

Minutes of the ENA Secretaries Meeting held online¹ on Thursday **30 April 2020** at 10h00 CET, 09h00 WET, 11h00 EET.

Participants:

Val Farrell (IE), Anneke van Dijk (NL), Caroline Föllmi (CH), Dragana Skočajić (RS), Eduardo Martí (ES), Emmanuelle Bougault (FR), Julianna Csikor (HU), Jyri Uimonen (FI), Lucien Verschoren (BE), Luis Martín (ES), Maja Persson (SE), Maria Fall (NO), Markus Guhl (DE), Mateusz Milczyński (PL), Maurizia Castellari (IT), Miet Poppe (BE), Niamh Brennan (IE), Nikos Thymakis (GR), Metaxas Constanbtinos (GR), Alexandar Galabov (BG), Harm Horlings (NL, Certifications and Labels **WG Chair**), Leon Smet (Anthos - Netherlands, Promotion **WG Chair**), Henk Raaijmakers (NL, ENA **Vice-President**), Jan-Dieter Bruns (DE, ENA **President**), and Josep M. Pagès (ENA **Secretary General**).

1. President's Welcome.

President welcomed everyone to the first online Secretaries Meeting.

2. Apologies for absence.

Julie Schou (DK) had sent apologies.

3. Agreement of the Agenda.

The agenda was adopted.

4. Minutes: approval of the minutes of the previous Secretaries' meeting held on 7 November 2019.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed on.

5. Matters arising from the minutes.

SG explained that the extraordinary General Assembly meeting, to be held along with this Secretaries meeting, to approve 2019 financial statements, was not convened as agreed at the last GA meeting. Because of the coronavirus situation, the Belgian law allowed the associations three extra months to approve the accounts and, therefore, they will be submitted for approval at the next General Assembly meeting in July.

SG informed the participants that the H2020 BeXyl project proposal was not approved and that there was no news, at the time of the meeting, from the other H2020 proposal Growers@yourService (initially Go4Green).

6. EU Legislation Working Group.

a. Coronavirus crisis

SG summarised the actions made:

- On the second week of March, a first survey for ENA members to ask about the situation.
- Last week of March – early April, ENA produced a very complete questionnaire, that was answered by almost 90% of the members.

- The French ENA member had proposed a wider European collective approach: to constitute a force to lobby the European Commission, because it was urgent to emphasise the serious situation of the nurserymen, horticulturalists and the European horticultural industry. This movement led to 9 sector organisations (Union Fleurs, ENA, AREFLH, VBN, Val' hor, Anthos, CIOFORA, Fleuroselect, ELCA) to sign a **joint letter to the EU Commissioner for Agriculture**, on 10 April, and COPA-COGECA sent their own letter, based on the same text. A subsequent press release jointly produced had excellent press coverage.
- No reply received to this joint letter.
- The EC was not giving financial aid, only giving the 'permission' to nurseries to destroy the product.
- Last week, a few MEPs initiated a letter to push the EC. The same organisations cooperated asking for signatures, and at the end, 50 MEPs signed it.
- The international organisations were preparing a new questionnaire to know the losses of each sub-sector, the status of the sales channels and the support measures in each country.

The Vice-president added that, although organisations were asking for EU funds for individual companies, the infrastructure of the European Commission is unable to support individual companies. So, he advised to put pressure on the national authorities to support our sectors, using the funds from the European Commission. He was convinced that we will find money to support our sector in the long run, by helping with the green cities and promotion.

Participants were asked to summarise the market situation in each country and the support they were getting from their governments.

Germany: the landscape market was very good in autumn and also until March. Garden Centers market stopped, although the closing dates were different depending on the region. Sales in Garden Centers were good when open. They were more worried about the future because the Government is using now incredible amounts of money for the problems, and it will have to be paid through taxes in the future. Landscape market, very related to the construction, will be more uncertain than Garden Centers, as it's forecasted that people will invest in their gardens and homes if they are not travelling or going out as they used to. There are not many German nurseries being bankrupted. At the beginning of the crisis, businesses were losing 20%, but now they are recovering and they have good expectations.

