



Food and Agriculture
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Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
Commission des Thons de l'Océan Indien

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**INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION
STRATEGIC SCIENCE PLAN
2020-2024**

**DRAFT
FOR SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE REVIEW**

THE INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is an intergovernmental organization responsible for the management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. The IOTC was established in 1993. The Commission comprises Contracting Parties (Members) and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, together referred to as CPCs.

The Commission has four key science-based functions and responsibilities which enable it to achieve its objectives of sustainable development and optimal utilization. Briefly these include: reviewing the status of the stocks and gathering, analyzing and disseminating scientific information (including catch and effort statistics and other relevant data); supporting research and development activities in respect of the stocks and fisheries; adopting, on the basis of scientific evidence, conservation and management measures to ensure the conservation of the stocks; and reviewing the economic and social aspects of its fisheries.

MISSION

The IOTC Commission's Rules of Procedure details the functions and mode of operation of the Scientific Committee as an advisory body to the Commission. Each Member of the Commission will have the right to be represented, and the Committee is responsible for:

- *recommending policies and procedures for the collection, processing, dissemination and analysis of fishery data*
- *developing and coordinating cooperative research programmes among Member Countries*
- *assessing and reporting to the Commission on the status of the stocks, formulating recommendations concerning conservation, fisheries management and research, including consensus, majority and minority views.*

VISION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

To be a dynamic and responsive Scientific Committee with the participation of highly competent scientists from all member countries of the Commission, working cooperatively in an efficient and transparent way, to provide objective, reliable and robust scientific advice to the Commission in support of its mandate.

WHY DO WE HAVE A STRATEGIC SCIENCE PLAN?

The activities and goals contained in this strategic science plan reflect the current needs of the Commission. This plan provides a stable framework with which the working parties and Scientific Committee can develop their respective work plans and ensure consistency and relevance from year to year. The Scientific Committee and its working parties, however, will continue to prioritize their activities in accordance with changing circumstances and the changing needs and requirements of the Commission.

This strategic plan is designed to provide guidance for the period 2020-2024. Three specific goals are envisioned, each with objectives, activities and performance indicators.

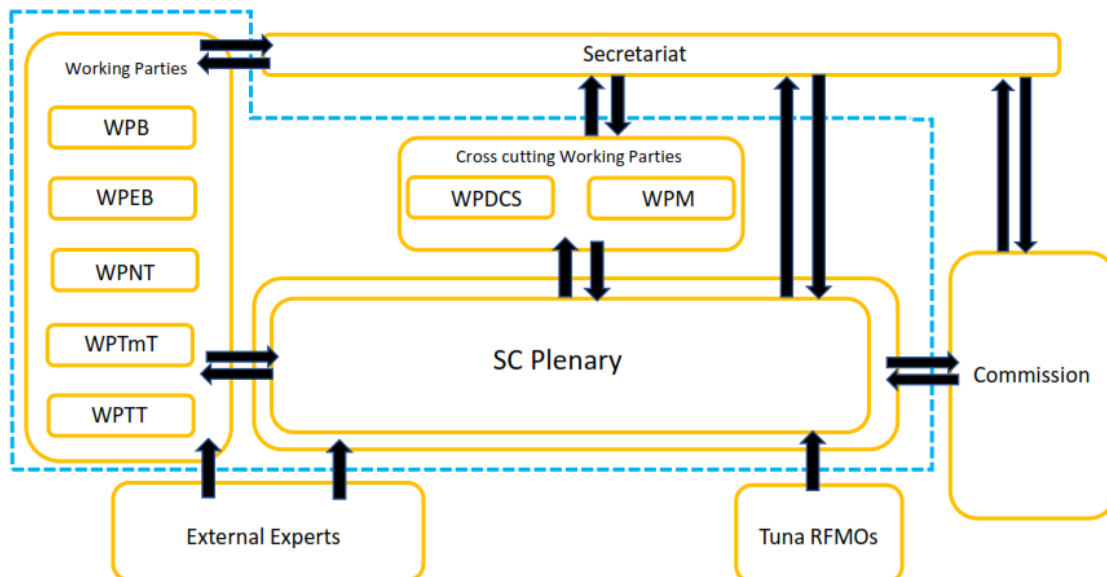
HOW THE SCIENCE PROCESSES WORK IN IOTC

The primary functions of the Scientific Committee and its working parties are to provide the Commission with the information it needs to manage fish stocks under the IOTC mandate, and any adverse impacts on the ecosystems in which the fisheries operate.

