

OUTCOMES OF THE 28th SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, JUNE 2026

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 16th Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT16) of the recommendations arising from the 28th Session of the IOTC Scientific Committee (SC) held from 1 – 5 December 2025, specifically relating to the work of the WPNT.

BACKGROUND

At the 28th Session of the SC, the SC noted and considered the recommendations made by the WPNT in 2025 that included:

- Consider supporting a consultancy to review existing systems for IOTC datasets, including, but not limited to, those used in fisheries data — with a view to identifying best practices and proposing improvements to the current data quality scoring system used by the Secretariat
- To urge the Commission to align the spatial resolution of size-frequency data with that of geo-referenced catch and effort data

These requests were made in order to be able to properly assess the stock status of these species.

IOTC code	English name	Scientific name
LOT	Longtail tuna	<i>Thunnus tonggol</i>
FRI	Frigate tuna	<i>Auxis thazard</i>
BLT	Bullet tuna	<i>Auxis rochei</i>
KAW	Kawakawa	<i>Euthynnus affinis</i>
COM	Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus commerson</i>
GUT	Indo-Pacific king mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus guttatus</i>

Based on the recommendations arising from the WPNT15, the SC28 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 30th Session which was held in May 2025.

In addition, the SC28 reviewed and endorsed a Program of Work (2026–30) for the WPNT, including a revised stock assessment schedule, as detailed in [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#). A separate paper (IOTC–2026–WPNT16–08) will outline the review and development process for a Program of Work for the WPNT for the next five years.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the recommendations outlined in [Appendix A](#), [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#), the SC made several other comments relevant to the WPNT, which participants are asked to consider:

Report of the 15th Session of the Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT14)

(para. 52) The SC **NOTED** the report of the 15th Session of the Working Party on Neritic Tunas (IOTC–2025–WPNT15–R), including the consolidated list of recommendations provided as an appendix to the report. The meeting was attended by 40 participants (cf. 47 in 2024). Eight participants received funding through the MPF.

(para. 53) The SC **NOTED** the increasing number of participants and papers at WPNT meetings.

- (para. 54) The SC **NOTED** that this year the WPNT focused on genetic techniques for estimating population structure, highlighting that this topic is more critical for neritic tuna species than for tropical tunas due to their more complex population structures, which can undermine stock assessments conducted on an ocean-wide basis.
- (para. 55) The SC **NOTED** that understanding stock structure should be the basis for management and assessment of these species, underscoring the need to enhance genetics work and Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR) studies. The SC therefore **ENCOURAGED** further work in this area, covering sampling regions not yet covered and applying CKMR and other genetic techniques to these species.
- (para. 56) The SC **NOTED** that the Secretariat will shortly be starting a pilot study to develop a wider sampling programme which can be used to support future genetic research among other studies.
- (para. 57) The SC **NOTED** that Sri Lanka presented a paper to the WPNT on conducting molecular research on neritic tuna species and encouraged other countries to conduct similar genetic studies.
- (para. 58) The SC **NOTED** that the stock status of bullet and frigate tuna remain unknown and so highlighted the need to find a way to secure datasets from coastal countries harvesting these species that would allow the WPNT to conduct stock assessments and determine their stock status. The SC therefore **ENCOURAGED** coastal CPCs to work to provide more robust catch and length-frequency data for these species to the Secretariat. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** that differentiating between these two species can be difficult, complicating data collection. The SC **NOTED** that species identification tools and an application developed by OFCF have been presented to several working parties and **NOTED** that these should be helpful tools to overcome this challenge of species mis-identification.
- (para. 59) The SC **NOTED** that the WPNT relies on data-poor, catch-only methods to assess the species under their remit which carry high uncertainty and depend on many assumptions. The SC **NOTED** that improved catch data reporting is essential for these methods to work, and that the high uncertainty in catch statistics for bullet and frigate tuna makes robust stock assessments challenging.
- (para. 60) The SC **SUPPORTED** a proposed consultancy to review the current data quality scoring system used by the Secretariat.
- (para. 61) The SC **NOTED** Indonesia's data revision, which showed increasing catches for bullet tuna among the six species under the WPNT's remit, with Indonesia contributing over 50% of the total bullet tuna catches. The SC **NOTED** the concern that, as neritic tuna species are caught together, the opposing trends for bullet tuna (increasing) compared with other neritic tuna species (decreasing) are not logical, and so **ENCOURAGED** Indonesia to further investigate these catch series.
- (para. 62) The SC **NOTED** that the WPNT is exploring alternative data-poor methods that utilise length-frequency data. The SC **REQUESTED** countries harvesting these species to work to improve their length frequency data, with support from the Secretariat, to make the future assessments feasible and less uncertain.
- (para. 63) The SC **NOTED** the increasing catches for bullet tuna and the constraints faced by IOTC's Working Parties in standardising effort units for these fisheries. The SC **NOTED** that this issue was discussed by the WPDCS who **NOTED** the need to understand the drivers behind these catch trends.
- (para. 64) The SC **NOTED** that assessing neritic tuna species is difficult due to complex fisheries, stock structures, species identification, and fishing localities. The SC **NOTED** the repeated cautions about the poor status of some neritic species and **REQUESTED** that the WPNT consider management measures that could be recommended for adoption by the Commission to ensure the long-term sustainability of these valuable resources.
- (para. 65) **NOTING** the importance of neritic tuna species to many coastal CPCs, the SC **NOTED** suggestions to incorporate socio-economic indicators relating to these fisheries into the work and assessments of the WPNT.
- (para. 66) **CONSIDERING** the relatively short life of the neritic tuna species, the SC **NOTED** that, to date, the impacts of climate change on their life history characteristics have not been studied in any detail by the WPNT. The SC **NOTED** that many coastal countries' have been increasing their catches of small pelagic species (a key food source for tuna) which could be impacting the populations of neritic tuna species. However, the SC **NOTED** that catches of most neritic tuna species appear to have been increasing annually.
- (para. 67) The SC **NOTED** that applying integrated stock assessment models such as Stock Synthesis to neritic tuna species is unlikely to succeed given lack of data for neritic tunas, and so **ENCOURAGED** the WPNT to continue to investigate alternative, data-poor methods.