The Federal Government implemented non-repayable aid from up to €55.000 per company, and € 500.000 loans 90% granted by the Government, but it won't be necessary for many nurseries. Initial labour shortages were solved. 20% of country production is for export, and export might be much more difficult as many other countries are also on lockdown (Russia, Austria, France, etc.).

Spain: trouble with local production, great losses in the flower sector, export was down, and domestic market was closed down. There was no help from neither national nor the regional authorities. Deferral of taxes and social security were the only measures implemented.

Belgium: the crisis started in mid-March, Garden Centres had been closed for one month, having large losses. Nurseries were suffering a lot, depending on the sub-sector, harder for flower and bedding plants. Distance sales were increasing. Landscaping was reduced, mostly for big companies. Flowering and bedding plants sectors were suffering much more. Estimate damage of total € 135 million in the entire sector, € 35 million in the hardy nursery sub-sector. The association was discussing measures to have a € 200 million emergency fund (to share with other sectors like restaurants and culture), and the association is lobbying for funds. There were problems for seasonal workers to arrive in Belgium.

Norway: their nurseries don't export very much and had not suffered a lot even though in the beginning, stores were shut down for a while, although Garden Centres remained opened. As people remained at home, they did gardening, which was good for the sales. Landscape projects had been working as normal. There was not so much damage in the nursery sector, in summary.

Italy: they had really bad times since early March, when they passed from good sales to zero for three weeks. Although Garden Centres were gradually opening, people were not going out for shopping and sales were 10-15% compared to last year. They were pressing the Governments to get loans (repayable in 6 years) available for the industry and asking to get dedicated support to the nursery industry, receiving nice words from politicians but no action.

Greece: landscaping companies were not working on public projects, and even a 6.000 ha park was not initiated. Garden Centres were open with strict rules, but the sales were low. The situation was bad but not a complete disaster. In March the market was 70% lower on the Garden Centre market. April should have been the best month in the year, and they estimate were going to lose 50% of the annual turnover. DIY stores were closed down, meaning zero sales. They showed their worries if the tourism industry were not recovering by summer, as they were not going to require plants for their gardens; and if the crisis lasts, it would cause a ten years deep economic crisis in the entire country.

Ireland: Garden Centres were closed so it's been a very difficult time for nurseries. The supermarket chains were doing well in selling plants if suppliers could get into them, but they found they have to heavily discount the plants to get the sales. The landscape trade was completely shut down, which was affecting the hardy stock nurseries, especially tree nurseries. They had some support from the Government with wage subsidies for nurseries whose turnover was dropped by 25% or more, which was good and valuable to keep the industry going. The long-term effects are going to be quite difficult for nurseries for this year, and probably into next year. Cash Flow was a major problem. They had support from the Government, with 80% of the wages paid by the Government for the employees that were maintained in the nurseries.

Serbia: they had a very bad situation, mostly for nursery producers; and slightly better for flower producers. Garden Centres were closed since mid-March. There were no big projects and only some

small gardens. They had expectations to receive some loans as national support, and the situation was very unclear.

Poland: landscape companies had been working all the time and business were going quite well, although some projects stopped. Garden Centres were working slowly at the beginning but recovering now. Small nurseries and local producers were struggling because local fairs were closed. Last weeks the situation was slowly recovering. Public investments had stopped, and they were afraid of problems for the next season, as they won't have money for investment. Private consumption will be good this year because people will stay at home, they will not go for vacation, and will spend money in the country and plants, probably, but they were not so optimistic for the future. Aids from the Government were for small companies only, under 9 employees.

Bulgaria: 10,000 workers were employed in the sector. They were struggling still in the moment. If the season fails, there will be total loss of around 20 million euro. Until the beginning of April, the losses were around 2 million euro. They tried different campaigns to promote the sectors so that they could gain attention from the Government. For example, they donated more than one thousand plants for a hospital, getting attention from the media. The sales in garden centres could drop more than 50% compared to last year. They asked support to different institutions; however they had received response from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry only and offering some measures like help to have more national products in the stores and supermarkets.