The Scientific Committee is supported by five species scientific working parties: on billfish (WPB), ecosystems and bycatch (WPEB), neritic tunas (WPNT), temperate tunas (WPTmT), tropical tunas (WPTT). In addition, the working parties on methods (WPM) and data collection and statistics (WPDCS) have important (cross cutting) roles in ensuring that the data and methods used by working parties and the scientific committee are of the highest quality. Each working party comprises national science experts and other external experts from stakeholder groups. The Scientific Committee comprises scientists from the IOTC Member countries.

The IOTC Secretariat also plays an important role in organizing meetings and ensuring that fisheries statistics and technical papers are made available to IOTC's working parties and Scientific Committee. The Secretariat also has a range of in-house expertise, including a stock assessment expert, which also provides technical support. The calendar of working party meetings planned for the period 2020-2024 is provided below.

The IOTC Secretariat, CPCs and affiliated stakeholder organizations manage a range of research activities that contribute to the goals of the Scientific Committee. This science strategy will also assist in the direction and formulation of these and future research initiatives.



CALENDAR OF PROPOSED WORKING PARTY MEETINGS FOR 2020-2024

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Neritic Tunas	Assessment meeting (BLT ¹ , FRI ¹ , GUT ¹ , KAW ¹ , LOT ¹ , COM ¹)	Intersessional meeting	Intersessional meeting	Assessment meeting (BLT ¹ , FRI ¹ , GUT ¹ , KAW ¹ , LOT ¹ , COM ¹)	Intersessional meeting
Billfish	Assessment meeting (SWO)	Assessment meeting (BLM, MLS)	Assessment meeting (BUM, SFA ¹ , SWO ²)	Assessment meeting (SWO)	Assessment meeting (BLM, MLS)
Ecosystems and Bycatch	Assessment meeting (BSH ² , OCS ¹ , SMA ¹ , Mobulid rays ² , Sea turtles ³)	Assessment meeting (BSH*, FAL ² , marine mammals ⁴)	Assessment meeting (BSH ² , OCS ² , SPL ² , FAL*, seabirds ³)	Assessment meeting (SMA ² , BTH ² , PTH ² , POR ² , marine turtles ²)	Intersessional meeting
Temperate Tunas			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data prep meeting • Assessment meeting (ALB) 		
Methods	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting
Tropical Tunas	Assessment meeting (SKJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Prep meeting • Assessment meeting (YFT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data prep meeting • Assessment meeting (BET) 	Assessment meeting (SKJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Prep meeting • Assessment meeting (YFT)
Data Collection and Statistics	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting	Annual meeting

¹ Data poor methods² Indicators³ Review of mitigation measures⁴ Ecological Risk Assessment

OVERARCHING GOAL OF THE IOTC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

To provide the best available scientific advice to the Commission

SPECIFIC GOALS

1. Strengthening data collection and analysis by

- Improving the collection and reporting of fisheries data for principle IOTC Species
- Increasing the availability of biological data
- Increasing the availability of data on by-catch and non-target species
- Improving data storage and sharing

2. Improving objective, robust, scientific advice to the Commission by

- Identifying and quantifying major uncertainties in stock assessments
- Improving fisheries-dependent abundance indices
- Investigating fisheries-independent abundance indices
- Evaluating reference points and harvest control rules through Management Strategy Evaluation
- Advancing ecosystems-based management advice
- Advancing advice on the economic and social aspects of fisheries
- Improving the processes for the provision of scientific advice

