

SEFINS Conference

'Bridging the Gap: Working Together to Tackle Invasive Non-native Species in Europe'

Workshop sessions

These interactive workshop sessions were based on the four themes previously described and were designed to utilise the knowledge and expertise of the delegates to shape the future of the SEFINS project. Delegates were divided into six groups and given an hour to discuss four questions centred on 'Bridging the Gap'. The questions and a summary of delegate responses are given below. This collated information was also circulated to delegates after the event.

1. Citizen science and awareness raising

'Citizen science' has become a very fashionable approach to gather information on the distribution of species of interest, but is not suitable in every instance.

- *When does it work well, when should another approach be used?*
- *How can we maximise the value of this approach?*
- *What is the future?*

Citizen science should be used cautiously, as it isn't always appropriate. It is important to consider what people place value on, a one size fits all approach cannot be taken. The role of culture should not be underestimated, as this can exert a strong influence on volunteer participation. This varies between countries but also across regions and demographic groups. Projects must be well structured and managed with clearly defined goals. They should justify diverting time and money away from research. Volunteer INS early warning systems have shown potential to be an ideal use of this workforce.

Projects should start small and use established existing methodology. A simple project is more likely to be successful, retaining participants and forming the foundations on which further projects can evolve. However care must be taken to avoid repetitive work and a consequent loss of interest and therefore data quality. A project is only as good as the data it collects. Species monitored through citizen science need to be easily identifiable by non-experts and there must be validation checks on the data acquired. It can take time for a project to become established and for the true benefits to be seen.



Citizen science projects must be beneficial to both parties. A sense of stewardship or ownership is essential for long term success. This requires both transparency and clearly defined objectives. People that are involved in data gathering should be given feedback and also be involved in any decisions based on the data they collected.

Volunteers are people with spare time, usually the elderly or retired. In the future, thought should be given on how to engage with an increased cross-section of the population. Volunteers can be a valuable means of awareness raising, as they are likely to spread information within their peer group which may otherwise be inaccessible or unresponsive to other approaches. This could help to promote involvement from different sectors of the general public.

2. Data and inventories

Sharing information on the distribution of INS between stakeholders in different Member States could help us to manage invasions far more effectively in the future. Harmonising the various data systems is a huge job and the SEFINS partnership are looking to start this process in the Two Seas area.

- Which currently available databases and information systems should be harmonised to more effectively tackle INS in Europe?
- How could this be achieved?

There are currently two forms of database or information system: data warehouses and alert mechanisms. It is the primary observational data that we need the most help to manage.

Databases between the Netherlands and Flanders are harmonised. However, there is a need to increase data standardisation across the EU. For example, in France, national data do not define INS although information on them is available. Data standardisation allows information to be pooled and used strategically. Ideally, a uniform standard and quality of data should be agreed.

Further investigation into more effective use of technology to share scientific data is needed. Are there parallels with other systems, e.g. regional police databases, which could be exploited?

It could also be useful to compare our approaches to those taken in North America, where there are also a number of databases containing information on INS distribution. Online recording seems to be much less prevalent there, and there is more of an emphasis on data gained from published literature. Answers to some of the technical issues may already exist and it is important to avoid duplicating systems and 'reinventing the wheel'.



The SEFINS cluster could work on the development or better knowledge of organisations to assist in gathering and holding data, such as the Norfolk Biodiversity Network (NBN). This would assist in improved communication of data location and ownership, and ascertaining intellectual rights.

3. Risk Management and impact assessment

A wide range of risk management and impact assessment tools have been developed across Europe; an area which comprises many different bioclimatic regions. This makes it difficult to produce a completely integrated Europe-wide risk management framework, but we will soon be governed by a common Regulation. Standardisation of risk assessment protocols and region-specific risk classifications would still lead to a more harmonised system and allow better comparison across regions. It could also help ensure a consistent quality of information for policy and management.

- *What are the key parameters (environmental risk, public health, economy) that need to be included in a risk assessment and management framework?*
- *How 'in depth' should an impact assessment be?*

Risk assessments must be combined with or followed by a clear management plan, which must be established well in advance of any threat. Quick response times are dependent on this.

Risk assessments should also include any missing data on INS. The financial and environmental costs of eradicating species can be high. The costs of tackling INS should be carefully weighted; therefore risk assessments should have an economic aspect. Sharing EU risk assessments could help to reduce both financial and economic costs, however this is difficult as there are currently no minimum EU requirements for risk assessments.

Can risk assessments be streamlined? Is it possible to have fewer risk assessments applicable to a range of situations instead of a large number of very specific risk assessments for different things? It is important to balance the time spent creating risk assessments and modelling against practical action, in order to maintain momentum.



4. Knowledge transfer, training and advice

Projects such as RINSE and MEMO have helped facilitate a great deal of activity to share knowledge across borders, but these sorts of project are only active over a relatively short time period.

- *How can we sustain and promote the transfer of knowledge across borders on a longer-term basis, without relying on project funding?*

This will require strong organisation and should involve governments and trade organisations. It must not be affected by the short shelf life of governments. Information should be captured and stored in a way that can influence policy making. There is a need to work with industry to bring economic gains through INS as there may be potential to channel profits into research and management. Well managed, economically important INS could deliver benefits which would be lost if they were completely outlawed. It might be possible to generate income from taxes/penalties on INS, again linking them with commerce. Generating demand for knowledge transfer will help to move away from project funding. The socio economic impacts and commercial importance of knowledge should be highlighted.

Projects funded for the short term need to build in long term sustainability. However, there is limited funding available for long term data collection projects – this is an issue. New projects should perhaps place more emphasis on knowledge transfer than creating new information. Infrastructure needs to survive beyond a project. There are currently too many standalone websites and technology has moved on. Focus should therefore be shifted onto better ways of sharing project outputs. There is a clear need for a central portal to direct internet traffic towards the diversity of information available on INS (INS search engine), acting as a single point of reference for projects, opportunities and contact points. Project data should feed into existing portals, such as Q bank and regional record centres need to feed into national database.

There should be a focus on community maintained knowledge sharing, such as Wikipedia style websites or email networks. These are excellent ways to share knowledge as they are free/open access, form an international platform and are generally reliable. However the issue of security of information must be considered, as original papers or documents cannot be changed. There is also no substitute for face-to-face contact and networking for knowledge transfer.

There are real borders between different areas of expertise e.g. agriculture and conservation groups do not seem to naturally transfer data between them. In contrast, academics already have good networks and mechanisms in place to allow the cross-border sharing of knowledge.





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Practitioners do not have these same networks and mechanisms in place to collaborate and share knowledge. A simple website to allow practitioners to network and share information could be a good start towards promoting future knowledge transfer.

