

ESAI FUNDS PRACTICAL BIOSECURITY GRASSROOTS WORKSHOP TO HELP SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES AND BIOSECURITY

Invasive alien species (IAS) are one of the biggest threats to biodiversity on a global scale. Management of IAS costs on the island of Ireland as a whole (the Republic of Ireland plus Northern Ireland) has been estimated at over €200 million annually*. As more is understood about IAS and their impacts, environmental practitioners are beginning to recognise the need for a greater understanding around IAS and how they can help to avoid the spread of IAS by practicing responsible biosecurity.

In April last, the Centre for Environmental Research, Innovation and Sustainability (CERIS) at the Institute of Technology, Sligo, with the support of the ESAI and the EPA, took steps towards addressing this knowledge gap with an innovative and informative event - the “Invasive Alien Species: Practical Grassroots Biosecurity” workshop. Organised by Eithne Davis, a PhD research student in CERIS, the workshop brought together IAS experts from Ireland, Belgium and the UK. This day-long workshop drew a diverse variety of participants from state agencies, local authorities, community and recreational groups, the organic farming and horticultural sectors, as well as engineers, and environmental scientists. All the participants have concerns around dealing with IAS, and wanted to learn more about biosecurity.

The focus of the day was to investigate the barriers to practicing good biosecurity in the workplace. Thanks to financial support from the ESAI Grassroots Workshop Support Scheme, there was no charge for attendance. The scheme was crucial to running this workshop, the satellite meetings that were held around it, and the ongoing collaboration that was fostered.

Participants were given a morning of education and training around IAS and biosecurity which included formal online biosecurity training. Eithne Davis (CERIS, Institute of Technology, Sligo), Emily Smith (University of London) and Stephanie Bradbeer (University of Leeds) gave a series of short presentations explaining IAS, why they are a problem, how they are spread, and what our obligations are in regard to Irish and EU legislation. Caitriona Shannon (Leeds University) led the group in completing an online training session on biosecurity. All participants received an accredited certificate at the end of the training session.

The second part of the day consisted of a participatory exercise to identify the obstacles to practicing good biosecurity that exist in the workplace. This led to identifying solutions to these obstacles, and how those solutions could be applied in order to improve the capacity for practicing responsible biosecurity. Sonia Vanderhoeven of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform designed and led the participatory exercise during the second half of the day. This exercise drew upon the participants’ vast experience in a wide variety of disciplines and collated that information in a way that could be analysed and used to improve practical supports to good biosecurity in the workplace.

This Practical Biosecurity Grassroots Workshop focussed on the EPA remit of “Using knowledge to protect and improve our natural environment” by delivering current best practice training to a range of practitioners and exploring obstacles to biosecurity in stakeholder organisations. The aims and objectives of the ESAI were also honoured by providing a forum for Irish researchers to collaborate with international experts and early-stage researchers in the UK. The organised event provided a focus for further expert meetings which were held over a three-day period. Collaboration continues between the scientists involved, and plans are in place to build on the work done.

*https://invasivespeciesireland.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Economic_Impact_Assessment_FINAL_280313.pdf