

Review Article

An introduction to the FAO Code of Conduct for the Import and Release of Exotic Biological Control Agents¹

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Biological control of arthropod pests and weeds, by introduction of exotic natural enemies ('classical' biological control) has been carried out successfully for more than a century. Over the years, practitioners have become increasingly aware that introduced biological control agents may have undesirable side effects. Initially, this concern was limited to the possible impact of these introduced agents on economically important plants and insects (notably, honey bees). More recently increased environmental awareness has drawn attention to the potential danger to all indigenous fauna and flora, particularly rare and endangered species. Concurrently, the emergence of the integrated pest management (IPM) concept, in response to over use of pesticides and to further sustainable agriculture, has resulted in the adoption of biological control in the widest sense as a cornerstone of crop protection. Consequently, countries with no previous experience of biological control started to make introductions of biological control agents, for classical biological control and as formulated products for use as biological pesticides. The International Institute of Biological Control (IIBC) and the International Organization for Biological Control (IOBC), aware of the dangers of injudicious introductions and the need to provide guidance for countries without previous experience of biological control, approached the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to initiate discussions to determine the need for a code of conduct along the lines of the FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides (1986).

Consequently, the FAO commissioned Professor M. J. Way of the Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, London, an advisor to FAO on IPM, to prepare a review and discussion document on the need for a code, in association with the IIBC and in collaboration with the FAO Integrated Pest Management Programme. This document was circulated by FAO to plant protection organizations and to biological control experts, world wide. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into a draft code which was presented for consideration at an expert consultation in Rome in September 1991. The report of the expert consultation included an agreed draft Code which was circulated widely for comment to the FAO Regional Plant Protection Organizations and then

revised by the IIBC to take account of their comments. The final text was developed by FAO in the format required by the Programme for International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures, under the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention. This Programme makes available to FAO Members and other interested parties guidelines to achieve international harmonization of phytosanitary measures, with the aim to facilitate trade and to avoid the use of unjustifiable measures as barriers to trade. The standards are being presented in a framework composed of seven parts encompassing procedures for: import regulations, export certification, compliance procedures, pest surveillance, exotic pest response, pest management and post-entry quarantine. This Code, included under Import Regulations, was endorsed in November 1995 by the 28th Session of the FAO Conference.

It is intended to facilitate the safe importation of exotic biological control agents capable of self-replication (parasitoids, predators, parasites, phytophagous arthropods and pathogens) for research and/or release into the environment, including those packaged or formulated as commercial products, as indicated in the Outline of the Code. To this end it lists the responsibilities of government authorities, of exporters and importers and other bodies involved in meeting the objectives of the Code. Further, it is suggested that governments already fulfilling the objectives of the Code may consider adapting existing systems in the light of the Code. The Code is accompanied by a bibliography and a list of definitions and abbreviations which are reproduced here at the end of the Code.

It is intended that the Code is supplemented by a set of Guidelines to be published by FAO which will set out in more detail how to set up a biological control programme against a particular pest, test for host specificity of candidate control agents, how to eliminate hyperparasites and diseases from cultures of agents, how to carry out pest risk analysis, how to carry out quarantine procedures for imported agents and, lastly, specify appropriate export and import documentation for biological control agents. Drafts of these have been prepared by the IIBC and circulated by FAO for comment before producing the final text.

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¹ Some of the information in this article is taken from the preliminary and introductory sections of the FAO (1996) Code of Conduct for the Import and Release of Exotic Biological Control Agents.

