



Minutes of the Fifth Management Committee Meeting of COST Action CA15223 “Contribution of RNAi to sustainable agriculture, food safety and security”

Athens – Greece, 28.2.2020

1. Welcome to participants

The 5th iPLANTA MC meeting started at 9.00. The participants were welcomed by Prof. Bruno Mezzetti, Chair of the Action, and by Dr. Jeremy Sweet, Vice Chair of the Action. Bruno Mezzetti chaired the MC Meeting.

2. Verification of the presence of two-thirds of the Participating COST Countries or, if applicable, a quorum

CSO Approval: 26/02/2016

Start of the Action: 27/10 /2016

End of Action: **26/10/2020**

Total number of COST Countries having accepted the MoU: 32

The quorum (2/3 of COST Countries participating in the Action) was not reached because only 21 countries were represented: ES, AT, IT, DE, UK, TR, HU, EL, CZ, MK, NO, PL, BG, SI, FR, EE, BE, FI, RS, NL, RO, out of 32 iPlanta MoU signatory countries attended the meeting (COST doc. 134/14 B.2 “COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment” Annex I, Article 8). Due to the initial spread of COVID-19 delegates from some countries were not able to attend the MC meeting. iPlanta COST Action Management Committee delegates also attended the conference.

A representative from US attended the meeting as external expert. The MC meeting was open and several experts attending the 4th iPlanta conference also attended the MC meeting.

Inclusiveness Target Countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Serbia and Turkey.



Group photo of the 4th iPLANTA Conference – Athene 26-27.2.2020

3. Adoption of agenda

The agenda (**Annex 1**) for the 5th Management Committee (MC) meeting was adopted.

4. Approval of minutes and matters arising of last meeting

The Chair asked the MC members to approve the minutes of the 4rd MC meeting held in Lisbon (PT) on 01.3.19. The agenda was approved with unanimity.

5. Update from the Action Chair

a) *Status of Action: start and end dates of Action, participating COST countries, participating NNC/ IPC institutions and Specific Organisations*

The Chair reported that the action started the **27/10/2016** and will end the **26/10/2020**. The Action signatory countries are 32, plus 2 NNC (Armenia and Jourdan) and 2 IPC (Brasil and now Uruguay). The Chair thanked the WG leaders for the fruitful activities carried out during Grant Period 4 of iPLANTA and the local organizer of the fifth iPLANTA conference for the great contribution given in the organization and management of a successful event. Finally, the Chair invited all partners to stay connected with the accounts opened for the project on Twitter (@IPLANTA1) and on Facebook (group COST iPLANTA).

b) participating COST countries, IPC - Uruguay

The MC welcomed the participation of a representative from Uruguay as new IPC country joining the action.

6. Follow-up of MoU objectives: GP4 progress report of working groups

Each WGL had a short report of the activities carried out during GP4.

WGs Activities

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6.1 Guy Smagge reported on WG1 on activities carried out in GP4

On September 5-6th, 2019 – the University of Gent organized the WG1 annual meeting and school on Microscopy study cellular uptake of dsRNA for improved efficiency. More than 15 scientists from 8 countries, including experts and PhD students in the biotechnology field participated in a 1-day training school organised by the laboratory of Agrozoology embedded in the Department of Plants and Crops at Ghent University.

Previous studies have demonstrated that several barriers related to cellular uptake and endosomal release in the cell could impact pest insect sensitivity to the active molecule, which is a double stranded RNA (dsRNA) molecule. As such, the 3rd iPlanta training School organized by the laboratory of Agrozoology was aimed to provide training and best-practice in visualising cellular uptake of fluorescently labelled dsRNA using confocal microscopy. Confocal microscopy is a promising tool used to follow the fate of fluorescently labelled dsRNA, enabling scientists to better understand how these molecules are taken up by different pest insects. Understanding these mechanisms could lead to the development of even more selective RNA-based biocontrol products for crop protection.

6.2 Huw Jones reported on WG2 on activities carried out in GP4

Working group 2 members participated in the following activities:

Two talks at the “Biosafety of RNAi applications for plant protection” during the 15th ISBR Symposium in Tarragona in April 2019.