3. Increasing participation in scientific processes by

- Improving the scientific capabilities of the Scientific Committee
- Enhancing and improving participation in the Scientific Committee
- Promoting gender equality and raising gender awareness
- Preserving and promoting the independence and quality of the Scientific Committee and its working parties
- Increasing the collaboration of the Scientific Committee with the broader scientific community, communicating and promoting the value of IOTC's scientific outputs

ELABORATION OF THE GOALS, OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

GOAL 1. STRENGTHENING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Objective 1.1 Improving the collection and reporting of fisheries for principle IOTC species by:

Strengthening the collection of nominal catch, effort and size frequency information and addressing data gaps.

Activities

- Improving and adapting databases in support of changing scientific requirements.
- Collaborating with other tuna RFMOs and research institutes with tuna interests to assure that best practices for data collection are in place.
- Refining protocols for data collection and species identification for commercial and non-commercial target species from all fishing fleets, in particular artisanal fisheries.
- Conducting focused data evaluation meetings with data providers to review data quality, spatial resolution and misreporting of catches and landings.
- Providing capacity building to improve both the quantity and quality of the collected data to ensure representability of fishing activities.

Performance indicators

- Percentage reduction in data gaps in the Secretariat's databases by 2024.
- A list of data gaps and missing data elements over a 5-year period.

Improving support for the fulfilment of data reporting obligations

Activities

- Encouraging the provision of high quality data by (i) clearly identifying and communicating best practices for data collection and reporting (ii) providing report cards to data providers and the Commission to highlight areas for improvement in data reporting (iii) as needed, work directly with CPCs to identify ways to address data collection and reporting inadequacies and make strategic investments at the national level to overcome inadequacies.

Performance indicators

- Percentage reduction in non-compliance with reporting obligations by 2024.

Improving the precision of official data

Activities

- Identifying through simulation modelling, the degree to which improvements in data resolution improve the precision of estimates of exploitation. Including a cost-benefit analysis for collecting such data.
- Accessing high resolution data on floating object sets, especially on fishing aggregation devices (FADs) and on fishing operations by (i) identifying and proposing revisions to data

confidentiality protocols (ii) collaborating with industry partners to access confidential fishing operation data (historical and present).

Performance indicators

- Fishery catch/effort maps at 1x1° resolution, by month by major gear type by 2024
- Confidentiality protocols for accessing information on FADs.

Applying e-monitoring technology to increase data collection and coverage

Activities

- Pursuing broad-based application of electronic monitoring systems and other automated data collection methods which provide real-time data.
- Proposing minimum requirements for electronic monitoring for IOTC fisheries.
- Using vessel monitoring system (VMS) data to provide information at the highest temporal resolution.

Performance indicators

- Additional information on fishing operations.
- Fishery catch/effort maps at 1x1° resolution, by month by major gear type by 2024.

Objective 1.2 Increasing the availability of biological data by:

Identifying the types of biological data needed for the assessment of IOTC stocks

Activities

- Using approaches, such as simulation modelling, to determine the relative importance of particular data in the evaluation of stock status and productivity.
- Advising the Commission on any changes to the types and quality of biological data that are required from CPCs.

Performance indicators

- Revisions to the guidelines for the collection of biological data – priorities and best practices

Increasing the availability of biological data to investigate stock structure, movement and life history for IOTC stocks

Activities

- Identifying gaps in biological knowledge by species working groups.
- Promoting joint collaborative analyses of sparse biological datasets.
- Designing and executing biological research programs.
- Evaluating spatio-temporal patterns in fisheries data.
- Undertake regular collections of biological samples as necessary to determine the age and stock structure of the catch.
- Cooperate with CPCs and other research/data collection initiatives to develop biological sampling programs for IOTC stocks.

Performance indicators

- The number of joint analyses of biological information presented to working parties.
- The number of peer review publications on a novel biological data analysis in the region.
- The number of collaborative sampling programs.

