

INTERVENTION HIGHLIGHT



Streamlining agricultural trade processes Tonga adopts ePhyto certification system

For years, exporters in Tonga have relied on manual, paper-based phytosanitary certificates, which often entailed lengthy processing times, manual errors and logistical challenges. This often resulted in rejections of export consignments at ports of entry. Phytosanitary certificates are issued by Tonga's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forests (MAFF) Quarantine Division for the export of plants and plant products.

At a glance

- The introduction of an Electronic Phytosanitary Certificate (ePhyto) system in Tonga has revolutionised this process by offering a seamless, digital alternative.
- Through a collaboration between PHAMA Plus, PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU), Pacific Community (SPC) and other programs, MAFF has modernized its certification process by adopting the globally harmonized Generic EPhyto National System (GeNS).
- This transition involved shifting from traditional paper-based certificates to digital 'ePhyto' certificates.
- PHAMA Plus facilitated this initiative by providing essential digital equipment such as desktop computers, printers, laptops, external hard drives and tablets required for issuing ePhyto certificates through the GeNS portal.
- In parallel, PPIU supported capacity-building initiatives for both MAFF staff and the wider export industry in Tonga on how to effectively use and manage the system.

Benefits of going digital

- Since the implementation of the ePhyto system on in 2023, MAFF has successfully issued ePhyto certificates for 47 export consignments, encompassing commodities like squash, watermelon, root crops, kava powder and handicraft with an approximate value of AUD7.78 million dollars.

- These commodities primarily target markets in New Zealand, with the system already synchronised with New Zealand and Samoa quarantine regulators.
- MAFF's internal issuance time for phytosanitary certificates has drastically reduced from one day to just 30 minutes. Some exporters are still reporting a waiting period of two days to obtain the ePhyto certificate, which remains the same as the manual system.
- The ePhyto system has reduced administrative and operational costs (such as printing and stationery for MAFF) and the time needed to correct errors in phytosanitary certificates.
- The rejection rate of export consignments has plummeted to zero since introducing the ePhyto system, significantly enhancing confidence among exporters.
- In the event of a rejection, exporters could save up to AUD3108 per consignment. Previously, the average loss incurred for any issues at the port of entry in New Zealand amounted to TOP7,500 (AUD4800) for a fresh produce consignment valued at TOP40,000 (AUD25,500).

MAFF Quarantine Division plans to further synchronise its ePhyto system with Australia, United States, and other Pacific Island countries, encouraging more exporters to utilise the system and designing a customised application compatible with tablets to enhance mobility and user efficiency.