France: Garden Centres were closed since mid-March; florist shops were still closed. They obtained authorisation to sale vegetable plants in garden centres, but ornamental plants since 21 April only; click and collect was allowed. They expected reopening all on 11 May. Landscape markets were closed since mid-late March, as most landscape contractors stopped working on public and private sites. They first estimated a decrease of 20-25% of turnover, 400-500 million euros. No specific help was granted from their Government, but they kept lobbying.

Sweden: all working fine; good start of the season, people was asked to remain at home so they invested in their gardens. Garden Centres and Landscape markets were doing well. Their nursery sector did not need support measures.

Hungary: garden centres were opened, although the hours were limited, so there was some loss but not significant. The landscaping markets also continued working. They had a marketing campaign supported by the Government, promoting bedding plants and nursery products. Support loans with better conditions than normal were available, but not too many companies needed them in our sector.

Their export market was not significant. There had been a slowdown, and some losses but it was not completely stop. Some of the garden centres opened new online shops. The expected losses for the spring season were estimated to be around 60 70%, but the situation was improving.

The Netherlands: for the garden centre sector was quite bad in March, but they were picking up in April and it looks also for May. Looking at the whole market, they expected a loss of more than 200 million euros for the nurseries, but with the current situation they expected 50-80 million loses only. They had already some national support on the costs of the employees, but they also expected between 50 and 60 million, especially for the hardy nursery stock, to get compensation for the losses they had so far. They expected that within one or two weeks their Government would provide that compensation, of a 600 million fund for the entire horticultural industry. It would be a compensation they do not have to pay back. They also had loans with very low interests, granted by the Government. Institutional market was going on and garden centres had been open all the time. Therefore, the sector was managing.

Switzerland¹: 60% loss, although depending on the sales channel. Landscaping, fruit trees, forestry local market more or less ongoing, delivery was more complicated because of social distancing measures, a little less demand. Finale sales, retailers, Garden Centres: end sales were closed for 6 weeks, online selling was possible, but this was just a very small compensation. Current situation of the market: landscaping was never stopped; Garden Centres and DIY were open again since 27 April, after 6 weeks closed; with prevention measures for customers as social distancing, disinfection, etc. The association lobbied intensively their Government to reopen the retailers and to clarify that plants are seasonal and perishable. State support: Short-time work (80% of salary), credits 0% interest to pay back in 5 years (states guaranty), high risk persons can stay at home if protection at work is not possible (salary paid by company). But harmed plant producers cannot benefit a lot of the supports, the workers are needed for composting and start the next set of plant production. Later selling compensation is not possible (plants are seasonal and perishable); thus paying back credits would be difficult.

Finland²: market situation is almost the same as in Sweden. Garden centres and DIYs have been open. Spring season began in Easter, and April has been better than ever. May is the main season in retail sales and we are waiting good results. Also, in landscaping spring is normal. But in autumn we have to wait some depression specially in project of cities. Their tax income is going down and they will postpone part of their projects.

One problem is the lack of seasonal labour. Nurseries did not get their workers abroad. Domestic labour is one possibility and there are some campaigns to get workers to nurseries.

The Vice-president summarised that most producers were having losses in different countries. Because a second wave of the coronavirus might hit at the end of the year, he suggested that ENA should put pressure on the EC to convince national authorities in the MS to support their sector. In the long run, he advised to use the green cities concept and the scientific evidence to convince politicians to invest in green in and around the cities for the benefit of the citizens and to help keep people healthy.

¹ Received by e-mail because the Swiss Secretary was having a bad quality connection to intervene.

² Received by e-mail because the Finish Secretary was not able to intervene.

b. Brexit / Extra plant-health requirements on imports to UK.

There was no real progress on the UK-EU negotiations. SG explained that an amendment to the UK's Plant Health regulations had come into force, adding new strict requirements to the import of some plants into the United Kingdom, despite that the UK had agreed on following the EU rules until the end of this year. Although any Member State can decide quick unilateral measures in case of an emergency, this not seemed the case, and several members had sent ENA their concerns for the UK position.

