



OUTCOMES OF THE 23RD SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, LAST UPDATED: 17TH NOVEMBER 2021

Purpose

To inform participants at the 17th Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS17) of the recommendations arising from the 23rd Session of the Scientific Committee (SC23) that was held online from 7 - 11 December 2020, and specifically relating to the work of the WPDCS.

Background

At the 23rd Session of the SC held by videoconference, the SC noted and considered the recommendations made by the WPDCS in 2020.

Based on the recommendations arising from the WPDCS16, the SC23 adopted a set of recommendations, provided in [Appendix A](#) of this paper.

The recommendations contained in Appendix A were provided to the Commission for consideration at its 25th Session held by videoconference in June 2021. A separate paper, IOTC-2021-WPDCS17-04 addresses the responses and actions of the Commission.

In addition, the SC23 reviewed and endorsed a Program of Work for the WPDCS. A separate paper (IOTC-2021-WPDCS17-09) will outline the review and further development of a *Program of Work* for the WPDCS for the next five years.

Discussion

In addition to the recommendations outlined in [Appendix A](#), the following extracts from the SC23 Report (IOTC-2020-SC23-R) are provided here for the consideration and action of the WPDCS17:

Report of the Secretariat – Activities in support of the IOTC science process in 2020

(Para. 17) The SC NOTED that there may be some discrepancies between the numbers of active vessels reported in the NR and the Active Vessels List (AVL) available for download from the IOTC website and ENCOURAGED all CPCs to carefully check and ensure consistency between both data sources reporting to IOTC any identified discrepancy.

(Para. 18) The SC NOTED that the IOTC-OFCF project had signed a new letter of Understanding for a 6th phase starting in 2020. The SC EXPRESSED its appreciation of the long-term valuable contribution of the project to improve statistics in the developing countries over the last 19 years.

National Reporting to the Scientific Committee: overview

(Para. 25) The SC RECALLED that the submission of a National Report is mandatory, irrespective of whether a CPC intends on attending the annual meeting of the SC or not and shall be submitted no later than 15 days prior to the SC meeting. In 2020, of the 25 National Reports submitted, 8 were submitted after the deadline. The SC NOTED that the National Report does not replace the need for submission of data according to the IOTC Mandatory Data Requirements listed in the relevant IOTC Resolution (currently Resolution 15/02 On mandatory statistical reporting requirements for IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs)).

(Para. 28) The SC **NOTED** that current National Report templates include tables whose structure and purpose appear to overlap with similar requirements that CPCs have to fulfil to provide statistical data through official reporting channels, and **ACKNOWLEDGED** that this overlap is necessary to ensure that summary information on important aspects of the fisheries (e.g., interaction with bycatch species such as marine turtles) which is not regularly provided by CPCs, becomes available to the SC.

National Reporting to the Scientific Committee: Contracting Parties (Members)

(Para. 36) Noting the 25 National Reports submitted to the IOTC Secretariat in 2020 by Contracting Parties (Members), the SC expressed concern about the difference between the catches submitted in National Reports and total catches, by fleet, in the IOTC database. The IOTC Secretariat uses the information from the National Report to update estimates of nominal catches, in the case of revisions to the data or when CPCs have not submitted any catch data; however, the time available between submission of the National Reports and the Scientific Committee makes it difficult to update the IOTC nominal database prior to the annual Session. (...)

(Para. 37) The SC that scientific and statistical information such as discard levels, observer coverage, fleet statistics etc., which are of particular relevance for several IOTC Resolutions (e.g. 15/02, 16/04, 17/05 etc.), is often only reported by CPCs in their national reports but not made available to the IOTC Secretariat in due time in accordance with the reporting requirements prescribed in the resolutions. For this reason, the SC REQUESTED all CPCs to ensure that the information presented in the respective national reports and the official submissions available to the IOTC are in agreement.

Report of the 10th Session of the Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT10)

(Para. 42) The SC NOTED the importance of these neritic tuna species in the structure and functioning of the marine ecosystems as well as exploited stocks for several fisheries, particularly to developing coastal nations in the Indian Ocean. The SC EXPRESSED its concern that assessments can still not be carried out for several species due to the quality of data available.

