

FABI PRESENTS A WORLD CAFÉ SESSION ON FOREST HEALTH AT THE WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS IN DURBAN

As with many inter-disciplinary and wide-encompassing congresses like the 14th World Forestry Congress, there were many break-away sessions to home in on subject-specific forestry crises. These sessions, dubbed 'World Café' sessions, were essentially dialogue based or roundtable discussions, in which invited panellists shared their experiences and opinions on how to promote forest resilience in challenging environments. Earlier this year, Prof. Jolanda Roux, Dr Brett Hurley and Dr Casper Crous were invited by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to present such a World Café session on forest health.

Moderated by Dr Crous, the panellists of this session were left to freely comment on the topic: Is one tree worth the forest? Weighing the costs of the trade in live plants.

The panellists consisted of the following people, and it was a privilege to have them join this most important discussion:

Prof. Jolanda Roux (Forest Pathologist, FABI)

Dr Brett Hurley (Forest Entomologist, FABI)

Dr Clement Chilima (Director of Forestry, Government of Malawi)

Roger Coppock (Head of Analysts, Forestry Commission, UK)

Rory Mack (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: KwaZulu-Natal Division)

Philip Ivey (South African National Biodiversity Institute, Cape Town)

Joey Hulbert (PhD candidate, Forest Pathology, FABI)

This topic was chosen to help us re-assess how to deal with the massive increase in forest invasive pests due to the import and export of live plants. For example, 70% of forest pest invasions in the last four decades into Europe were due to the unregulated trade in live plants. This pattern is staggering when we consider European countries to have more developed trade regulation infrastructure, and therefore quite alarming given economic sustainability goals for developing nations.

Some key discussion points raised were that there needs to be more investment in human infrastructure (forest researchers) and physical infrastructure (quarantine facilities) to ensure that developing nations can also more rapidly and accurately detect new invasions. Small-scale farmers also need more help as they are left vulnerable to pest and pathogen attacks

(lack of knowledge updates and no proper breeding programmes, as examples). The Montesclaros Declaration seems to be a fair approach, but essentially the key issue is to be better at risk management. In other words, if you have to import, have clear evidence of no risk. Otherwise a licensing fee (the polluter pays) is another option to mitigate the socio-economic losses of invasive forest pests and pathogens.

The dialogue session was a success, with the only draw-back being the 90 minute allotted time we were given to have this session – many things were left unsaid. This means, however, that we touched upon a highly topical issue, and we need further dialogue on the future of curbing biological invasions into our valuable native forests and forestry plantations.



Dr Casper Crous talking at the World Café Session