried out to Libyan students at the Tissue Culture Lab and the green house at Tal-Kmand in Lija in May 2013.

Seven (7) students also carried out testing/work experience at the Soil and Irrigation Water Lab, Tissue Culture Lab and the PHD for their dissertations/ and projects/studies as part of the course they are following at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary institutions. Another two students specifically carried out work experience at the Surveillance and Inspectorate Unit, within the PHD.

In summer, six other University students also carried their work experience with the PHD.

Parliamentary Questions

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate received sixteen (16) Parliamentary Questions. These mainly focused on the Red Palm Weevil pest, planting of palm trees, fig trees, border controls on the importation of trees and export of agricultural products, border check on plants and trees, phytosanitary certificates, scholarships and plant health related University

degrees and information available for farmers on plant diseases and experimentation and experimentation at the Plant Biotechnology Centre.

11. COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate attended Working parties in relation to the new revised regimes namely Official Controls COM 265 (2013), Harmful Organisms COM 267 2013, Seeds and Other Propagating Material COM 262 (2013) and the Financial Regulation on Food and Feed COM 327 (2013) which was covered by Perm Rep. for Malta there are topics of concern namely the fees and accreditation of labs. Other topics which are of concern include the proposal with respect to trade from third countries and also the exemption of small professional operators from being registered. In parallel, the Directorate was consulted on the new regulation on Invasive alien species COM 620 (2013). Malta has submitted official comments to the Presidency on the Official controls and Seeds and Propagating material.

12. PROJECTS

Project on conservation varieties

The Plant Health Directorate submitted a project through EAFRD under measure 214 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 on the support for the conservation of genetic resources in agriculture and has successfully secured circa 2.5 million euro of funds. An area that presently forms part of the Plant Health Directorate in the limits of Tal-Kmand between Lija and Attard will be converted into a public garden. The 4,000 square metre area will be divided into different typical Maltese habitats dedicated for the conservation and studying of plants that form part of the local eco-system while at the same time visitors can use the place for recreational purposes; the extension of the present diagnostic laboratories in Lija with the eventual consolidation of all the diagnostic labs at one place; the construction of a seed quality laboratory; a visitors' centre to serve as a catalyst for further scientific study on the subject; and the clonal and sanitary selection of local citrus varieties. This project is to be completed by 2014.

In the meantime various correspondence and various meetings took place with different entities accordingly and various tenders and supporting documents related to the EAFRD project were drafted and eventually published on the Government Gazette (please vide Procurement under heading 14. Operational and Administrative)

Life+ project on nitrates

The PHD was also involved on MRRA's Life+ project on information and communication campaign for the proper use and management of nitrates in agriculture and livestock. A considerable amount of time was spent this year on the lab items to be purchased, purchase

of soil test kits, evaluation boards for the tenders and call for quotations for the collection of soil samples for testing/lab analysis of soil samples/purchase of soil test kits/purchase of chemicals/consumables/interpretation of results.

Biological Control of *Tuta Absoluta*

In 2013 the PHD submitted an application in conjunction with MCAST regarding a project about the biological control of *Tuta Absoluta* under the Research and Innovation Fund 2013, with MCAST being the lead in this project. The role of the PHD is that of rearing of the *Tuta Absoluta* and the parasitoids which have to be identified. This project has not been selected by the Evaluation committee.

RDD Project

Various PHD officials and other MSDEC departments/directorates have been involved as chairpersons, voting members and secretaries in the evaluation of a number of tenders and quotations that have been issued for the purchase of various apparatus for the PHD and call for services in connection with the RDD project.

13. PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY CENTRE MANAGEMENT

Facilities Management

During 2013 several maintenance works and services were carried out at the PBC premises (*Tal-Kmand, Lija*) related to the upkeep of the laboratories, offices, glasshouses and ancillary equipment.

Throughout the year routine work such as general cleaning, cleaning of benches and pots, application of pesticides and fertilisers, weeding, pruning and propagation were carried out in the glasshouses, screen houses, shade house, mother block and outdoor areas. Routine works for the up keeping of the PBC grounds formed also part of the work carried out, including general cleaning and maintenance, caring of the various plants and trees situated around the premises, weeding and cultivation of fields. A continuous production of herbaceous indicator and indexing plants for virus diagnosis was continued throughout the whole year. During 2013, the production and upkeep of herbaceous indicator mother plants which are kept for seed collection was also continued.