Report of the 18th Session of the Working Party on Billfish (WPB18)

(Para. 46) The SC NOTED the need to better evaluate the influence of low-quality catch data on billfish stock assessments and to develop CPUE time series for billfish species caught in large gillnet fisheries, as recently initiated for some neritic species in collaboration with I.R. Iran.

(Para. 56) The SC further NOTED the major uncertainties associated with the catches of gillnet fisheries, which target in particular black marlin and Indo-Pacific sailfish, and RECALLED the need for all concerned CPCs to ensure that the catch, effort and size data for these fisheries are systematically reported to the Secretariat in accordance with Resolution 15/02.

Report of the 16th Session of the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB16)

(Para. 64) The SC NOTED that in 2020, a stock assessment was completed for shortfin mako using a JABBA model but that it was not possible to provide scientific advice based on this assessment due to a number of reasons including: issues with model misspecification; the low credibility of nominal catch data; the selection of biological parameters used in the model; and the inability of the aggregated biomass dynamic model to reconcile the significant time delay (around 8 years) between fishing and the effect on future recruitment.

(Para. 67) The SC NOTED a request from Japan for the omission of [bycatch] data for Japan prior to 1992 in assessments as these are not data officially submitted by Japan. The SC further NOTED that Japan is currently working to estimate catches at a species level for these years and will submit these to the Secretariat when available. The SC REQUESTED Japan to prioritise data for blue shark and silky shark to be used in assessments next year.

Report of the 22nd Session of the Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT22)

- (Para. 85) The SC NOTED Para. 24 of Resolution 19/01 states that “The IOTC Secretariat, under advice of the Scientific Committee, shall prepare and circulate a table of allocated catch limits disaggregated as per the conditions set out in paragraphs 5 – 10 for preceding year, in December of the current year.” As such, the table of allocated catch limits was presented to the SC and is contained in Appendix 3.
- (Para. 86) The SC NOTED that the intention of Res 19/01 is to reduce catch levels to allow the yellowfin tuna stock to rebuild. The SC NOTED, however that according to Appendix 33, catches have actually increased by 5.22% since 2014. The SC further NOTED that increases in catches by CPCs not bound by Res 19/01 have offset the reductions in catches by CPCs bound by the Resolution. This has led to the overall increase in catches from 2014 – 2019.
- (Para. 87) The SC NOTED the WPTT Program of work, with high priorities being given to stock assessment model data review, fishery-independent monitoring including acoustic FAD monitoring, and MSE, CPUE standardisations, Biological sampling, Historical data review, and Target and limit reference points review.

Report of the 16th Session of the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS16)

- (Para. 101) The SC CONGRATULATED both Sri Lanka and Somalia for the positive updates in terms of the implementation of their national statistical systems. Furthermore the SC also NOTED how CPCs reacted to new challenges (such as reduction in onboard observers and sampling coverage) caused by the insurgence of the CoViD pandemic in 2020.
- (Para. 102) The SC NOTED that Electronic Monitoring Systems can be one viable and effective means to collect fishery independent information, including when external circumstances prevent human observers from being deployed onboard, while at the same time ACKNOWLEDGING that data collection through EMS alone cannot fully conform to Res. 11/04 “On a Regional Observer Scheme” requirements
- (Para. 103) NOTING that the quality of data available for artisanal fisheries in the Indian Ocean still needs to be greatly improved, the SC reiterated its REQUEST that the WPDCS continue assisting CPCs in improving the implementation of data collection and sampling activities for artisanal, coastal and small-scale fisheries, and SUGGESTED that when re-estimation of original data provided by CPCs are made by the Secretariat, these are revised frequently in close collaboration with national scientists.
- (Para. 104) RECALLING that Res. 15/02 requires CPCs to provide documents covering sampling and raising procedures by species and type of fishery, the SC REQUESTED the IOTC Secretariat develops, in close collaboration with CPCs, electronic templates to drive the documentation of such sampling procedures for all gears and fleets, focusing on time-area catches and size data, to be revised and discussed at the next session of the WPDCS.
- (Para. 105) Also, the SC NOTED the discussions ongoing at the WPDCS about the requirement (still from Res. 15/02) to sample at least 1 fish / MT, and also on the fact that sampling lengths from live bycatch species (such as sharks) prior to their release is discouraged by some CPCs for crew safety reasons and that this has to be taken into account when assessing the level of compliance of such CPCs.
- (Para. 106) NOTING the scientific importance of the information provided through the daily buoy position dataset (as this was initially required by Res. 19/02), the SC ACKNOWLEDGED that confidentiality aspects restrict its usage to the analysis of compliance aspects only (see para. 24 of Res. 19/02), therefore preventing its use for scientific purposes.
- (Para. 108) The SC ACKNOWLEDGED that this information is the result of combined efforts from several stakeholders (that including the industry, national organizations and also the IOTC Secretariat) and that when deciding how to give access to this data, the original providers should be pre-emptively consulted before the information is released. Also, the SC CONSIDERED the possibility that access priority to this data be given to scientists affiliated with the source institutions / stakeholders, in order to recognize their work.