(para. 68) The SC **NOTED** a suggestion that, as an IOTC subsidiary of the FAO, contact could be made with FAO experts who are in the process of conducting extensive capacity building activities including work on stock assessments and data improvements, **NOTING** that they may have tools and suggestions for how coastal CPCs and the WPNT can work towards improving the knowledge of the status of these stocks.

(para. 69) The SC **NOTED** that the narrow-barred Spanish mackerel is important for Arabian Sea countries and has substantial length-frequency data, unlike Indo-Pacific king mackerel, which has low catches in this area.

(para. 70) The SC **NOTED** that significant revisions to the catch time series of several neritic tunas (subsequent to their last assessment) means there is now increased uncertainty pertaining to those species current status and associated management advice due to current estimates of MSY no longer being valid.

(para. 71) **ACKNOWLEDGING** the difficulties associated with deriving geo-referenced size-frequency data at the spatial resolution of 5° grids in most coastal longline and surface fisheries, and the fact that most analyses currently used in the assessments, do not require such fine resolution, the SC **RECOMMENDED** the Commission to align the spatial resolution of size-frequency data with that of geo-referenced catch and effort data. Consequently, the data may be provided using an alternative geographical area if it better represents the fishery concerned. The SC **NOTED** that this recommendation is relevant for many IOTC species and has been reiterated by other WPs.

(para. 72) The SC **NOTED** that Pakistan and India have improved their participation in the WPNT and other WPs in 2025 compared to previous years and **ENCOURAGED** this to continue.

(para. 73) **NOTING** the decline in participation and the reduced number of paper submissions in recent years, which has resulted in shorter meetings, the SC **CONSIDERED** setting the WPNT meeting duration to four days as a standard. However, it also **SUGGESTED** retaining flexibility to extend the meeting when necessary, such as when a training workshop is requested by CPCs for inclusion in the agenda. **NOTING** that in 2026 the WPNT will be carrying out assessments for three species, the SC **SUGGESTED** that it may be beneficial to retain the 5-day meeting period for next year to ensure that there is time to conduct any required capacity building activities in addition to these assessments.

Executive summaries for neritic tuna species

The SC also adopted revised Executive Summaries for each of the neritic tuna species that can be found as appendices to the SC28 report, and which can be downloaded from the IOTC website in English and French:

English: <http://iotc.org/science/scientific-committee>

French: <https://iotc.org/fr/science/comité-scientifique>

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the WPNT:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2026–WPNT16–03 which outlined the main outcomes of the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee (SC28), specifically related to the work of the WPNT.
- 2) **CONSIDER** how best to progress these issues at the present meeting.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consolidated set of recommendations of the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee to the Commission, relevant to the Working Party on Neritic Tunas.

Appendix B: Schedule of stock assessments for the WPNT (2026–30).

