
DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SMALL INFORMAL WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW IOTC PROCESSES

PREPARED BY: SECRETARIAT

PURPOSE

To provide the Commission with a summary of the discussions that took place and recommendations made during the Small Working Group requested by the Commission at its 29th Session in 2025.

BACKGROUND

In 2025, the Commission discussed paper IOTC-2025-S29-08 submitted by Japan on the operation of IOTC's meetings which provided some comments and suggestions to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of IOTC's meetings.

Paragraph 16 of the Commission Report ([IOTC-2025-S29-R](#)) states:

*“16. The Commission **REQUESTED** that a small informal working group, open to any interested party, but involving at a minimum the Commission Chair and Vice-Chairs, and those of the CoC, SCAF and SC as well as other relevant subsidiary bodies, with support from the IOTC Secretariat, undertake a comprehensive review of IOTC meeting operations. This review should include at a minimum, the following topics:*

- a) the current structure of the annual meeting series (CoC, SCAF, TCMP, and Commission meetings);*
- b) the topics raised in paper IOTC-2025-S29-08;*
- c) the annual meeting calendar and meeting formats.*
- d) potential amendments to the IOTC Rules of Procedure that might be required to improve the IOTC's meetings and their structure.”*

As such, the Commission Chair and Vice-Chairs, and those of the CoC, SCAF and SC met on the 19 November 2025 to discuss this issue and plan a way forward to facilitate the Commissions request. It was agreed to send a letter to Members requesting their feedback on paper IOTC-2025-S29-08 as well as any other relevant issues related to the operation of IOTC meetings. This letter was distributed to Members on the 25th of November and Members were requested to provide feedback by the 9th of December.

On the 5th of January 2026, the Commission Chair and Vice-Chairs, and those of the CoC, SCAF and SC met again to discuss the responses received and provide their own insights. The comments received as well as those added by the Chairs were included in document IOTC-2026-S30-INF01. The Commission Chair then invited all interested parties to participate in an open small informal working group meeting to make recommendations on IOTC processes and propose revisions to the IOTC Rules of Procedure. The discussions and recommendations are provided below.

PARTICIPATION, REGISTRATION AND ATTENDEE STATUS

There was general support for actions that clarify attendee lists and limit participation strictly to authorized individuals. It was agreed that registration procedures should be reviewed to ensure that only those with valid status, such as Contracting Parties, CNCPs, Observers, and invited experts are admitted, thereby protecting procedural integrity. Discussions highlighted that the goal should be to ensure attendees have the endorsement of their delegations, rather than strictly limiting numbers.

The group **RECOMMENDED** a process to ensure participation is properly endorsed and vetted prior to the meeting commencing:

- i. All interested participants are required to register online using the web form provided on the meeting webpage. A deadline for registration of 5 days before the meeting commences will be implemented and the ability to register online will be removed at this time.
- ii. The registration list will be sent by the Secretariat to Heads of Delegations and/or pre-specified Alternates for validation. Only registered and validated participants will be permitted to attend IOTC meetings. Should a delegation not respond to the Secretariat's request for validation, the participants will be informed and asked to contact their delegation to endorse their participation. A non-response will not constitute consent for a participant to attend the meeting for which they have registered. In such cases, participants may be granted provisional attendance status pending endorsement, but will not be able to participate in technical discussions and present documents until validation is received.
- iii. Member states may choose to submit a list of pre-authorized participants (which may be updated at any time) that may register and attend the IOTC meetings. These individuals will still be required to register online, but they will automatically be considered to be validated by the HOD/Alt.
- iv. HODs or pre-specified Alternates may submit in writing, nominations for a meeting after the 5 day deadline as it will be considered that these participants have been pre-approved by their delegations and do not require validation.

While it is recognized that scientists at the Working Party and Working Group meetings require prior approval from their delegations, it was **NOTED** that they should remain free to speak in their individual technical capacity rather than being viewed as representing formal positions of delegations. This process was deemed necessary to ensure the scientific integrity of the discussions.

The group **NOTED** that although the IOTC processes regarding meeting had generally been successful to date, it was acknowledged that the majority of Working Parties do not have individual Terms of Reference (TORs). This was considered to be particularly problematic for the multi-disciplinary Working Parties (WP) such as the WPEB. As such it was discussed whether formal TORs should be developed for this WP. It was generally agreed that this could be beneficial to guide the work of the WP as well as provide guidance for future participants as to the working of this WP, however, it was also **NOTED** that this process may take time to reach agreement. Alternatively, a basic guidance document for Chairs to provide them with information on how to manage WP meetings (schedule presentations, prioritise documents, ensure discussions stay focused) could be produced. The group therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission provide guidance on whether TORs should be developed for each WP (and this work be added to their agendas) or whether a guidance document for Chairs may be preferable.

