

**IOTC MEETING PARTICIPATION FUND STATUS**

PREPARED BY: SECRETARIAT

**ABOUT THIS REVISION**

Table1 has been revised to correct the number of participants at the TCAC and include the number of participants at the Special Session in 2023. Para 12 has been amended accordingly.

**PURPOSE**

1. To submit for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Administration and Finance (SCAF), the Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) historical and future expenditure levels in support of the annual budget decision making process. This report is a requirement in accordance with Rule XVI.4: of the IOTC Rules of Procedure.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The IOTC Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) was set up by the Commission in 2010 through the adoption of Resolution 10/05 for the purpose of supporting scientists and representatives from IOTC Members and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) who are developing States to attend and/or contribute to the work of the Commission, the Scientific Committee and its Working Parties.
3. Since 2014, the IOTC Rules of Procedure (Appendix VIII) have guided the administration of the MPF. The rules detail a range of eligibility criteria for gaining access to the IOTC MPF. However, the core requirement is that the applicant must be from a developing Contracting Party, which is defined as any Contracting Party (Member) that is under the categories of 'Low' or 'Middle' income, according to the criteria used in the most recent calculation of the annual IOTC budget contributions (see the Annex of the IOTC Financial Regulations).
4. The MPF currently serves nine scientific bodies (seven working parties, the Technical Committee on Management Procedures and the Scientific Committee); and five non-scientific bodies (the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria, the Working Party on the Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures, the Standing Committee on Administration & Finance, the Compliance Committee, the Commission and the Special Sessions of the Commission).
5. A core exclusion criterion for the MPF is that any Contracting Party of the Commission that is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Commission is not eligible to benefit from the MPF.

***Almost \$2.8 million has been spent from the MPF since 2010. The average annual expenditure is approximately \$253,000.\*\*\****

6. Between 2011 and 2023, the number of IOTC bodies benefitting from the MPF has increased from 8 to 15, this is due to an increase in the number of non-scientific bodies being convened in recent years. The TCAC (having multiple meetings), special sessions of the Commission and the addition of the WPICMM has increased demand on the MPF and also has required exemptions to the current 25% allocation of the MPF to non-scientific meetings (Rule XVI.5: of the IOTC Rules of Procedure) to be obtained.
7. The total MPF expenditure from the MPF for the period 2010 to 2023, was \$2,771,316 (Table 2). Of this, \$2,166,162 was funded from the IOTC regular budget (including the initial allocation from 'accumulated funds') and \$604,949 was funded from extra-budgetary contributions.
8. Noting that the first two years of the MPF were financed from 'accumulated funds' and that the process had not yet been fully developed, the annual average expenditures for the ensuing nine years (2012-19) together

with 2022-2023 was \$252,990. The years impacted by COVID-19 (2020 and 2021) were excluded from this calculation.

## 2023 BUDGET AND USAGE

9. The Commission set the approved budget for 2023 at zero with a contingency to allow up to \$150,000 of Working Capital Funds to be used to augment the balance- left over from 2022. Due to an increase in demand and higher travel costs, the Commission approved the use of additional funds for MPF purposes up to a total expenditure of \$290,000 in 2023. A total of \$220,000 was transferred from the IOTC main fund into the MPF. The MPF was further augmented by \$17,000 of extra-budgetary contributions received from China and \$2,235 interest paid into the account by FAO.
10. The Covid-19 travel restrictions were fully lifted in 2023, resulting in the resumption of in-person and hybrid meetings.
11. The addition of a Special Session increased overall participation in the MPF in 2023.
12. The total expenditures for the MPF in 2023 amounted to \$300,179 and this covered the costs of 143 participants. This represents the second highest usage of the MPF in a single year since the fund commenced.

According to the FAO Financial System, the balance of funds in the MPF as of 31 December 2023 was \$8,153.