A one-day WG2 meeting and the two-day 4th iPlanta Training School hosted by Gabi Krczal and Michael Wassenegger, RLP Agroscience, Neustadt, Germany. These took place 15th -17th Oct 2019 and were attended by 13 students plus 9 trainers/others. The WG2 meeting included a Skype meeting to discuss planning the iPlanta Athens conference, three scientific presentations and a roundtable with the training school.

WG2 members participated in the WG3 workshop entitled ‘Biosafety of RNAi technology: data requirement and implications for the EU legal framework and planning RNAi plant field trials’ which was held on 1st and 2nd October 2019 in Rome, Italy.

Publications

WG2 members have written 5 chapters for the iPLANTA book and contributed to the perspective paper recently published in Pest Management Science. In addition they are contributing to a risk assessment paper led by Salvatore Arpaia that is currently under preparation and another perspectives manuscript based on iPlanta activities.

6.3 Due to the absence of Salvatore Arpaia, Antje Dietz-Pfeilstetter reported on WG3 on activities carried out in GP4

The main WG3 activity was a workshop, accompanied by a press conference, held 1 to 2 October 2019 in Rome/Italy, entitled “Biosafety of RNAi technology: data requirement and implications for the EU legal framework and planning RNAi plant field trials”. Aim of the first session was the evaluation of the relevance and applicability of EFSA guidelines for environmental and food/feed risk assessment to genetically modified RNAi plants. As an outcome of presentations and extensive discussions, a manuscript has been prepared and submitted to Frontiers in Plants Science for publication in the Special Issue on Advances and Challenges of RNAi based Technologies for Plants. In the second session further presentations on biosafety and regulatory

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considerations were given, including some on external applications of RNAi-based pest control. Third (press conference) and fourth (plenary lecture and round table) sessions were held in rooms of the Italian Senate, aiming at the dissemination of information about iPLANTA and field trials among the Italian agricultural community and the public.

In addition, WG3 members have written 3 chapters for the iPLANTA book and contributed to the Perspective Paper recently published in Pest Management Science.

Publications:

Arpaia, A., Christiaens, O., Giddings, K., Jones, H., Mezzetti, B., Moronta-Barrios, F., Perry, J.N., Sweet, J.B., Taning, C.N.T., Smagghe, G., Dietz-Pfeilstetter, A. Biosafety of GM crop plants expressing dsRNA: data requirements and EU regulatory considerations. Front. Plant Sci. (under revision)

Dissemination activities:

Seven presentations of iPLANTA members within the workshop organized by WG3 on “Biosafety of RNAi applications for plant protection” during the 15th ISBR Symposium in Tarragona in April 2019

6.4 Vera Ventura reported on WG4 on activities carried out in GP4

The WG4 organized a COST-iPlanta event joint with the CIR conference 2019 "Crop Innovations and Regulations" the 10 - 12 September 2019 in Barcelona, Spain. iPlanta contributed in the organization, with the support of different speakers, of one session dedicated to RNAi and also other sessions dedicated to biotechnologies by bringing specific contributions on RNAi technologies and applications. The iPlanta activities have been included in the program of CIR conference. The meeting lasted one and a half days from the morning of Wednesday 11 to the morning of Thursday 12 September.

The event had a high impact in promoting iPlanta activities to mayor industries and agencies involved in the agriculture sector.

6.5 Hilde-Gun Sorteberg reported on WG5 on activities carried out in GP5

WG5 had their meeting back-to-back (25th February) with the general meeting (26-27), and the MC meeting (28) in Athens, and presented selected highlights during the general meeting on the 27th. In addition to the selected messages from communication from our annual meeting, take home messages from COST academy courses on storytelling, social media recommendations and video productions were presented. This will lead to shaping key messages for each working group topic in the book we are writing on, together with the WG leaders. This will further be used as a basis for video productions for our last grant period to reach out to consumers and thereby also policymakers. This is important to shape clear take home lessons and messages from the actions whole grant period.

We are contributing to papers, and the book the whole action is involved in. There are also abstract from our talks during the communication meeting 25/02/2020. We did some mobile phone filming during the meeting days, that is planned edited to a more internal snapshot that can be a

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teaser for our final professional videos and possible podcast if we get a collaboration with an established pod cast series as advised by Jo Røislien.

