Darwin Plus: Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund

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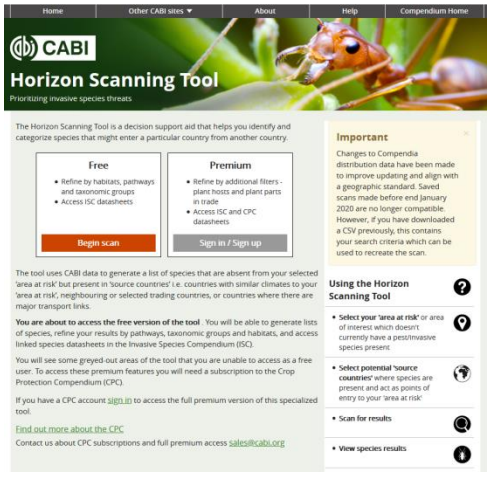
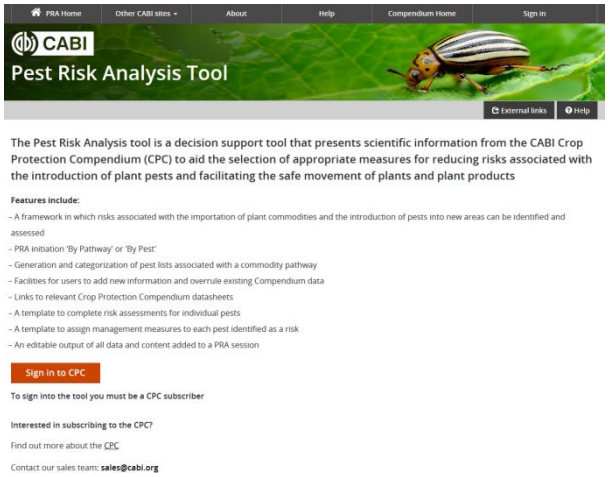
Biological invasions continue to increase globally, resulting in huge negative impacts on native biodiversity and agriculture, and sometimes threats to public health. This is mainly driven through increased human traffic and trade, but also through climate change. Once an invasive species becomes established, eradication is often not possible and continuous control efforts are costly. Therefore, solid prevention procedures are essential to minimise the risk of invasions and at the core of such procedures are pest risk assessments (PRA) and horizon scanning (HS).

With this in mind and the gaps in biosecurity capacity, particularly with regards to prevention across the majority of the UKOTs, an urgent need to address this lack of capacity to undertake PRAs was agreed. Furthermore, it was suggested that this could be addressed by a Darwin funded project, initially focusing on St Helena and the Falkland Islands as case studies.

In April 2018, the two years project titled “Improving biosecurity in the SAUKOTs through Pest Risk Assessments” was granted to the Centre for Agricultural and Bioscience International (CABI). This project primarily aimed to improve biosecurity in the SAUKOTs, by developing Pest Risk Assessment (PRA) procedures tailored to the needs of individual territories and by building capacity to use these. At the same time, CABI developed a new horizon scanning tool and an online PRA tool as part of the open access invasive species compendium (ISC).





To address the problem outlined above, the project was split into four work packages:

WP 1: Identifying the specific needs of individual OTs

WP 2: Test and implement a horizon scanning tool for invasive species

WP 3: Develop tailored PRA procedures for individual territories

WP 4: Create a biosecurity network for all SAUKOTs to share knowledge about species of concern, alerts, etc.

The four WPs were covered by desk-based activities and two workshops over the course of the project held on St Helena (March and December 2019). At these workshops, biosecurity staff from both territories plus stakeholders were trained to conduct PRA testing, whilst using and improving the templates developed in the first year of the project.

The main outcome of this project is the improved Biosecurity on several SAUKOTs through the implementation of better PRA procedures.
The newly developed PRA templates, in combination with updated PRA procedures, have been implemented on both St Helena and the Falkland Islands. In addition, with both CABI online tools (HS and PRA tool) now readily accessible have already mitigated the risk of introducing invasive species.

The success and achievements of this project will carry on over the years and will be indicated through the increase of rejections of high-risk species and higher acceptance of the import of low risk species and; increased interception of some high-risk species due to raised alert after horizon scanning. In all SAUKOTs, this is particularly relevant in connection with increased traffic and tourism. Especially for OTs with a more temperate or sub-Antarctic climate these risks are expected to become greater with climate change. Climate change is likely to allow the establishment of species in areas currently too cold for their long-term survival. Staff training and the availability of new (online) tools contribute to address these increased risks.

An additional outcome of the project was the establishment of a close cooperation between the biosecurity teams of the SAUKOTs to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills between them.

The project increased biosecurity awareness and succeeded in justifying the importance of prevention, to lower the impact of invasive species on biodiversity and livelihoods in the British OTs.