SG explained that he had an online meeting with Mr Arijs (Plant Health Unit of the European Commission). The European Commission and most NPPOs of Member States considered the measures disproportioned and exaggerated, and the UK approach for Protected Zones and *Xylella* hosts not aligned with the EU legislation. The legal services of the European Commission were studying the case, and the EC -and MS- will decide in the short term the next steps to follow.

It was agreed on supporting the EC position at the EC Plenary meeting of the Plant Health Advisory Committee.

c. French legislation on prior information to be provided to purchasers of plants liable to be harmful to human health.

French secretary thanked ENA and the organisations who had sent feedback to the EC against this legislation (ANVE, LTO). However, they had just received a letter from the EC notifying that they are not going to send comments to French Government because the text did not pose problems from the EU law point of view.

French organisation will keep putting pressure on their authorities to stop the project, and they think in autumn, a new lobbying action will be necessary.

7. Sustainability Working Group: ENA sustainable development goals.

Harm Horlings, WG Chair, explained that sustainability did not seem a priority at the moment, and he suggested to think about how to deal with this item in the future. For this reason, he had prepared a questionnaire, sent out to all ENA members, that was answered by Sweden, Italy and Denmark. Following a suggestion from the Danish, he was in contact with the creators of RISE (Response-Inducing Sustainability Evaluation), a method to measure sustainability in agriculture, and he saw certain possibilities to work with this program.

ENA members were asked to send ENA their answers to the questionnaire on sustainability, to guide the future work and prioritise what issues ENA should deal with. Finally, he suggested to invite RISE experts to the summer meeting.

Different sustainability aspects were mentioned: plastics -some supermarkets are already requesting recycled-only plastic pots/containers, France is preparing a proposal on dealing with plastics (to ask Val' hor)-, water -quantity and quality-, peat use reduction, pesticides reduction, biodiversity.

It was agreed on discussing the priorities in the next GA meeting.

8. Promotion Working Group: Proposal for the next call (2021-2023).

Leon Smet, WG Chair, summarised: the current project was in the third and final year; the financial reports of the second year were approved by CHAFEA; and the 7 participants were going to decide in mid-May if physical meetings and conferences to promote Green Cities were going to be held online.

He also explained that the new proposal was being prepared with 13 countries that had already submitted their financial and activity plans. The budget of the promotion project will be around 3.4 million Euros, and the activities will be a continuation of the current project, although with more emphasis on joint activities. The project implementation will have no cost for ENA, and the proposal, prepared by an external consultant paid by the participants, had no cost for ENA either. The WG was finalising the proposal, for submission before the deadline on 3 June.

9. Next General Assembly Meeting Preparation.

In view of the current coronavirus pandemic situation, the Secretaries agreed on having a 'light' online General Assembly meeting in summer, and to ask all ENA members for a modification of the summer meetings calendar of future years: 2020 online; 2021 Bavaria, Germany; 2022 Floriade, the Netherlands; 2023 Turkey. It will be voted by e-mail shortly after the meeting and, if approved, the summer 2021 meeting will be held in Bavaria (30 June to 3 July).

President Bruns announced that he was going to cancel hotel reservations made for the 2020 summer meeting.

It was stated that the board must be renewed at the next summer GA meeting, and also because of the pandemic situation, the current board announced that they will ask to be re-elected for an additional year mandate.

10. AOB

The President asked about the European Green Week. The week was planned for the first week of June in Brussels, and it was postponed till 20 to 22 October. The green week is an event organised by the European Commission, and they are going to talk about everything that is green. The So'Green group lead by ELCA (European Landscape Contractors Association) tries to have them talking about the real green, the plants. ELCA will have a stand there. We had planned to have a full day of conferences on our sector; Leon Smet had volunteered to explain the green cities project there and the benefits of the green for the cities. The Commissioner and many high-level politicians are expected to participate in this event.

The President thanked the secretaries for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 12h06, wishing the best to all.

ⁱ <https://transcripts.gotomeeting.com/#/s/bd66e980792c36e17204003c894997f0299c407032e2ca7eabd2aaed08b9b682>