DOCUMENT HANDLING

The group discussed that Working Papers should clearly state the authors' expectations for the meeting body, such as whether the document is for discussion, feedback, conclusion, recommendation, or decision. To facilitate this, all submitted documents should contain text at the end (such as provided in all Secretariat documents) stating the actions required in relation to the paper. An example is given below from document IOTC-2025-SCAF22-08:

RECOMMENDATION/S

68. That the SCAF:

- a) **NOTE** the Budget Estimates and supporting documentation for the IOTC Secretariat's programme of Work for the financial period 1 January to 31 December 2026, together with indicative figures for the 2027 financial period.
- b) **RECOMMENDS** that any additional funds required for the Secretariat to host meetings be first taken from savings in other budget lines, then, only if required, on an exceptional basis, from the Working Capital Fund.
- c) **RECOMMENDS** that if funds are required for work to migrate IOTC's systems and website to the FAO website platform in 2026, they will first be taken from savings in other budget lines, then, only if required, on an exceptional basis, from the Working Capital Fund.
- d) **RECOMMENDS** a budget and scheme of contributions for the 2026 financial period to the Commission for its consideration.
- e) **RECOMMENDS** that the IOTC Secretariat publish a final version of the Programme of Work and Budget for 2026 and tentatively for 2027, based on the amendments made during the SCAF22, and as adopted by the Commission during its 29th Session. The final Program of Work and Budget shall be published on the IOTC website (www.iotc.org) for ease of reference and transparency.

However, since it may be difficult for CPCs to state the action to be required, the group alternatively **RECOMMENDED** that a cover sheet be attached to each document upon submission, ensuring that the main elements of the document are immediately clear for both the chair and participants. This will help the chair to consider how to deal with the documents submitted by CPCs. An example of a cover sheet as used by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is provided in Annex I, though the group recognised that this would need amending should it be agreed to take this forward.

The group also **NOTED** that concern had been raised regarding the late submission of papers to IOTC Meetings. The Secretariat confirmed that the Rules of Procedure already contain clearly defined deadlines for document submission but that these may not be followed consistently. The group reiterated the need to adhere to these deadlines but **NOTED** that under certain circumstances, the chair of a meeting should be given limited authority to allow a small amount of flexibility to these deadlines to include papers that provide crucial information or are fundamental to the successful outcomes of the meeting but which may have been submitted after the deadline. As such the group **RECOMMENDED** that minor changes be made to the Rules of Procedure (ROPs) which facilitate this flexibility as it is not possible under the current text.

Closely related to this, the group **NOTED** that there has been increasing requests for information papers to be presented during IOTC meetings. It was further **NOTED** that information papers are not subject to the deadlines for submission specified in the ROPs and that their submission just prior to the commencement of a meeting made it difficult for participants to review them and fully review and discuss their contents. It was further **NOTED** that this potential loophole was being exploited to facilitate the late submission of working documents, repackaging them as information papers and then requesting their full discussion. The group therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission specify that information papers should not be presented during meetings and should be kept for background information purposes only. The author may make a short oral introduction to the Information paper, alerting other participants to its content and availability, but it would not be discussed unless it contain information deemed by the chair to be crucial to the scientific processes of the meeting. All papers requiring presentation at a meeting should be submitted as working documents, respecting the deadlines specified in the ROPs and should include the actionable text specified above.

REPORT ADOPTION

The group **NOTED** that in recent years the discussions required to obtain agreement on management measures had been lengthy and often only finalised late on the final day of the meeting. As such it has not been possible to adopt the Commission report during the session as required under Rule XV of the IOTC Rules of Procedure. The group **RECOMMENDED** revising the Rules of Procedure to allow for intersessional adoption of the Commission report by correspondence as soon as possible after the closure of the meeting. This would not preclude adoption of the report during the session if time allowed.

ANNUAL MEETING CALENDAR AND FORMATS

The group **DISCUSSED** the current IOTC meeting calendar as well as the meeting formats for the annual Commission and its associated meetings. The group **NOTED** conflicts with the IOTC meetings in May with meetings of ICCAT. It was **AGREED** that the Secretariat should continue to liaise with ICCAT to try and avoid this conflict, noting the very dense ICCAT meeting schedule may make this difficult. The group **AGREED** that it would not be suitable for IOTC to move its Commission meeting to avoid the ICCAT meeting, but rather to appeal to ICCAT to respect the importance of the IOTC Commission and try and avoid scheduling meetings during the same dates. No other changes were proposed to the annual calendar of meetings.

