

UK Plant Genetic Resources Group Meeting
DATE & TIME: Wednesday 12th March 2025, 12:00-14:00
LOCATION: online

Nigel Maxted, Univ. of Birmingham (NM) (**Chair**)
Gaynor McKenzie, James Hutton Institute (GM)
Elizabeth Scott, NIAB (EMS)
Kalani Seymour, Plant Heritage (KS)
Caroline Liddell, Defra (CAL)
Lydia Mckenzie, Defra (LM)
Rachel Davis, Defra (RD)
Joe Taylor, JNCC (JT)

Charlotte Allender, Univ. of Warwick (CHA)
Noam Chayut, John Innes Centre (NC)
Sharon Balding, Kew Gardens (SB)
Sean May, Univ. of Nottingham (SM)
Charlotte Lusty, Kew (CHL)
Lin Huang, Aberystwyth University (LH)
Debbie Kessell, SASA (DK)

25/01 Apologies

The meeting was chaired by Nigel Maxted (NM).

Apologies were received from Matt Ordidge, Lydia Smith and Catrina Fenton.

CAL will be moving to a new role within Defra at the start of April and will no longer be attending the UKPGRG meetings.

CHL has become a member of the UKPGR, as part of Kew's representation within the group. CHL recently joined Millennium Seed Bank as Head of Seed Collections.

25/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2024 (NM)

The following corrections to the meeting's minutes were raised:

- add CHA to list of attendees.
- Elizabeth Scott's initials to be restored to EMS.

25/03 Actions and Matters arising (NM)

The following actions from previous meetings were raised:

Item 23/28: Action Liz Scott: to follow up with Anthony Hopkins at BSPB

- EMS has tried to contact Anthony Hopkins but has been unable to speak with him.
- **NEW ACTION:** NM to email Anthony Hopkins.

Item 24/13: Liz Scott to send contacts at AFBI to NM via email following this meeting.

- EMS believed NM had the relevant contacts and therefore did not send any.
- **NEW ACTION:** Defra to reach out to AFBI, and to cross reference contacts with EMS.

Item 24/27: NM and DK to follow up on the matter outside of the meeting

- Following the October 2024 UKPGR meeting, NM and DK discussed plant variety national listing fees. Since then, the Director of the Church of Bures, who were a main provider of commercial landrace material in the UK, have confirmed that they have ceased production of this material in the UK.

25/04 UK Biodiversity Indicator on Plant Genetic Resources

JT presented an update on the UK Biodiversity Indicator (UKBI), including a summary of the feedback provided during the previous UKPGR meeting.

The following updates were presented:

- There was no data update for the [Plant Genetic Resources Indicator \(PGRI\) published](#) in December 2024.
- A note was added to the UKBI page to flag the indicator production team may not have capacity to continue to update the indicator in the future.
- The intention of the Defra/JNCC indicator production team is to discontinue the PGRI in its current form in the 2025 UKBI publication. Currently there is insufficient capacity to update or develop the indicator to adapt the UKBI's for Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) reporting.
- The UKBI production team have released [this survey](#) which is open until 16 May 2025 for users of the UKBI to provide feedback on their use of the indicator.

ACTION: *Any interested UKPGR members to submit a response to the UKBI survey by 16 May 2025.*

JT confirmed that a final decision on the discontinuation of the PGRI is yet to be made, and recommended UKPGR members complete the survey.

Attendees provided the following feedback on the updates:

- The intention to discontinue the PGRI is surprising. Many attendees believe there is a need for the PGRI however its current formulation requires changes in order to be useful.
- In the event of the discontinuation of the PGRI, some attendees shared their frustration at the time they have given to support its development.
- Sending a letter on behalf of the UKPGR in support of the continuation of the PGRI was raised. JT is happy to receive a letter and noted that any letter should be addressed to Defra and JNCC.
- RD asked whether a revised domesticated PGRI could be produced to support reporting on Target 4 of the GBF. JT offered to discuss this question further, and RD offered to provide policy input for indicator development.

ACTION: *JT and RD to discuss a revised domesticated PGRI outside of the meeting.*

- Attendees queried which other indicators had been flagged for discontinuation including the Animal Genetic Resources Indicator (AGRI). JT confirmed the AGRI had not been flagged for discontinuation.
- A European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS) project and its development of genebank metrics was mentioned. Attendees suggested the metrics work could be used to support the development of the PGRI.
- Attendees suggested creating a working group to support the continuation and development of the PGRI. A working group to devise a revised PGRI and present it to the JNCC and Defra indicator production team was also suggested. JT will raise the viability of a PGRI devised outside of the production team with the responsible statistician of the PGRI.

ACTION: *JT to discuss the viability of a working group producing a PGRI, with the responsible statistician at Defra.*

- Attendees highlighted the high number of nationally and internationally important Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) collections in the UK. The group also discussed the related importance of having a UK PGRI for international reporting, as well as it being unusual to be a country with one of the highest numbers of PGR collections without having a national PGRI.
- The potential political perception of a decision to discontinue the PGRI was discussed. JT confirmed that any decision to discontinue would be a pragmatic decision based on resources.

- LH highlighted that more institutional data will become available in the coming months, which could be utilised by the PGRI production team.
- NC highlighted that other countries report on indicators, and these could be reviewed to support the development of the UK's PGRI.

25/05 GRACE-RI

NM shared a presentation on GRACE-RI that was circulated prior to the meeting. Colleagues discussed GRACE-RI and whether the UK should apply.

GRACE-RI is a pan-European research infrastructure being developed by PRO-GRACE to bring together European institutions to work on the conservation and characterisation of plant genetic resources. PRO-GRACE is a wider EU funded project to develop the concept for the novel European research infrastructure. NM confirmed PRO-GRACE has been extended until November 2025.

