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*A Commission proposal to enhance controls on Portuguese wood and wood packaging material movements so as to prevent the spread of the pine wood nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*), a regulated harmful organism, has received today the favourable opinion of the Standing Committee on Plant Health (SCPH). The proposal requires Portugal to increase its road, air and sea controls on movements of coniferous wood, bark and plants for pine wood nematode (PWN) to the maximum feasible level. The controls will include coniferous wood including wood packaging material, such as pallets, which are widely used in the transport sector for all kinds of goods, to verify whether such material has been correctly heat treated against pine wood nematode and appropriately marked before leaving continental Portugal. The proposal also requires that the other Member States carry out official controls on material coming from Portugal.*

Since June 2008, the whole of continental Portugal is considered to be a demarcated (infested) area for PWN and is subject to emergency measures to prevent the spread of PWN to other Member States. A pine forest mortality of more than 50% is predicted in case this quarantine pest would become established in Southern Europe. In spite of the existing emergency measures, non-compliant consignments of wood and wood packaging material coming from Portugal have been intercepted, some of them containing live PWN.

The proposal which has received the green light of the SCPH provides that Portugal shall apply the maximum feasible level of official controls and shall notify weekly all results to the Commission and the other Member States to allow a close monitoring of the evolution of the situation. In addition, Member States other than Portugal shall from now on carry out official controls on coniferous wood, bark and plants, coming from Portugal and moved into their territory.

The proposal foresees that Portuguese wood packaging material has to be marked after having been heat treated and also that the wood packaging material originating in other Member States must be similarly treated and marked when it is to leave continental Portugal. This is necessary because non-Portuguese wood packaging material leaving Portugal cannot be differentiated from non-compliant Portuguese wood packaging material. In order to allow the operators to adapt to these requirements, it is foreseen that the Commission Decision shall apply from the 16th of June 2009.

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