Objective 1.3 Increasing the availability of data on bycatch and non-target species by:

Developing a comprehensive bycatch database

Activities

- Encouraging the submission of non-target and bycatch information in accordance with IOTC Resolutions.
- Working with CPCs and partners to highlight the importance of collecting and reporting non-target species information.
- Compiling and maintaining meta-data on observer programs and observer data collected by CPCs and partners.
- Facilitate and contribute to bycatch data collection workshops to improve species identification and sampling.

Performance indicators

- The number of bycatch workshops in the Indian Ocean region.
- The percentage increase in bycatch information in the IOTC databases by 2024.

Continuing the development of an observer database

Activities

- Increasing the implementation of the regional observer scheme (ROS) amongst CPCs.
- Providing updated observer manuals for data collection and best practice.
- Improving estimation of dead and live discards.

Performance indicators

- The number of CPCs that have implemented the ROS by 2024.
- The production and distribution of updated manuals for the ROS.
- The percentage increase in discard information in the IOTC databases by 2024.

Objective 1.4 Improving data storage and sharing by:

Reviewing and making recommendations to existing procedures for data access and confidentiality

Activities

- Reviewing existing data confidentiality protocols to take into consideration new data streams and needs.
- Making recommendations to revise existing data confidentiality protocols.

Performance indicators

- An appropriate data confidentiality agreement for the requesting and sharing of confidential data.

Developing and implementing data exchange mechanisms and e-reporting tools

Activities

- Developing and improving e-reporting tools to facilitate data reporting.
- Developing common data collection formats to enable the compilation of data from different collection initiatives.

Performance indicators

- A functioning e-reporting system for the official IOTC data types by 2024.

GOAL 2. IMPROVING OBJECTIVE, ROBUST, SCIENTIFIC ADVICE TO THE COMMISSION

Objective 2.1 Identifying and quantifying major uncertainties in stock assessments by

Identifying the major sources of uncertainty affecting management advice

Activities

- Compiling meta-datasets on biological and fisheries data that will allow the evaluation of the quality of data as well as identification of knowledge gaps.
- Conducting meta-analyses and reviews on biological parameters, fishery data, data processing and assumptions during the assessment process.

Performance indicators

- A meta-database for fishery, biological and tagging data.

Objective 2.2 Improving fisheries-dependent abundance indices by

Increasing the quality and number of abundance indices available for stock assessments

Activities

- Developing guidelines for the best practice of developing indices of abundance including the presentation of model diagnostics.
- Developing standardized indices of abundance for previously unassessed fleets and gears.
- Supporting efforts to perform collaborative analyses across national fleets.
- Providing capacity building for developing country scientists on the best techniques to standardize abundance indices.

Performance indicators

- A guide for scientists on the standardization and presentation of abundance indices.
- An increase in the number and coverage of standardized abundance indices.

Objective 2.3 Investigating fisheries-independent abundance indices by

Investigating and developing fisheries-independent indices of abundance

Activities

- Identifying and assessing the feasibility of providing abundance estimates from fisheries independent data sources.
- Organizing dedicated workshops on the development and analysis of fisheries-independent information.

Performance measure

- The number of working party papers describing analyses of fisheries-independent abundance indices.
- The number of fisheries-independent indices of abundance included in assessment models by 2024.

- The number of workshop reports dedicated to analyzing fisheries-independent information.

Objective 2.4 Evaluating reference points and harvest control rules by

Continuing to evaluate reference points and robust harvest control rules (HCR) through management strategy evaluations (MSE)

Activities

- Determining and characterizing major sources of scientific uncertainty in stock assessment parameters.
- Developing operating models to examine the impacts of sources of uncertainty on management advice.
- Conducting management strategy evaluation to identify harvest control rules that are robust to the identified sources of uncertainty.
- Testing harvest control rules using management strategy evaluation and make recommendations regarding the most appropriate harvest control rules to meet IOTC objectives.

Performance indicators

- The number of documents on management strategy evaluation presented at working parties.
- The number of stocks for which management strategy evaluation simulations are being conducted and management procedures are tested.