Ornamental plants were continually cared for with regular applications of insecticides where necessary to control pests. Continuous conventional propagation of various ornamental plants was also carried out within the glass house. Other work consisted in the acclimatisation of Globe artichokes, Vines, Ferns, Citrus plantlets and African violets transferred from the Tissue Culture laboratory.

The screen houses containing healthy and infected plants/trees required regular irrigation, pruning, weeding, application of pesticides and drenching with fungicides for the control of pests and fungal diseases.

The trial on grapevines in connection with a MSc student's dissertation in the controlled environment compartment of the glasshouse was still ongoing during 2013.

Sale and Donation of Plants

In 2013, the PHD sold a total of 92 plants amounting to € 421.50. In addition, a total of 574 ornamental plants were donated to various entities of the Ministry, governmental organisations and other non-governmental organisations. Moreover, 137 plants were lent to various governmental and non-governmental organisations for the various activities held throughout the year.

Participation in Fairs

In 2013, the PHD participated in the following fair organised by the former MRRA:

- *Festa tal-Halib*

During this fair, plants propagated and grown at PBC were exhibited and sold.

Risk Assessment within the PBC

During 2013, the Risk Assessment which had already commenced within the PBC, continued to be implemented and monitored as necessary. Newly transferred and deployed officials being provided with office ergonomic equipment namely foot rests, ergonomic mouse pads and tower stands.

The Health and Safety representative in charge of the Ghammieri Lab premises continued to work on the items that needed to be rectified and which have been identified during the Risk Assessment carried out at the same premises.

Other activities

Construction works of workers' rest were commenced in the beginning of 2013 as per MEPA permit No. PA01566/11. Several meetings were held and works were carried out namely the excavation and construction of such rooms, roofing, plumbing, finishing of works and the trenching and the laying of pipes for the electrical and network supply as required. Relative tender had been awarded to CYAN Engineering as per Advt. No. 146/2012 published on the Government Gazette in August 2012.

Work on the restoration and maintenance of one of the reservoirs at the Plant Biotechnology Centre in Lija dating back to the 16th century was carried in 2013. Relative Advt. No 41/2013 was published accordingly on the Government Gazette in April 2013. Relative tender was awarded to Sario Installations These works needed to be carried out due to the fact that a substantial amount of water was being lost.

Works on repairing the collapsed boundary wall at the PBC continued in 2013.

Other works were also carried out namely the yearly certification of the generators at the PBC; the replacement of membrane and waterproofing of roof of the Plant Tissue Culture Laboratory; periodical lift inspections; meetings relating to the construction and extension of the PHD Laboratories (CT/A/007/2013 – Contracts Ref. No. CT 3129/2013 published on Government Gazette in July 2013); liaising and meetings relating to the upgrade of the Plant Thermotherapy Room and Plant Growth Room at the Plant Biotechnology Centre in Lija (Advt. No. 59/2013 published on the Government Gazette in June 2013); required repairs to the Plastic House and the annual land registration request to the PBC.

14. OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Human resources development

A number of officials within the Plant Health Directorate attended courses, both locally and abroad in a wide range of topics, including management, self development and leadership skills, EU affairs, ICT skills, presentation skills, policies and procedures, introduction to the Green Public Procurement, E- procurement, preparation for Council Meetings, sustainable development, communication dynamics, training on the EAFRD Project, developing core skills, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, team building, effective people management, GIS Conference and inventory management.

Technical staff also attended a number of courses and meetings specific to the area under their responsibility, these included courses organised by Better Training for Safer Foods (BTSF) under DG SANCO.

In-house training on Laboratory Information Systems (LIMS) was organised in conjunction with Seasus and MITA, in-house training relating to the Plant Health Malta Official Register (MOR), in-house training as a follow-up of the BTSF courses previously attended by various PHD officers and in-house training organised by SIU on Citrus Pests and Diseases.

