



OUTCOMES OF THE 26TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, LAST UPDATED: 19TH NOVEMBER 2024

Purpose

To inform participants at the 20th Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS20) of the recommendations arising from the 26th Session of the Scientific Committee (SC26), held as a hybrid meeting in Mumbai, India, from 4 to 8 December 2023, specifically concerning the work of the WPDCS.

Background

At the 26th Session of the SC held as a hybrid meeting, the SC noted and considered the recommendations made during the 19th Session of the WPDCS which was held between the 28th of November and 2nd of December 2023.

Based on the recommendations arising from the WPDCS19, the SC26 adopted a set of recommendations which were provided to the Commission for consideration at its 28th Session held in Bangkok, Thailand, in May 2024 ([Appendix A](#)).

In addition, the SC26 reviewed and endorsed a Program of Work for the WPDCS. A separate paper (IOTC-2022-WPDCS20-09) 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 SC26 Report ([IOTC-2023-SC26-R_Rev1](#)) are provided here for the consideration and action of the WPDCS20.

Report of the Secretariat – Activities in support of the IOTC science process in 2023

(Para 10) The SC **NOTED** paper [IOTC-2023-SC26-05](#) which provided an overview of the work undertaken by the IOTC Secretariat in 2023 and **CONGRATULATED** the IOTC Secretariat for its contributions to the science processes this year. These contributions included support to the Working Groups, Working Parties and Scientific Committee meetings; the facilitation of the IOTC Meeting Participation Fund; assisting in improvements made in the quality of the data sets being collected and submitted to the IOTC Secretariat; capacity building activities; recruitment and management of consultants; oversight of scientific projects and facilitation of the attendance of the invited scientific experts that support IOTC technical meetings.

(Para 14) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the work of and **CONGRATULATED** the Data Section of the IOTC Secretariat for the several important activities carried on so far, such as the release of the Interactive Data Browser and the collation and clean-up of sales data from ISSF-associated canneries.

(Para 15) The SC **NOTED** how both these activities hold sensitive data assets (e.g., raised time-area catches for the five major IOTC species, and detailed catches by vessel), whose public release would be of great importance for the IOTC, and **AGREED** on the need to identify mechanisms that will guarantee data confidentiality and clarify the limits of applicability and caveats of all released information.

National Reporting to the Scientific Committee: overview

(Para. 28) The SC **NOTED** that spatialized catch and effort data for the drifting gillnet fishery of I.R. Iran operating in the high seas is not fully provided to the IOTC and **ACKNOWLEDGED** that I.R. Iran is currently considering

the use of VMS and EMS to collect this information in the future. The SC **NOTED** that due to the small size of most vessels in Iran, it is challenging to deploy onboard observers.

(Para 29) The SC **NOTED** significant changes in trends of catch data for yellowfin tuna (among others) in the historical series provided by Kenya for their longline fisheries and **ACKNOWLEDGED** that these might be due to the vessels being used for research and training purposes from 2021 onwards.

(Para 30) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the sudden and steady increase in catches of yellowfin tuna reported for the handline fishery of Oman since 2014, despite constant effort trends and **REQUESTED** further explanations on the matter. The SC **QUERIED** whether issues with species identification between longtail tuna and yellowfin tuna could be one of the driving factors.

(Para 31) The SC **NOTED** that Seychelles had issues in accurately reporting, in a timely manner, data extracted from their logbooks in the past. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the recent improvements in the national data management process and **NOTED** that Seychelles might resubmit historical data soon, although additional work on the collection of size-frequency through port sampling is still required.

(Para 34) The SC **NOTED** that mandatory scientific and statistical information such as discard levels, observer coverage, fleet statistics etc., which are of relevance for several IOTC Resolutions, is often only reported by CPCs in their national reports but not made available to the IOTC Secretariat in due time and in accordance with the reporting requirements prescribed in the Resolutions.

(Para 35) The SC **RECALLED** 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 Resolutions (and in particular Resolution 15/02 *On mandatory statistical reporting requirements for IOTC Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs)*).

(Para 36) For these reasons, the SC **REQUESTED** all CPCs to ensure that information and data presented in the respective national reports and the official submissions available to the IOTC are in agreement.

Report of the 13th Session of the Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT13)

(Para 43) The SC **ENDORSED** the development of a large-scale regional sampling program focusing on the collection of size-frequency data and tissue samples from coastal fisheries and also including the collection of morphometric data required to develop robust conversion factors, length-length and length-weight relationships. To this end, several Members expressed their interest to share samples in order to build on the stock structure project conducted and presented in 2020 ([IOTC-2020-WPNT10-10](#)).