(Para. 110) The SC NOTED the steps forward in the definition of Electronic Monitoring Programme Standards presented at the WPDCS and ACKNOWLEDGED that these require additional contributions and development for their successful implementation at regional level

Recommendation

That the WPDCS:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2021–WPDCS17–03 which outlined the main outcomes of the 23rd Session of the Scientific Committee, specifically related to the work of the WPDCS.
- 2) **CONSIDER** how best to progress these issues at the present meeting.

Appendices

[Appendix A](#): Consolidated set of recommendations of the 23rd Session of the Scientific Committee (7 - 11 December 2020) to the Commission, relevant to the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics.

Appendix A

Consolidated set of recommendations of the 23rd session of the Scientific Committee (7 – 11 December 2020) to the Commission and relevant to the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics

*Extract of the Report of the 23rd Session of the Scientific Committee
(IOTC-2020-SC23-R; Appendix 38, Pages 210-211)*

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE 16TH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON DATA COLLECTION AND STATISTICS (WPDCS16)

- SC23.12 (para. 107) Furthermore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** the Commission to consider how to best take into account the confidentiality aspects inherent to such a dataset (e.g. through updates to Res. 12/02) while at the same time ensuring proper attribution of its ownership. (Refer to paras. 104 and 106 of the SC23 report for qualifying details on this Recommendation).
- SC23.13 (para. 109) **ACKNOWLEDGING** a potential lack of clarity in the current definition of “*For reporting (Optional)*” data elements in the context of the ROS minimum standard data fields, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission require CPCs to report such fields to the IOTC Secretariat (as part of their regular ROS data submissions) when these are available to the national observer programmes.
- SC23.14 (para. 111) For this reason, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that an ad-hoc, intersessional Working Group on the development of EM Programme Standard be constituted and physical or virtual workshops (depending on the circumstances) be held to further progress with the definition of EMS minimum standards.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF MATTERS COMMON TO WORKING PARTIES (CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES – STOCK ASSESSMENT COURSE; CONNECTING SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT, ETC.)

- SC23.15 (para. 114) Given the importance of external independent review for working party meetings, the SC **RECOMMENDED** the Commission continues to allocate sufficient budget for invited scientific experts to be regularly invited to scientific working party meetings.

Meeting participation fund

- SC23.16 (para. 116) The SC reiterated its **RECOMMENDATION** that the IOTC Rules of Procedure (2014), for the administration of the Meeting Participation Fund be modified so that applications are due not later than 60 days, and that the full Draft paper be submitted no later than 45 days before the start of the relevant meeting. The aim is to allow the Selection Panel to review the full paper rather than just the abstract, and provide guidance on areas for improvement, as well as the suitability of the application to receive funding using the IOTC MPF. The earlier submission dates would also assist with visa application procedures for candidates.

IOTC species identification guides: Tuna and tuna-like species

- SC23.17 (para. 117) The SC reiterated its **RECOMMENDATION** that the Commission allocates budget towards continuing the translation and printing of the IOTC species ID guides so that hard copies of the identification cards can continue to be printed as many CPCs scientific observers, both on board and port, still do not have smart phone technology/hardware access and need to have hard copies on board.

PROGRAM OF WORK AND SCHEDULE OF WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- SC23.19 (para. 163) Noting the highly beneficial and relevant work done by IOTC stock assessment consultants in previous years, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the engagement of consultants be continued for each coming year based on the Program of Work. Consultants will be hired to supplement the skill set available within the IOTC Secretariat and CPCs.