With regards to the annual meeting of the Commission and its associated meetings, it was noted that the two-week duration of the meetings was long and burdensome for smaller delegations. The necessity to have these meetings back-to-back was, however, acknowledged. To reduce the duration of the Commission and its associated meetings, the group **RECOMMENDED** moving the TCMP to a different date apart from the other annual meetings. The group further **DISCUSSED** the need to allow more time for the important discussions during the CoC and possibly extend the meeting by a half day (or day). To accommodate this, the group **SUGGESTED** either using the extra day

liberated by the rescheduling of the TCMP to accommodate this or consider providing guidance to the Chair to streamline the CoC meetings, making them more efficient, maintaining the current duration of three days.

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the small informal working group made the following recommendations:

- 1) The group **RECOMMENDED** a process to ensure participation is properly endorsed and vetted prior to the meeting commencing:
 - i. All interested participants are required to register online using the web form provided on the meeting webpage. A deadline for registration of 5 days before the meeting commences will be implemented and the ability to register online will be removed at this time.
 - ii. The registration list will be sent by the Secretariat to Heads of Delegations and/or pre-specified Alternates for validation. Only registered and validated participants will be permitted to attend IOTC meetings. Should a delegation not respond to the Secretariat's request for validation, the participants will be informed and asked to contact their delegation to endorse their participation. A non-response will not constitute consent for a participant to attend the meeting for which they have registered. In such cases, participants may be granted provisional attendance status pending endorsement, but will not be able to participate in technical discussions and present documents until validation is received.
 - iii. Member states may choose to submit a list of pre-authorized participants (which may be updated at any time) that may register and attend the IOTC meetings. These individuals will still be required to register online, but they will automatically be considered to be validated by the HOD/Alt.
 - iv. HODs or pre-specified Alternates may submit in writing, nominations to a meeting after the 5 day deadline as it will be considered that these participants have been pre-approved by their delegations and do not require validation.
- 2) The group **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission provide guidance on whether TORs should be developed for each WP (and this work be added to their agendas) or whether a guidance document for Chairs may be preferable.
- 3) Since it may be difficult for CPCs to state the action to be required, the group alternatively **RECOMMENDED** that a cover sheet be attached to each document upon submission, ensuring that the main elements of the document are immediately clear for both the chair and participants.
- 4) The group reiterated the need to adhere to document submission deadlines but **NOTED** that under certain circumstances, the chair of a meeting should be given limited authority to allow a small amount of flexibility to these deadlines to include papers that provide crucial information or are fundamental to the successful outcomes of the meeting but which may have been submitted after the deadline. As such the group **RECOMMENDED** that minor changes be made to the Rules of Procedure (ROPs) which facilitate this flexibility as it is not possible under the current text.
- 5) The group **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission specify that information papers should not be presented during meetings and should be kept for background information purposes only.
- 6) The group **RECOMMENDED** revising the Rules of Procedure to allow for intersessional adoption of the Commission report by correspondence as soon as possible after the closure of the meeting.
- 7) To reduce the duration of the Commission and its associated meetings, the group **RECOMMENDED** moving the TCMP to a different date apart from the other annual meetings.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Commission:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC-2026-S30-07 which provided the Commission with the discussions and recommendations from the small informal working group on IOTC Processes.
- 2) **CONSIDER** whether any of the recommendations should be endorsed and implemented.

Cover Sheet to Accompany New Proposals
(submitted by OO)

Title of the Proposed Draft Recommendation/Resolution:

Title of currently in force recommendation(s) or resolution(s) addressing the same or related issues:

1. Does it create new reporting obligation(s) for CPCs? Yes No

Brief description of new reporting obligation(s):

2. Does it require additional input or work by the SCRS? Yes No

Is this work already included in the current SCRS workplan Yes No

Brief description of new scientific work required (i.e. stock assessment, analysis, external consultant):

3. Does it involve the creation of a new working group or intersessional process? Yes No

4. Does it require a new programme or additional activities to be managed by the Secretariat?

Yes No

Brief description of new Secretariat work required:

5. What is the proposed timeframe for implementation, and are there different specific timeframes for certain CPCs, fisheries, regions, etc.:

6. Is there any other relevant information regarding the resource and workload implications of the proposal: