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PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF IOTC WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2026 AND 2027

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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 2026 and 2027, 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 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 2025 need to be considered:

2026 IOTC Meetings (non-scientific)

- 10th Session of the Technical Committee on Management Procedures: 26-27 January
- 16th Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC): 4 to 6 February
- Working Party on Implementation of Conservation and Management Measures (WPICMM): 11-13 February
- Working Party on Social-Economics (WPSE): 1-2 April
- 23rd Session of the Compliance Committee: 4-6 May
- 22st Session of the Standing Committee on Administration and Finance: 7 May
- 11th Technical Committee on Management Procedures: 9 May
- 30th Session of the Commission: 11 to 15 May
- 17th Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC): 12 to 15 October

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, 2021 and 2022. 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), while others have decreased in length to improve efficiency (e.g., WPNT and WPM).

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. 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.

In 2021, the SC made several observations about the future of meeting formats (IOTC-2021-SC24-R):

*(Para. 12) The SC **NOTED** although all meetings had been successful held virtually in 2021, they were shortened to facilitate the virtual platform. The SC **AGREED** that in the future virtual meetings may still be conducted for certain meetings (such as Data preparatory meetings) in order to reduce the expenses travel imposes on CPCs as well as the IOTC MPF, but for those meetings requiring closer collaborations in person, physical meetings will be continued as required.*

*(Para. 14) The SC **REQUESTED** that the Secretariat investigate the most suitable options for hosting hybrid meetings in the future that would facilitate both in-person and virtual participation. This would alleviate some of the burden inherent in the increased number of meetings as well as reduce costs for both the Secretariat as well as perspective participants.*

In 2022, again discussed this issue (IOTC-2022-SC25-R):

*(Para. 188) **ACKNOWLEDGING** that holding data preparatory meetings prior to stock assessments is considered to be best practice and noting that since 2019 data preparatory meetings were successfully held for the WPTmT, WPTT and WPEB, the SC **AGREED** to continue the practice of having data preparatory meetings prior to stock assessment meetings for the major IOTC species. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that data preparatory meetings continue to be held virtually so as not to increase the travel and costs required for the already full IOTC timetable of meetings.*

*(Para. 189) The SC **NOTED** the utility of facilitating both in-person and virtual participation at future meetings to ensure increased participation and reduce the logistical costs for many CPCs. As such, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that future working party and Scientific Committee meetings are held in a hybrid format.*

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. To date no changes to the structure of the WPEB have been agreed by the SC.

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 2026 and 2027 (Appendix I).
- 3) **RECOMMEND** that the Commission endorse the schedule of IOTC Working Party meetings and the Scientific Committee meeting to be held in 2026 and 2027.

APPENDIX I

DRAFT: SCHEDULE OF IOTC WORKING PARTY AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS (2026 AND 2027)

Dates and locations

	2026			2027		
Meeting	No.	Date	*Location	No.	Date	*Location
Management Strategy Evaluation Task Force of the Working Party on Methods (WPM)	17 th	23 – 25 March	Virtual	18 th	March	Virtual
Working Party on Social-Economics (WPSE)	3 rd	1-2 April (2d)	Virtual	4 th	April	Virtual
Ad hoc Working Group on Electronic Monitoring Systems (WGEMS)	6 th	13-14 April (2d)	Virtual	7 th	April	Virtual
Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (Data Preparatory meeting) (WPEB-DP)	22 nd	15-17 April (2d)	Virtual			
Working Group on FADs (WGFAD)	8 th	8-9 June (2d)	Virtual	9 th	June	Virtual
Working Party on Tropical Tunas (Data Preparatory meeting) (WPTT-DP)	28 th	10-12 June (3d)	Virtual	29 th	June	Virtual
Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT)	16 th	6-9 July (4d)	TBC	17 th	July (3d)	TBC
Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPTmT)	10 th	20-22 July	Virtual			
Working Party on Billfish (WPB)	24 th	9-12 September (4d) (with WPEB)	TBC	25 th	September (4d) (with WPEB)	TBC
Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB)	22 nd	14-18 September (5d) (with WPB)	TBC	23 rd	September (5d) (with WPB)	TBC
Working Party on Tropical Tunas (Assessment meeting) (WPTT-AS)	28 th	20 October – 24 October (5d) (with WPM)	TBC	29 th	October (5d) (with WPM)	TBC
Working Party on Methods (WPM)	17 th	26-27 October (2d) (with WPTT)	TBC	18 th	October (2d) (with WPTT)	TBC
Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics (WPDCS)	22 nd	24 – 28 November (5d) (with SC)	TBC	23 rd	November (5d)	TBC
Scientific Committee (SC)	29 th	30 November - 4 December (5d)	TBC	30 th	December (5d)	TBC

*In accordance with the SC Recommendations, Data Preparatory and Working Group meetings will remain virtual. The Secretariat will endeavour to ensure all remaining meetings are held in a hybrid format if possible.