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6.6 Book preparation /other scientific dissemination

Jeremy Sweet reported that 16 Chapters had been offered for the book covering the science, application and biosafety aspects of RNAi both in GM plants and topical applications. Most chapters had been prepared and submitted for reviewing. The book will be published by CABI as an open access ebook provided funding of €10000 is available in the next financial period. In addition printed copies will be made available at a discounted price for iPlanta participants. The book will be prepared and published before the end of the project.

iPlanta is coordinating a Frontiers in Plant Science special issue on the Research Topic: Advances and Challenges of RNAi Based Technologies for Plants . This will be an Open Access issue with a number of papers published at no or reduced cost and others supported by iPlanta depending on the funds available in this Grant Period. 18 papers have been submitted and 4 submissions have been rejected as they are not within the research topic of RNAi. One paper has been accepted so far and the remainder are currently being reviewed and edited.

6.7 GP4-STSMs Report– Jorge Paiva STSM/ITC Leaders: report on activities carried out in GP4

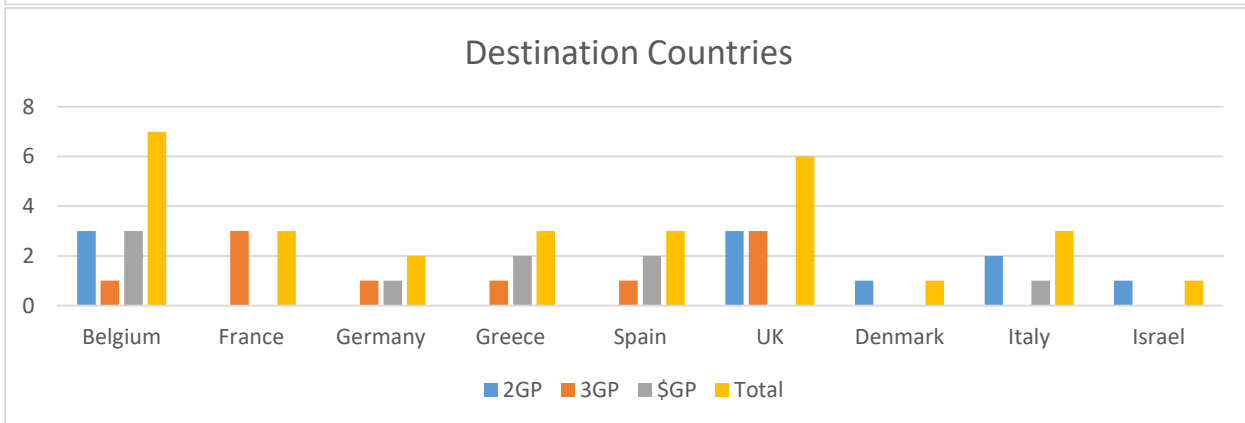
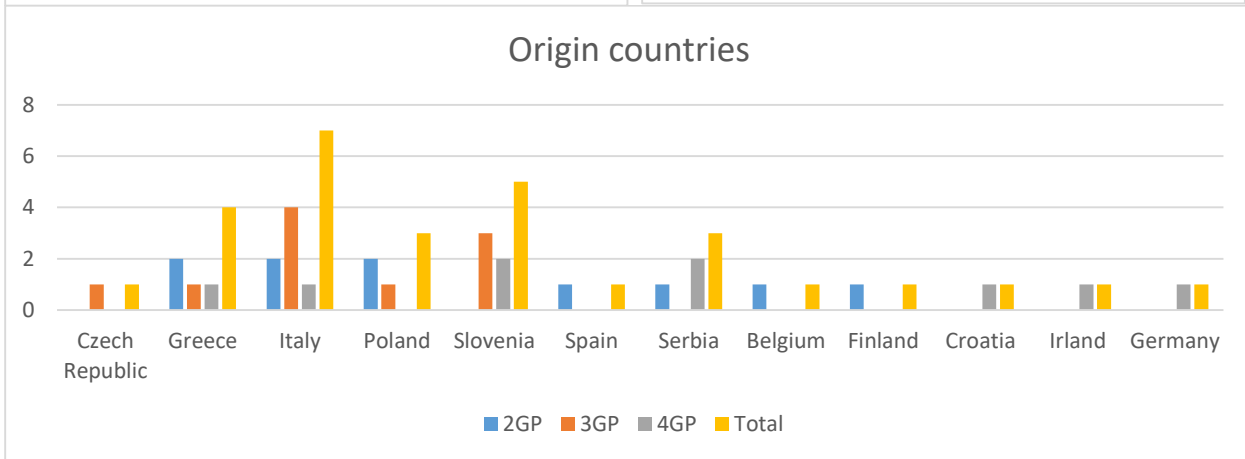
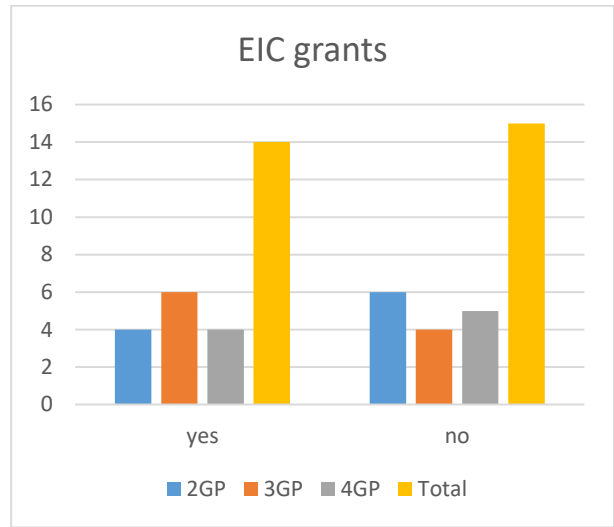
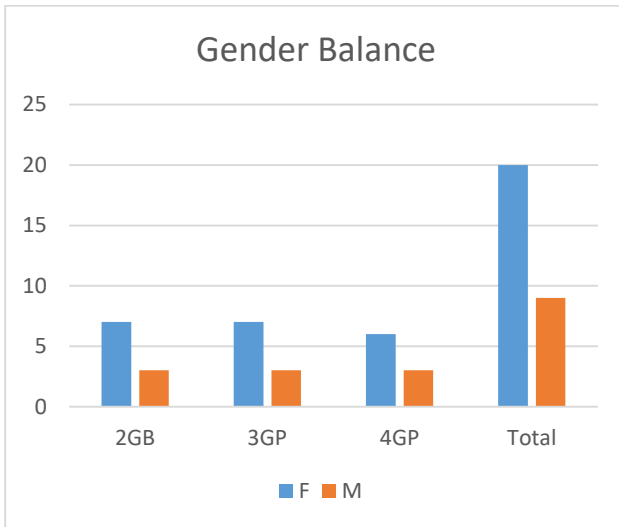
A total of 10 proposals for STSMs were approved, but one of the grantees for personal reasons did not use the grant. A total of 9 grants were finally approved and attributed: 6 to women and 3 to men. Slovenia and Serbia were the main origin countries (2 grants each). Other origin countries were Greece, Italy, Croatia, Ireland, Germany (1 grant each) i.e. more than half of the proposals approved came from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC). The main destination countries of the grantees were Belgium (3 grants), Italy and Spain (2 grants each), Germany and Italy (1 grant each). From the 9 grant proposals approved, 4 were proposed by EICs. These indicators revealed similar figures when compared to previous grant periods (see figures below).