**Table 1.** Numbers of participants supported by the MPF at IOTC meetings since 2014.

	Meeting Participation Fund									
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
WP Neritic Tunas	13	9	10	11	7	6	0	0	0	8
WP Temperate Tunas	3	-	4	-	-	1 Prep + 4 main	0	0	0	0
WP Billfish	8	9	6	8	5	8	0	0	0	6
WP Ecosystems and Bycatch	5	8	10	7	6	9	0	0	0	5
WP Methods	6	6	9	5	2	7	0	0	0	4
WP Data Collection & Statistics	3	5	6	10	9	8	0	0	0	4
WP Tropical Tunas	6	6	12	11	9	12	0	0	0	5
Technical Committee on Management Procedures	-	-	-	13	8	6	0	0	0	17
Scientific Committee	12	14	12	14	13	11	0	0	26	8
Compliance Committee	12	10	14	13	10	10	0	0	18	14
Standing Committee on Administration & Finance	8	10	14	11	7	10	0	0	20	17
Commission	13	10	14	15	10	11	0	0	22	17
Special Session of the Commission										17
Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria	-	-	10	-	13	7	0	0	25	15
Technical Committee on Performance Review					13	7	0	0	0	0

WP Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures					10	0	7	0	0	6
<b>Total MPF participants</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Expenditure (US\$)</b>	<b>\$242,517</b>	<b>\$207,073</b>	<b>\$285,088</b>	<b>\$202,945</b>	<b>\$250,903</b>	<b>\$246,546</b>	<b>\$21,324</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$288,671</b>	<b>\$300,179</b>

**Table 2.** Historical expenditures against the IOTC Meeting Participation Fund, including from the initial allocation of 'accumulated funds', regular budget and extra-budgetary sources for the period 2010-23.

Year	Start of year balance	Additional Regular Funds	Additional Extra Budgetary Funds	Extras (interest/ FAO payments)	Total expenditure (US\$)	Regular budget expenditure (US\$)	Extra budgetary expenditure (US\$)	End of Year Balance	Extra budgetary source
2010	200,000				57,429	57,429	0	142,571	Initial MPF Allocation from 'accumulated funds' (US\$200,000)
2011	142,571	14,615			157,186	157,186	0	0	
2012	0	126,010	69,492		195,502	126,010	69,492	0	Australia
2013	0	240,547	75,405		315,952	240,547	75,405	0	Australia
2014	0	118,519	124,000	(2)	242,517	118,517	124,000	0	Australia, BOBLME, ABNJ Tuna Project
2015	0	118,387	88,417	(1,497)	207,073	118,656	88,417	(1,766)	Australia, China, ABNJ Tuna Project
2016	(1,766)	200,000	77,604	(3,461)	285,088	211,022	74,066	(12,711)	Australia, China, ABNJ Tuna Project
2017	(12,711)	200,000	20,000	1,150	202,945	182,945	20,000	5,494	China
2018	5,494	200,000	49,439	3,784	250,903	200,000	50,903	7,814	Australia, China
2019	7,814	200,000	46,337	1,683	246,546	200,000	46,342	9,288	Australia, China
2020	7,814	250,000	31,414	1,582	21,324	0	21,324	269,486	Australia (US\$ 13,414), China (US\$ 18,000)
2021	269,486	25,000	18,000	495	-	0	0	312,981	China (US\$ 18,000)
2022	312,981	25,000	18,000	1,787	288,671	270,671	18,000	69,097	China (US\$ 18,000)
2023	69,097	220,000	17,000	2,235	300,179	283,179	17,000	8,153	China (US\$ 17,000)
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>2,771,316</b>	<b>2,166,162</b>	<b>604,949</b>		

## DISCUSSION

***Demand on the MPF in 2023 was much higher than forecasted and the 2024 MPF budget may not be sufficient to cover demand.***

13. The balance of the MPF at the end of 2023 was \$8,153. The Commission set the 2024 MPF budget at \$250,000, with a contingency to allow up to \$40,000 of Working Capital Funds to be used to augment the MPF should additional funds be necessary. Therefore, the total amount available is \$298,153 (\$250,000 + \$40,000 + balance of \$8,153)

14. Due to the current high costs of travel and given the full calendar of meetings planned for 2024, \$298,153 might not be sufficient to meet demand.

