

PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF IOTC WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2021 AND 2022

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PURPOSE

To provide the Scientific Committee (SC) with the proposed list of dates and locations for each Working Party and Scientific Committee meeting to be held in 2021 and 2022, for its consideration.

BACKGROUND

The number of IOTC working party meetings has increased in recent years and the current length and timing of these meetings continues to stretch the limited resources of the IOTC Secretariat and CPCs alike. As such, in recent years, the IOTC Secretariat has made efforts to increase the level of efficiency (e.g. monetary and time) of the IOTC scientific process. In addition, it is necessary to plan two years in advance so as to give potential hosts enough time to incorporate meeting costs into their budgets.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, there has been substantial discussion among participating IOTC scientists aimed at encouraging, wherever it is logical/feasible, the consolidation of IOTC meetings thereby reducing the financial and logistical burden upon the IOTC. Discussion has revolved around what would be the most sensible combination of working party meetings and the timing of those meetings, taking into account data reporting deadlines and other timing demands. It has been suggested that where feasible meetings should be held in localities most relevant to the participating CPCs. This would help increase the profile of the work that the IOTC is undertaking by exposing scientists from the region to fisheries matters most relevant to their own fleets.

The need for forward planning is highlighted by the fact that many of those invited to attend IOTC meetings as Invited Experts have indicated that their schedules are often planned more than 12 months in advance. As such, there is a clear need to secure meeting dates and locations well in advance.

In identifying potential venues and dates for IOTC meetings, other key international meetings in 2020 need to be considered:

2021 IOTC Meetings (non-scientific)

- 5th Meeting of the IOTC Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures (WPICMM05): February 2021
- 7th Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC07): TBC
- 18th Session of the Compliance Committee: May/June 2021
- 18th Session of the Standing Committee on Administration and Finance: May/June 2021
- 4th Session of the Technical Committee on Management Procedures: May/June 2021
- 25th Session of the Commission: June 2021

Proposed revisions to working party meetings scheduling

There have been a number of proposed revisions to the usual scheduling of working party meetings in recent years.

Meeting length, structure and data preparation

Some IOTC working parties focus on a single species (WPTmT), others on a particular topic (WPM and WPDCS), some focus on groups of broadly similar species (WPTT, WPB, WPNT) and one working party on a range of highly diverse species and wider ecosystem issues (WPEB). Many working party meetings have been receiving an increasing number of papers year-on-year meaning that the Chairs and IOTC Secretariat are required to review the content for relevance to priority agenda items for the meeting and request authors to withdraw papers, move them to information documents not for presentation or pass them to a different meeting as recommended by the 1st performance peer-review panel. This issue has further been exacerbated by the revised meeting formats (virtual meetings with shortened

hours/days) imposed by the Covid-19 crisis in 2020. In recent years, some meetings have also increased in length to accommodate the increasing number of requests from Commission for scientific advice and large amount of meeting content (e.g. WPTT, WPB and WPDCS).

The importance of data preparatory meetings was noted in the IOTC Performance Review where it was advised that, where budgets and other resources permit, data preparatory meetings preceding stock assessment review meetings are encouraged (PRIOTC02.03, para. 96e). While it would be ideal to hold data preparatory meetings ahead of every stock assessment, it is often not practical logistically in terms of the time of scientists involved and the Secretariat, the scheduling of other tRFMO commitments and the available resources. Nevertheless, this issue has been identified and discussed at many of the working parties in recent years and, for example, the WPTmT held a data preparatory meeting in 2019, while the WPTT did so in 2020. The data preparatory meetings have facilitated discussions on data inputs, model assumptions and parameterization allowing more time during the assessment meetings to review model diagnostics and discuss which models are most suitable for management advice. As such the request for data preparatory meetings has expanded to other working parties, such as the WPEB in 2021.

The WPEB has noted particular issues with increasing content as well as a diverse group of participants who may not be fully engaged in every aspect of the meeting given the very different specialist groups in attendance. The 2017 report provides a summary (IOTC-2017-WPEB13-R, para. 214-215):

*214. The WPEB **RECALLED** its previous recommendation to the Scientific Committee:*

*“The WPEB **RECOMMENDED** that the SC note the following:*

*The WPEB **DISCUSSED** the future format in order to focus the efforts of scientists working on different groups of bycatch species to address more efficiently, the mandate of the group.*

*The WPEB **CONSIDERED** a range of options which the SC is asked to consider:*

*o **Option 1:** The current WPEB be split into two; A dedicated Working Party on Sharks (WPS) and a Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB).*

*o **Option 2:** Retaining the WPEB in its current form, with alternating focus of sharks in one year, followed by other ecosystem and bycatch issues in the next year.*