Objective 2.5 Advancing ecosystems-based management advice by

Identifying and assessing the data available for ecosystems based management advice

Activities

- Developing ecosystem indicators, taking into account information and indicators used by other bodies.
- Characterizing and identifying ecoregions for which ecosystem plans could be developed.
- Implementing a work plan that will facilitate the development of ecosystem indicators.
- Organizing specific workshops to further the development of ecosystem indicators and report cards.
- Enhancing participation of researchers from different disciplines (oceanography, climate, socioeconomics, etc.) in the scientific processes (especially in the Working Party on Ecosystem and Bycatch) by invitation and appointment of specific tasks.

Performance indicators

- A work plan to advance ecosystem-based fisheries management by 2024.
- The development of ecosystem indicators and report cards.
- Proposed ecoregions for the application of ecosystem plans by 2024.

Objective 2.6 Advancing advice on economic and social aspects of fisheries by

Identifying likely needs for proving advice on socio-economic aspects of IOTC fisheries

Activities

- Obtaining clarity from the Commission on its economic and social goals and requirements.
- Identifying which data and modeling platforms are most appropriate to meet the Commissions requirements.
- Make recommendations on the collection and reporting of socio-economic information.

Performance indicators

- Agreed protocols for the collection of socio-economic information.

Objective 2.7 Improving the processes for provision of scientific advice by

Revising current assessment processes to meet changing needs

Activities

- Adopting a meeting schedule or process that ensures sufficient time is dedicated to discussing assessment model inputs and specifications, initial model runs, diagnostics and projections.
- Strengthening the peer review process, including the consideration of external expert advice on assessments.

Performance indicators

- The existence of data preparatory meetings for species being assessed.
- A protocol for addressing an external review of an assessment.

Integrating uncertainty in stock status assessments and projections

Activities

- Using effective methods to integrate the sources of uncertainties into the stock assessment process and results.
- More thorough presentation of diagnostics to evaluate models fits to data and identify conflicts in input data sources.

Performance indicators

- An assessment process using a suite of models that incorporates a wide range of plausible uncertainty.
- Appropriate presentation of the uncertainty in the model results and projections.
- Development of a best practice guidelines for presenting appropriate model diagnostics.

Providing scientific advice using appropriate methods of analysis

Activities

- Conducting assessments using the latest models and techniques.
- Ensuring that appropriate expertise is available to conduct the assessments.
- Investigating and applying data poor methods for assessing stocks when required.

Performance indicators

- The number of new stocks for which assessments or stocks status summaries are available.

- The number of stocks for which quantitative assessments are conducted.

Improving stock assessments by incorporating the latest information

Activities

- Incorporating, as soon as possible, improved/updated information on fisheries activities and life history characteristics in assessments.
- Ensuring Indian Ocean data and parameters are used to the extent possible.

Performance indicators

- The number of assessments in which revised/updated life history information are incorporated.

Strengthening the peer review process

Activities

- Identifying and inviting external, independent experts to participate in technical activities, particularly for stock assessments.
- Encouraging the publication of scientific outputs.

Performance indicators

- The number of external experts contributing to IOTC technical processes.

Improving dialogue between working parties

Activities

- Encouraging working party chairs to attend the annual Scientific Committee meeting, and if possible the WPDCS.
- Encourage working party chairs to communicate directly with each other on cross cutting issues.

Performance indicators

- The number of working party chairs that attend the Scientific Committee.
- The number of working party chairs that attend the WPDCS.

Improving dialogue between the Scientific Committee and the Commission

Activities

- Encouraging participation of scientists at the Technical Committee on Management Procedures (TCMP);
- Identify capacity building opportunities for the Commission to better understand the terminology and advice provided by the TCMP and the Scientific Committee.
- Recommending to the Commission, the need to create additional science-manager dialogue when necessary.