(Para 47) **NOTING** how issues in species identification are common for neritic tunas and seerfish in several fisheries and that this affects the accuracy of the time series of catch which are the main input for the assessment models, the SC **ENDORSED** the organisation of training workshops for fish species identification.

Report of the 21st Session of the Working Party on Billfish (WPB21)

(Para 49) The SC **NOTED** that the WPB had reviewed evidence that shortbill spearfish (*Tetrapturus angustirostris*) is being caught in IOTC fisheries and that the species population size may be declining. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the addition of shortbill spearfish in the official list of IOTC species may require a review of the IOTC Agreement, which would be a complex administrative process and unlikely to occur in the near future. The SC **AGREED** that a way to move forward may be for the Commission to adopt the same approach as for the main pelagic sharks caught in tuna and tuna-like fisheries (e.g., blue shark) and mandate the SC with collating information on this species and providing scientific advice for its management. As such the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission endorse the SC's approach to address the captures of shortbill spearfish in IOTC fisheries.

Report of the 19th Session of the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB19)

(Para 61) The SC **NOTED** the poor status of discards data in terms of quality and availability which should be submitted by CPCs through form 1DI. The SC **NOTED** that the data on taxa such as cetaceans, turtles and seabirds

reported through these forms are mostly data on occurrences rather than fully raised data. They **ENCOURAGED** CPCs to increase their reporting levels through this form. The SC **NOTED** that as a result of this issue, data on cetaceans, marine turtles and seabirds are available only through the Regional Observer Scheme and are therefore very limited. The SC **SUGGESTED** that increasing the minimum required level of observer coverage may help to improve data for these species.

Report of the 25th Session of the Working Party on Tropical Tunas (WPTT25)

(Para 83) The SC **NOTED** that it is necessary to look into catch uncertainties and that this is starting to come up frequently in IOTC assessments. The SC further **NOTED** that the assessment may be affected differently by the bias in the catch series' trend or scale. The SC suggested that some of the options for addressing catch uncertainty be examined at the data preparation meeting in 2024.

(Para 84) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the significance of longline CPUE in the assessment but **NOTED** that there are still many problems with these CPUE indices, such as the unresolved impact of piracy. The SC suggested looking into the possibility of developing indices for other fisheries, like the gillnet fishery. It was noted, nevertheless, that the official gillnet data held by the Secretariat are insufficient for CPUE standardization since they lack geo-reference information and are not operational level. The SC **NOTED** that while some nations (like I.R. Iran) have gillnet data suitable for deriving CPUE indices, these data are typically restricted to coastal waters. Additionally, the Indian Ocean is home to a variety of gillnet fisheries where the data may be different. The SC **SUGGESTED** that some consultancy work be utilised to assess whether developing gillnet CPUE across the Indian Ocean is feasible.

Report of the 19th Session of the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS19)

(Para 133) The SC **NOTED** with concern the lower quality levels estimated for all other datasets (catch and effort and size-frequency) and particularly for data-poor species, which has been constantly highlighted as a major issue by all concerned Working Parties.

(Para 134) The SC **NOTED** the activities from the Secretariat aiming at improving the reporting and management of all statistical fishery data, including the updates of the IOTC forms and the definition of new forms to support reporting of data for activities on drifting objects and anchored fish aggregating devices.

(Para 135) The SC **RECALLED** how the data reporting forms presented by the Secretariat have become mandatory for the provision of statistical information to the IOTC, and that dedicated regional workshops will be held in Q1 and Q2 2024 to support CPCs in fully adopting the new forms and procedures.

(Para 137) The SC **ENDORSED** the proposed updates to the IOTC data submission processes, and more specifically:

- a. the introduction of Form 3-DA and 3-AA
- b. the decommissioning of Form 3-AR, 3-FA, 3-SU, and 1-RC-YFT
- c. the entry into force of the ad-interim data reporting workflow and supporting tools starting with the 2024 data reporting cycle (i.e., by the deadline of 30 June 2024)
- d. that the trial of the FAO matrix approach for the characterisation of IOTC fisheries are extended to cover all Indian Ocean fisheries
- e. that ROS data be reported to the IOTC exclusively through the consolidated ROS Excel data reporting forms or as .ros files produced by the ROS electronic data collection tools.

(Para 138) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the request to clarify the issues with data reporting requirements identified with Res. 12/02 and 19/07, as well as the request to change the status of reporting of fishing craft statistics from voluntary to mandatory in Res. 15/02 and **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission takes these requests in due consideration at the next revision of all concerned resolutions.