*o **Option 3:** Maintaining the WPEB with clear guidelines to deal with sharks every year, as well as other issues and bycatch groups in alternate years or as required.*

*□□The WPEB **AGREED** that shark issues were important to address on a yearly basis”.*

(Para. 253, IOTC-2013-WPEB09-R)

and the response of the Scientific Committee:

*“The SC **AGREED** that the WPEB should be maintained as a single working party for the next few years, to deal with sharks every year, as well as other issues, especially ecosystem related matters, and bycatch groups in alternate years or as required by the Commission”. (Para. 58, IOTC-2013-SC)*

*215. The WPEB **NOTED** that this approach has not proved successful, particularly in years when a stock assessment has been undertaken as the large number of papers submitted (~60) cannot be fully considered in the time available. The WPEB therefore **RECOMMENDED** that in future years when a stock assessment is planned, the meeting is extended in length by a number of days to more adequately accommodate the workplan, with some of the days dedicated exclusively to the stock assessment work.*

For other working parties, such as the WPNT, there has been limited content and progress in recent years, other than that produced by the IOTC Secretariat, presented at each Working Party. Results produced based on the limited data are therefore highly uncertain and, hence, progress in providing appropriate advice to the Commission has been relatively slow. It may be relevant to review the assessment cycle to ensure the frequency is appropriate for the neritic species (for example longtail tuna has been assessed annually from 2013 to 2017 while yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack and albacore tunas are assessed in 3-year cycles), and also appropriate for the assessment methods used and the data available. In particular for WPNT, given the poor quality of the data available and the limited assessment methods currently in use it may be more appropriate to move towards a biennial or triennial stock assessment meeting cycle with data workshops held in the intermediate years, focusing on a particular topic such as CPUE standardization for a species or fleet type and/or biological parameters. This was discussed and reflected in the workplan for the WPNT in 2019 (Appendix VI of IOTC-2019-WPNT09-R)

The IOTC Science Strategic Plan

In 2019, a proposal for a Science Strategic Plan was developed (IOTC-2019-S23-11). This strategic plan includes a proposed timetable of meetings for the 2020-2024 period. The benefit of a strategic plan is that it provides a blueprint for the Objectives and Activities required by the SC to meet the Commission's needs. As such, meetings can be scheduled over a multi-year period in accordance with the Strategic Plan. The Commission adopted the IOTC Strategic Science Plan 2020-2024, but noted that it was extremely ambitious and that its implementation should be reviewed by the Scientific Committee in 2022 and if necessary, modified

RECOMMENDATION

That the Scientific Committee:

- 1) **DISCUSS** the structure and scheduling of meetings across the working parties and **AGREE** on the best format in terms of data preparation, stock assessment cycles and meeting duration.
- 2) **FINALISE** the draft schedule of IOTC Working Party meetings and the Scientific Committee meeting for 2021 and 2022 ([Appendix I](#)).
- 3) **RECOMMEND** that the Commission endorse the schedule of IOTC Working Party meetings and the Scientific Committee meeting to be held in 2021 and 2022.

APPENDIX I

DRAFT: SCHEDULE OF IOTC WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS (2021 AND 2022)

Dates and locations

Meeting	2021			2022		
	No.	Date	*Location	No.	Date	*Location
Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB) BSH Data Preparatory Meeting	17 th	12-14 April	TBC	18 th	NA	NA
Working Party on Temperate Tunas	08 th	19-23 April	TBC	9 th	TBC	TBC
Working Party on Tropical Tunas (Data Preparatory meeting)	23 rd	10-14 May	TBC	24 th	TBC	TBC
Working Party on Neritic Tunas	11 th	5-9 July	TBC	12 th	TBC	TBC
Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB)	17 th	6-10 September (5d)	TBC	18 th	TBC	TBC
Working Party on Billfish (WPB)	19 th	13-16 September (4d)	TBC	20 th	TBC	TBC
Ad hoc Working Group on FADs (WGFAD)	2 nd	4-6 October	TBC	3 rd	TBC	TBC
Working Party on Methods	12 th	18-20 October (3d) (with WPTT)	TBC	13 th	October (3d) (with WPTT)	TBC
Working Party on Tropical Tunas (Assessment meeting)	23 rd	21-26 October (6d) (with WPM)	TBC	24 th	October (6d) (with WPM)	TBC
Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics	17 th	1-3 December (3d)	TBC	18 th	November (3d)	TBC
Scientific Committee	24 th	6-10 December (5d)	TBC	25 th	December (5d)	TBC

*Due to the Covid-19 crisis and the cancellation of physical meetings for the foreseeable future, offers to host meetings in 2021 were not requested or accepted. Should the situation change, the Secretariat will work with Member countries to determine hosting of these meetings.