15. The SCAF is requested to provide guidance to the Secretariat on how to manage the 2024 MPF budget should funds not be sufficient.

- The default strategy for the Secretariat, should an additional allocation not be made available, would be to prioritise eligibility to the MPF (Table 3). In accordance with the MPF Rules of Procedure section 2, the order of priority will be:
    - First, to support eligible Members from least developed countries (LDC) (based on the [UN classification](#));
16. It is proposed that further priority will be given according to World Bank classification (see Appendix 7 of the S26 Report for WB classifications – [here](#)), Thus:
- Second priority will be eligible Members that have a World Bank classification of ‘low’ — Note, this group currently contains only LDC Members;
  - third priority will be eligible Members that have a World Bank classification ‘Middle’ — Note however, this group contains 15 Members and additional criteria for prioritisation may be required.

**Table 3.** Classification of IOTC Members for 2024 Meeting Participation Fund purposes

Least Developed Countries	WB Classification ‘Low’	WB Classification ‘Middle’
Bangladesh, Comoros, Madagascar, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Yemen	Madagascar, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen	(Bangladesh), China, (Comoros), India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand

17. Other eligibility constraints related to the provision of prerequisite documents and the allocation of funding to science and non-science meetings (ROP XVI.5) will also apply.

***The 2025 MPF budget and proposed 2026 budgets may not be sufficient to meet the expected increased demand and higher travel costs***

18. The proposed 2025 and 2026 MPF budgets (\$250,000, respectively) may not be sufficient to meet the demand for the MPF and higher travel costs (flights and accommodation/meal allowances).
19. The SCAF is requested to consider this situation and if necessary provide guidance to the Commission on how to manage the risk of there not being sufficient funds to cover MPF demand in 2025 and future years. Some options could include:
- Maintaining the annual budget of the MPF at \$250,000
  - Increasing the annual budget
  - Changing the source of funding to the MPF (i.e. use contributions, WCF, or a combination of both).
20. Regarding the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet point above, as the WCF currently stands at \$6,345,624, it may be beneficial for the SCAF to consider exclusively funding the MPF from this fund. This would allow greater flexibility in the amount of funding available for the MPF but would require approval from the Commission since member contributions would be consequentially reduced.
21. The current rules of procedure for the administration of the IOTC Meeting Participation Fund (Appendix VIII of the IOTC Rules of Procedure) are highly prescriptive but given the high demand for the MPF, they have become difficult to operationalise. It is also difficult to predict usage, maintain the 75%:25% budget attribution to science and non-science meetings and manage the fund over the calendar year. These factors, along with the current

capped level of the funding increase the risk of not having enough funds to support eligible Members participation in meetings (such as the Scientific Committee meeting) in the latter part of the year.

22. The SCAF20 requested a review of MPF Rules of Procedure through a small working group, including the budget and efficacy of procedure for the administration of the IOTC Meeting Participation Fund (Appendix VIII of the IOTC Rules of Procedure). This small working group could further investigate the potential usage of the WCF to alleviate these issues.

### SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

That the SCAF:

- a) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2024–SCAF21–05 on the Meeting Participation Fund.
- b) **NOTE** the extra-budgetary contribution made to the MPF.
- c) **PROVIDE GUIDANCE** to the Commission on how to manage the risk of there not being sufficient funds to cover MPF demand in 2024 and future years and whether the use of the WCF could alleviate these risks.
- d) **RECOMMEND** to the Commission that, on an exceptional basis, the current 75%:25% allocation of the MPF to science and non-science meetings (Rule XVI.5: of the IOTC Rules of Procedure) not be applied in 2025.