ITC Conference: during GP4, no ITC Conference grant proposals were received.

The coordinator of STSM also issued a reminder that all the reports of ongoing STSMs should be submitted until the 1st April, in order to proceed the respective evaluations and approval of the reports, as the payment of the grants should be done until the end of April. He also reminded all that the rules and procedures of STSM available at iPlanta website should be followed.

Due to many inquiries, for the GP5, it was estimated that 4 to 5 grants can be admitted with maximum 1000 EUR admittance per grantee. These STSMs should not exceed the two week period and should preferably be carried out during July or August. The final STSM call will be opened as soon as the budget for GP5 will be approved by the COST Office.

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6.8 International dissemination

During GP4 it was not possible to organize International dissemination events.

6.9 Update from Grant Holder Action GP3 budget status

The Chair reported that the budget status for GP4, evidencing that all meetings planned in the previous MC meeting (Lisbon 2019) were organized. The STSMs program had a good success. Unfortunately, we had no applications for Congress grants ITC/ECI and the only application for international dissemination.

GP4 iPLANTA - total expenditure x 12 months - budget situation - MC4 in Athens, February 2020					
Activity	City/Country	dates	Number of experts	Spent/ prevision	
WG1 Meeting	Gent – BE	September 05th	6	2130,44	paid
WG2 Meeting	Neustadt-GE	October 15th	3	1746,69	paid
WG3 Meeting	Rome-IT	October 01-02	16	11586,31	paid
WG4 Meeting	Barcelona-SP	September 11-12th	15	11777,4	paid
WG5 Meeting	Athens-GR		5	3500	estimated
Int.Meeting 1	USA		1	0	Not eligible
Traininng School 1	Gent-BE	September 09th	13	4028,4	paid
Training School 2	Neustadt-GE	October 16-17th	18	11718,38	paid
STSMs			9	17650	partially paid
Congress grants ITC/ECI			4	0	no applications
Dissemination				6000	Frontiers and other
MC Meeting/4th Conference	Athens-GR		66	59400	estimate 65*900€
LOS MC Meeting/4thConf	Athens-GR			4080	paid
Total expected costs				133617,62	
	Estimanted	FSAC 15%		20042,64	
Estimated Total cost GP4				153660,26	
Allocated GP4 budget				154000	
Estimated Total Overspending				-339,74	

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Cost for Athens WG5, Conference and MC meeting are estimated because the activities are still to be completed the same as the last STSMs still running. After the payment of the Athens meetings and of the last STSMs if some budget will remain, all agreed to use it for open access dissemination on scientific journals (papers on Frontiers Special issue and other journals).

7) Gp5 Scientific-budget planning

7.1 GP5 Scientific strategy/planning (MoU objectives, GP Goals, WG tasks and deliverables)

The Chair opened the discussion on the plan of activities for the next GP5, from May 2020 to October 2020, by suggesting planning as main events a meeting for each WG to be combined with a school (1 or 2 maximum), this in order to increase the efficiency of WG activities and reduce administrative work.

After a discussion the MC approved the following meetings plan proposed by the Chair and WGLs:

GP5 iPLANTA – meetings plan

Activity	Country
WG5 Meeting	Oslo (NO)
Food/Consumer Stakeholder meeting	Bruxelles (BE)
Int.Meeting 1 PB2020	Washington (USA)
Last Conference/MC	Valencia (SP)

The WGLs will provide the description of the scientific contents of the different events, with the mandate to achieve objective and deliverables expected in the MoU. The budget allocated for STSM/ITC will be managed by adopting the rules and deadlines of the previous GPs.

All activities will be carried out in respect of COST policy for gender balance and ECI participation and the rules defined for the action since the first MC meeting. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we expect this plan and our action to be prolonged in time in order to carry out the planned activities including the meetings important to finalize iPLANTA well.

7.2 Dissemination planning (Scientific publications and book)

- **Joint research, position papers: progress/state of the work**
All agreed to allocate a budget to support other open access publications on international scientific journals.
- **Book – Cabi – progress/state of the work**
Book preparation will be ended by the end of the Action. CABI Contract will be shared to all authors for acceptance. All agreed to have the book open access and to apply for additional funding from COST as expected in the Vademecum for **Final Action Dissemination (FAD)**. FAD refers to outputs produced after the end date of the Action in order to share and promote the COST Action's results among wider research community, policy makers, other stakeholders and/or the general public. The FAD is funded centrally by the COST Association under the Centralised Management Funding Scheme in the form of a fixed Grant. The FAD

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must adhere to the COST logo and branding guidelines detailed in the COST brand book, available for download at: <https://www.cost.eu/visual-identity>. A summary referring to scientific publications is annexed to the grant letter. Similarly to publications funded under the CGS (see Section 10.3), the FAD (e.g. videos, animations, infographics, etc.) must be a direct result of work performed by the Action and must be co-authored by Action Participants representing at least 3 different Participating COST Full Members / COST Cooperating Members. Approved FAD products or outputs must be ordered and paid directly by each Action's Grant Holder. The COST Association will then provide a fixed Grant of up to an agreed amount to compensate the Action Grant Holder. The FAD procedure is as follows: 1. Requests for a FAD Grant of up to EUR 10 000 must be sent to the Action Science Officer by the Action Chair on behalf of the Action's MC by no later than 6 months before the official end date of the Action. The FAD Grant request form can be found at: http://www.cost.eu/FAD_application_template.

- **Dissemination to consumers and non-experts are also planned according to key messages shaped and based on vocabulary reaching audiences beyond the regular science communities.**

In addition to this on GP5 an additional budget should be expected to cover expenses for a minimum number of printed copies for the Authors.