NM explained the financial costs of the three phases of GRACE-RI. Phase 1 lasts for five years and has no explicit contribution fees. Phase 2 has an annual cost of 500,000 euros which will be split amongst countries at a comparable cost to the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR) fees. The total costs for Phase 3 costs would be between 3-4 million euros, the proportional fees for each country would follow UN rules and take into account a country's income. There will be another three years until the costs for GRACE-RI begin. NM clarified that applying for GRACE-RI does not commit a country to all phases of the project.

Responsibility for the UK's funding contributions to GRACE-RI sits with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). Defra contacted DSIT about funding, DSIT confirmed they would not be funding this project and advised this would sit with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). RD noted that a distinct funding bid within Defra for GRACE-RI would not be possible however this does not impact the potential of sourcing funding within Defra for GRACE-RI at this time. NM asked whether developing a political support letter is useful if DSIT will not provide financial support. RD recommended the Group contact UKRI to discuss funding.

RD highlighted that in order for Defra to provide a letter of political support for GRACE-RI, UKPGR would need to submit a justification paper providing detail on the background of GRACE-RI and how it will support the UK sector, the policy team will then put a submission to Defra's Chief Scientific Officer.

NC clarified that three major contributor countries are required to join GRACE-RI. RD asked whether any attendees have colleagues in the major contributing countries, to ask their views on contributing to GRACE-RI. NC noted general concerns raised by colleagues in other countries, notably worries about confrontational overlap between GRACE-RI and ECPGR, and fears that a membership to GRACE-RI will affect other funding within the country. LH offered to ask a colleague in Germany.

CHA queried whether UK research institutions can contribute to GRACE-RI if the UK is not a member country.

The group discussed next steps regarding GRACE-RI application. The following feedback was shared:

- Clarification of the relationship between GRACE-RI and ECPGR is required considering they are funded separately despite having some overlapping work.
- Applying later to GRACE-RI would have limited impact on costs and the UK's ability to participate, and would allow UKPGR to watch the development of GRACE-RI before progressing an application.
- Query about whether there is a penalty for ceasing membership to GRACE-RI before the project concludes.

- Agreement amongst attendees on the principles of PRO-GRACE and GRACE-RI to increase collaboration across Europe, while reluctant to commit to GRACE-RI without more clarity on its structure.
- UKPGR members not in attendance should have the opportunity to factor into the group's response to the GRACE-RI coordinator.
- Query about whether there would be less financial support for other international work if UK becomes a GRACE-RI member.
- Suggestion to take a phase-by-phase approach to supporting GRACE RI.

NM confirmed that he would ask the GRACE-RI coordinator for clarity on the following:

- The relationship between GRACE-RI and ECPGR.
- GRACE-RI's approach to conservation and utilisation.
- The structure, function and governance of GRACE-RI.
- Governmental costs for UK membership across the phases of GRACE-RI.

ACTION: NM to send an email seeking clarity on GRACE-RI to PRO-GRACE coordinator.

25/06 Defra Update (RD)

Defra resources

Due to internal restructuring, there will be reduced resources in the plant genetic resources team for the foreseeable of 2025 until restructuring is confirmed.

Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA)

The next session of the CGRFA takes place on 24 to 28 March 2025. The meeting covers all genetic resource domains, namely animal, aquatic, forestry, microorganism and invertebrates and plant genetic resources. The agenda includes: the report of the 12th session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; the third report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; implementation and review of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; effect of seed policies, laws and regulations.

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITGRFA)

The next Governing Body meeting of the ITGRFA will be taking place in November 2025 in Peru.

The next meeting for the Working Group (WG) to enhance the Multilateral System (MLS) of the ITPGRFA will take place from 1 to 4 April 2025. The enhancement of the MLS is due to be agreed at the Governing Body meeting in November 2025. At the last WG meeting in September 2024, Member States were largely in agreement on: the expansion of Annex I of the ITPGRFA to include all PGRFA; subscription based payment structure; inclusion of Digital Sequence Information. However there was no consensus on a subscription only mechanism, so the WG agreed to consider the alternative subscription mechanism containing a dual trigger for mandatory benefit-sharing payments: an early trigger upon registration, or a deferred trigger at the point of commercialisation. This option was presented to the WG in January 2025. There are three payment structures and rates options within the package of measures, which the European Regional Group (inc the UK) are not convinced will achieve the objectives of the enhancement of the MLS. There is one more formal meeting scheduled for July 2025 before the Governing Body meeting in Peru.

25/07 PGR applications / Project updates (All)

UKPGR members shared updates on projects and applications.

Two PhD students at the University of Birmingham will present their work on developing GB crop wild relatives and landraces inventories.

ACTION: *Presentation on GB crop wild relatives and landraces inventories to be added to summer technical meeting agenda*

25/08 AOB (NM)

Pulse Crop GIN survey (NC)

NC to send around a survey that JIC are formulating NIAB about legumes that exist in the country, as part of the Pulse Crop GIN. BSBI was mentioned. GM noted there's a legume collection at the James Hutton institute.

Plant Variety legislation (NM)

NM shared [this questionnaire](#) by email to the group, and encouraged members to complete it by 14 April 2025. EMS highlighted that workshops are being held as part of the development of the Plant Variety and Seeds strategy.

25/09 Date of next meeting – summer technical 2025 (NM)

CHA and the University of Warwick will be hosting the summer technical. CHA queried whether Garden Organic may be interested in joint-hosting considering their nearby locations.

ACTION: *CHA to ask Catrina Fenton whether Garden Organic would be interested in hosting a joint summer technical.*