Procurement

The following is a list of tenders as published on the Government Gazette during 2013:

1. Advt. No. 30/2013 – Felling, removal from site, transportation and disposal of palm trees infected with the Red Palm Weevil in Malta and Gozo (February 2013) (Local funds)
2. Advt. No. 41/2013 – Restoration of Reservoir at the PBC, Lija (April) (Local funds)
3. Advt. No. 51/2013 - Supply, delivery, installation and commissioning of an autoclave (June 2013) (EAFRD)
4. Advt. No. 52/2013 - Services of a botanical manager for the project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (June 2013) (EAFRD)
5. Advt. No. 58/2013 – Services of project manager to coordinate the project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (June 2013) (EAFRD)
6. Advt. No. 59/2013 - Supply, delivery, installation and commissioning of a UV-VIS Spectro-photometer (June 2013) (EAFRD)
7. Advt. No. 74/2013 – Services of gardeners to work in the conservation of local genetic resources (June 2013) (EAFRD)
8. Advt. No. 75/2013 - Supply, delivery, installation and commissioning of a water purification system (June 2013) (EAFRD)
9. Quot. No. 59/2013 – Supply, delivery and commissioning of a pH meter and two hotplates/magnetic stirrers for the PHD (July 2013) (EAFRD)
10. Quot. No. 60/2013 – Supply and delivery of chemicals and consumables for the PHD (July 2013) (EAFRD)
11. Advt. No. 76/2013 – Services of an administrator for project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (July 2013) (EAFRD)
12. CT No. 3129/2012 – Construction and finishing of a first floor extension to Laboratory at the Plant Biotechnology Centre, Lija (July 2013) (EAFRD)
13. CT No. 3052/2013 – Construction and finishing of a garden and building at the Plant Biotechnology Centre, Lija (July 2013) (EAFRD)
14. Advt. No. 100/2013 - Services of two scientists for the project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (Sept 2013) (EAFRD)

15. Advt. No. 102/2013 - Services of an agronomist for the Project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (Sept 2013) (EAFRD)
16. Advt. No. 112/2013 – Services of gardeners to work in the Conservation of Local Genetic Resources (Oct 2013) (EAFRD)
17. Advt. No. 78/2013 – Upgrade of the climatic control of the Propagation facility at the PBC, Lija (Nov 2013) (EAFRD)
18. Advt. No. 123/2013 - Services of technician for the project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (Nov 2013) (EAFRD)
19. Advt. No. 132/2013 – Services of Administrator for the project on the study and sustainable conservation of varieties of local plants (Nov 2013) (EAFRD)

Income

During 2013, the Plant Health Directorate had a total income of € 23,530.87 from laboratory testing, sale of plants, import inspections and issuance of plant passports.

Customer Care

During 2013, the PHD continued with its endeavours to assist the general public, stakeholders and handling of customer complaints. Generic queries and calls were redirected to respective sections for feedback and advice and addressed as necessary. SOP in this regard has also been reviewed and updated accordingly so as to always ensure an optimum and efficient customer service.

Better Regulation

During 2013, all the Units within the Plant Health Directorate continued with their endeavours to implement best practices and to reduce administrative burdens as per guidelines issued by the Better Regulation Unit within the Management and Efficiency Unit, Office of the Prime Minister.

Green Measures

As part of the ongoing green measures at the Plant Health Directorate, in 2012 the PHD continued to implement and discuss green measures amongst which more fittings and lights were changed to energy saving ones both at the PBC and at *Għammieri*. At this point most of

the traditional lights within the PHD have been changed to energy saving ones. Also, most lugging around the pipes of the AC units is being changed in order to preserve energy.

During 2012, the Directorate's Green Leader also continued with his efforts in raising awareness about environmental measures to be followed at the workplace.

Memorandum of Understanding

In 2013, communication ensued with the Ministry of Gozo in order to set up a meeting to discuss the way forward on the work on seeds and propagation material to be done as specified in the MoU. A visit in Gozo as a basis of future discussions on the way forward on the work on seeds and propagation material to be done as specified in the MoU was held. The visit consisted in a visiting a number of retailers of plant propagation material in order to assess the situation in Gozo regarding the trade of such plant material. Relative report was drafted accordingly.

Website of the Plant Health Directorate

During 2013, the PHD website was updated as necessary from time to time. These updates included the uploading of various news items, Legal and Government Notices, various guidelines, PHD posters and leaflets, a number of SOPs, EPPO Don't Risk it Campaign, as well as implementing necessary corrections.

MARICA GATT

Director Plant Health