Performance indicators

- The number of scientists attending the TCMP and/or other science-manager meetings.
- The creation of additional Technical Committees or the organization of ad hoc working parties to increase dialogue on relevant issues.
- The number of capacity development initiatives held to improve the understanding and communication of technical advice.

GOAL 3. INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN THE SCIENTIFIC PROCESSES

Objective 3.1 Improving the scientific capabilities of the Scientific Committee by

Increasing the participation of Scientific Committee members in the analyses that support scientific management advice

Activities

- Evaluating the efficacy of the scientific training activities conducted by the Secretariat.
- Working with CPCs to support undergraduate and graduate level students in quantitative fishery science.
- Organizing training courses, workshops for particular topics.

Performance indicators

- The number of courses conducted and the training materials available.
- The number of papers presented by CPC scientists to the Scientific Committee and its associated working parties.

Objective 3.2 Enhancing and improving participation in the Scientific Committee by

Ensuring the participation of scientists from CPCs that harvest significant portions of the stock

Activities

- Making recommendations to the Commission on ways to increase participation for CPCs that catch >10% of the total catch of a given stock.
- Using technical networks to reach out to CPCs that have not attended IOTC meetings in recent years and encouraging their participation.
- Clearly noting in meeting reports when no scientists from CPCs that catch significant portions of a given stock are present at relevant meetings.

Performance indicators

- Percentage participation of the CPCs that harvest significant portions of the stock.
- Percentage increase in the number of CPCs with scientific representation at scientific meetings.

Ensuring the participation of scientists from developing countries

Activities

- Raising awareness of the Meeting Participation Fund and its procedures, to encourage scientists to attend meetings.
- Supporting long-term training at one or more national laboratories.
- Initiating collaborative research projects with scientists leading to co-authorships on scientific documents presented at scientific meetings or submitted for publication.

Performance indicators

- The percentage increase in the number of developing country scientists participating in scientific meetings.
- The number of papers presented by developing country scientists at scientific meetings.

Objective 3.3 Promoting gender equality and raising gender awareness by

Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in ecosystem and fisheries resources management

Activities

- Encouraging participation by women in IOTC scientific processes.
- Promoting female leadership in the IOTC scientific processes.
- Communicating the positive contribution by women in fisheries resource management.

Performance indicators

- Percentage of women attending IOTC scientific meetings.
- The number of authorships and co-authorships by women on IOTC documents and peer review journal articles
- The number of women undertaking the role of chairperson and/or vice-chairperson.

Objective 3.4 Preserving and promoting the independence and quality of the Scientific Committee and its working parties by

Avoiding conflict of interests and ensuring the independence of the scientific process

Activities

- Developing a code of conduct for scientists and for observers.

Performance indicators

- A Code of conduct for the Scientific Committee.

Objective 3.5 Increasing the collaboration of the Scientific Committee with the broader scientific community, communicating and promoting the value of IOTC's scientific outputs by

Strengthening the linkages and collaboration with other tuna RFMOs

Activities

- Increasing the scientific exchange between the IOTC and other tuna RFMOs
- Considering the participation of scientists from other t-RFMOs as guest experts or as peer reviewers.
- Promoting inter-t-RFMO meetings on areas of common interest (e.g. species, assessment methods, data acquisition).
- Taking advantage of other fora in which relevant fisheries science is being discussed.
- Supporting the processes arising from the Kobe process (e.g. Bycatch, MSE and FAD technical groups).

Performance indicators

- The number of external experts from other t-RFMOs participating in IOTC scientific meetings.
- The number of IOTC experts participating in other t-RFMO scientific meetings.
- The number of joint t-RFMO meetings organized and attended.

Strengthening the linkages and collaboration with other regional bodies

Activities

- Identifying regional initiatives that are relevant to the IOTC science processes.
- Communicating with those regional initiatives to determine possible avenues of collaboration.
- Encouraging participation of scientists at meetings and workshops held by other regional bodies which are of relevance to the work of the IOTC.

Performance indicators

- A working document describing the regional initiatives that are relevant to IOTC.
- The number of agreements for collaboration with regional initiatives.