7.3 Action GP5 Budget Planning

Following the decision taken in points 7.1 and 7.2, the Chair opened the discussion on the GP5 Budget provisional distribution, this by remembering that still the new GP5 budget has not been allocated to what has been proposed. The total budget used for this estimation is the 50% (six months) of what was allocated for GP4 (12 months). After a short discussion all MC delegates agreed on the following GP5 budget provisional distribution:

GP5 iPLANTA - estimated total expenditure per 6 months				
Activity	City/Country	dates	Number of experts	total € x 760€/expert
WG5 meeting	Tromso (NO)	1,5 day end of July	13	9.880,00
Food Consumer association Stakeholder meeting	Bruxelles (BE)	September, 9-10th, 2020	16	12.160,00
Final Meeting/MC Meeting	Valencia (SP)	September, 23-25th, 2020	40	30.400,00
STSMs (only 1000€ each)				6.000,00
Dissemination: publications scientific journals/book printing				5.500,00
Dissemination: Video 1 day filming				850,00

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Int.Meeting 1	USA - PB2020		1	2.500,00
Total expected costs				67.290,00
	Expected	FSAC 15%		10.093,50
Estimated Total cost GP5				77.383,50
GP4 budget - not yet allocated - estimated				77.000,00
	Estimated Total Overspending			383,50

All agreed that what proposed can be revised depending to the final amount of budget that will be allocated.

7.4 Request of extension

The Chair informed that there is the possibility to have COST ACTION GRANT AGREEMENT AMENDMENT for changing the end date of a Grant Period if it becomes necessary. The COST Association will consider it on a case-by-case basis and will determine whether such an increase is justified and / or necessary. An amendment to the Action Grant Agreement must be signed by both the COST Association and the Grant Holder before the end date of the Grant Period.

Given the pandemic that had just started in Italy before our meeting in Athens, making it impossible for many speakers to travel from Italy and the lock-down of large parts of the world, we expect the need to prolong the action time. This is probably best to discuss when the situation across Europe is clearer after we see how long the shut-down will last.

8 AOB

None

9 Location and date of next meeting

The next MC meeting and 5th Conference was decided to be held in Valencia (SP), next September, 2020, local organizer prof. Maria Luisa Badenes, Alberto Carbonel, Lorenzo Burgos.

10 Summary of MC decisions

The following decisions were approved:

- Minute of the 3rd MC meeting.
- WGLs report on WGs activities in GP4.
- STSMs and dissemination activities in GP4
- Chair report on GP4 budget distribution.
- Plan of activities (meetings and dissemination) for GP5
- Estimated budget distribution for GP5
- Next MC meeting and 4th Conference

11. Closing

At 12.30 the Chair of the Action declared closed the second MC meeting of iPLANTA Action.

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Annex 1 – Agenda of MC meeting.

COST Action CA15223
Action Title: Modifying plants to produce interfering RNA

Draft Agenda
4st Management Committee Meeting
Athens, Greece
February 28th, 2020

1. Welcome to participants
2. Verification of the presence of two-thirds of the Participating COST Countries or, if applicable, a quorum
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Approval of minutes and matters arising of last meeting (Lisbon MC Meeting)
5. Update from the Action Chair
 - a) Status of Action: start and end dates of Action,
 - b) participating COST countries, participating IPC - URUGUAY
6. Follow-up of MoU objectives: GP4 progress report of working groups and STSMs
 1. GP4-WG1 Report – WG1L
 2. GP4-WG2 Report – WG2L
 3. GP4-WG3 Report– WG3L
 4. GP4-WG4 Report– WG4L
 5. GP4-WG5 Report– WG5L
 6. Book preparation /other scientific dissemination
 7. GP4-STSMs Report– STSM-L
 8. International dissemination
 9. GP4 Budget report – Action Chair
7. GP5 Scientific – budget planning
 - 1 GP5 Scientific strategy/planning (MoU objectives, GP Goals, WG tasks and deliverables)
 - 2 Dissemination planning (Scientific publications and book)
 3. Action GP5 Budget Planning
 4. Request of extension
8. AOB
9. Location and date of LAST MC meeting, place and date to be identified (SEPTEMBER 2020)
10. Summary of MC decisions
11. Closing

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