(Para 142) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the progresses accomplished by Indonesia in re-estimating their historical catch series from 2010 to 2021, and while **ENDORISING** the proposed general methodology, **NOTED** that there still are issues in some of the species-specific reconstructed historical time series such as: significant fluctuations in the revised catch statistics for several species, inconsistent patterns for specific years (e.g., 2018) and issues in continuity and magnitude with the historical catches pre-2010.

(Para 143) For this reason, the SC **AGREED** to continue providing general guidance to resolve this issue and as a first step **ENCOURAGED** Indonesia to liaise with the Secretariat and present updates on their yellowfin tuna historical time series at the next data preparatory meeting of the WPTT in May 2024

(Para 146) **ACKNOWLEDGING** that Res. [23/08](#) requires the revision of the ROS data fields, the SC **ENDORSED** the request of setting up an intersessional working group (either by correspondence, or remotely) convening interested WPDCS and WGEMS participants to discuss and review:

- a. The scientific need for each ROS data field (as proposed by the ROS expert workshop of 2018)
- b. The status (mandatory / mandatory when feasible / optional) of each ROS data field
- c. The possibility of adding EMS-specific elements to the list of ROS mandatory data fields
- d. The inclusion of proper mechanisms / classifications, within the ROS data fields, to better capture details on fins naturally attached to sharks
- e. The summary of capabilities, advantages, and drawbacks of collecting ROS data fields through alternative methods such as EMS, human onboard observers, port-sampling, self-reporting, etc. (as well as a combination of these).

and **REQUESTED** that this group reports to the next session of the WGEMS and WPDCS.

Recommendation

That the WPDCS:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2024–WPDCS20–03 which outlined the main outcomes of the 26th 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 26th Session of the Scientific Committee (4 - 8 December 2023) to the Commission, relevant to the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics.

Appendix A

Consolidated set of recommendations of the 26th session of the Scientific Committee (4 – 8 December 2023) to the Commission and relevant to the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics

*Extract of the Report of the 26th Session of the Scientific Committee
(IOTC-2023-SC26-R; Appendix 38, Pages 204-207)*

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE 21ST SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON BILLFISH (WPB21)

SC26.09 (para. 49) The SC **NOTED** that the WPB had reviewed evidence that shortbill spearfish (*Tetrapturus angustirostris*) is being caught in IOTC fisheries and that the species population size may be declining. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the addition of shortbill spearfish in the official list of IOTC species may require a review of the IOTC Agreement, which would be a complex administrative process and unlikely to occur in the near future. The SC **AGREED** that a way to move forward may be for the Commission to adopt the same approach as for the main pelagic sharks caught in tuna and tuna-like fisheries (e.g., blue shark) and mandate the SC with collating information on this species and providing scientific advice for its management. As such the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission endorse the SCs approach to address the captures of shortbill spearfish in IOTC fisheries.

REPORT OF THE 25TH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON TROPICAL TUNAS (WPTT25)

SC26.17 (para. 101) The SC **NOTED** that the Jelly-FAD is an example of how the implementation of biodegradable DFADs can be achieved, further **NOTING** that other actions have been also carried out in the Indian Ocean for BIOFAD testing using alternative designs and materials and this work has been presented to the WGFAD and WPEB for many years. The SC further **NOTED** that the IATTC has recently adopted a step-wise approach to the full adoption of biodegradable DFADs (IATTC C-23-04). The SC therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission initiate an ambitious step-wise approach for the implementation of biodegradable DFADs as soon as possible.

SC26.19 (para. 114) Following the presentation of document IOTC-2023-SC26-11 the SC **RECOMMENDED** that pursuing the development of the Close-Kin Mark Recapture project for yellowfin tuna should be a high priority for the Commission.

REPORT OF THE 19TH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON DATA COLLECTION AND STATISTICS (WPDCS19)

SC26.21 (para. 138) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** the request to clarify the issues with data reporting requirements identified with Res. 12/02 and 19/07, as well as the request to change the status of reporting of fishing craft statistics from voluntary to mandatory in Res. 15/02 and **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission takes these requests in due consideration at the next revision of all concerned resolutions.

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

IOTC species identification guides: Tuna and tuna-like species

SC26.23 (para. 155) 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 CPC scientific observers, both on board and at port, need to have hard copies.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL OBSERVER SCHEME

SC26.26 (para. 175) The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the estimated levels of coverage provided in Appendix B.1 of IOTC-2023-SC26-07_rev1 are based on the number of hooks (observed and total), as this effort unit is the only one generally available to the IOTC Secretariat. The SC further **NOTED** that the issue had been previously raised during SC25 and therefore **REITERATED** its **RECOMMENDATION** (SC25.34 (Para. 172)) that at the next revision of Res. 15/02 this is amended to include the mandatory reporting of sets/operations as an additional unit of effort for longline fisheries.