APPENDIX A

CONSOLIDATED SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 28th SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE (1-5 December 2025) TO THE COMMISSION RELEVANT TO THE WORKING PARTY ON NERITIC TUNAS

Extract of the Report of the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee

(IOTC–2025–SC28–R[E]; Appendix 40, Page 263)

STATUS OF TUNA AND TUNA-LIKE RESOURCES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Tuna and seerfish – Neritic species

SC28.02 (para. 269) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for each neritic tuna (and seerfish) species under the IOTC mandate, as provided in the Executive Summary for each species, and the combined Kobe plot for the three species assigned a stock status in 2025 (Fig. 2):

Bullet tuna (*Auxis rochei*) – [Appendix 12](#)

Frigate tuna (*Auxis thazard*) – [Appendix 13](#)

Kawakawa (*Euthynnus affinis*) – [Appendix 14](#)

Longtail tuna (*Thunnus tonggol*) – [Appendix 15](#)

Indo-Pacific king mackerel (*Scomberomorus guttatus*) – [Appendix 16](#)

Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) – [Appendix 17](#)

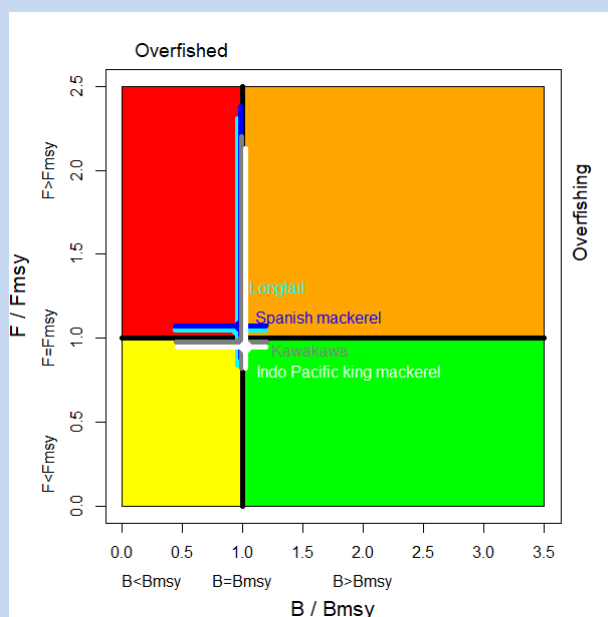


Fig. 3. Combined Kobe plot for longtail tuna (cyan), narrow-barred Spanish mackerel (blue), kawakawa (grey) (all for 2021 with stock assessment carried out in 2023) and Indo-Pacific king mackerel (2022 with stock assessment conducted in 2024 (white)), showing the estimates of stock size (B) and current fishing mortality (F) in relation to optimal biomass and optimal fishing mortality. Cross bars illustrate the range of uncertainty from the model runs. Given unresolved uncertainty in the stock assessment, status for bullet tuna, frigate tuna and narrow-barred Spanish mackerel should be interpreted with caution.

SC28.10 (para. 71) **ACKNOWLEDGING** the difficulties associated with deriving geo-referenced size-frequency data at the spatial resolution of 5° grids in most coastal longline and surface fisheries, and the fact that most analyses currently used in the assessments, do not require such fine resolution, the SC **RECOMMENDED** the Commission to align the spatial resolution of size-frequency data with that of geo-referenced catch and effort data. Consequently, the data may be provided using an alternative geographical area if it better represents the fishery concerned. The SC **NOTED** that this recommendation is relevant for many IOTC species and has been reiterated by other WPs.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION, TO SPECIFIC CPCs AND/OR OTHER BODIES

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

National Reports from CPCs

SC28.09 (para. 30) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Compliance Committee and Commission note the lack of compliance by 2 Contracting Parties (Members) that did not submit a National Report to the Scientific Committee in 2025, **NOTING** that the Commission agreed that the submission of the annual reports to the Scientific Committee is mandatory.

Observed issues related to IOTC Working Party meetings

SC28.27 (para. 245) The SC **NOTED** the increasing utilisation of the Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) during working parties, observing that this is a positive development which aligns with the Commission's objectives and the original purpose of the MPF. However, the SC **NOTED** a few cases where applicants did not fully meet the MPF requirements, such as failing to submit a complete paper or submitting papers not sufficiently relevant to the meeting's agenda. The SC **NOTED** that there is currently no precedent requiring a recipient to return funds in such situations. Consequently, to ensure the effective use of MPF resources, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission and SCAF discuss further actions.

Invited Expert(s) at the WP meetings

SC28.28 (para. 260) 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.

IOTC species identification guides: Tuna and tuna-like species

SC28.26 (para. 262) 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.

Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of the SC and its subsidiary bodies

SC28.30 (para. 266) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note and endorse the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons for the SC and its subsidiary bodies for the coming years, as provided in [Appendix 7](#).

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

Consultants

SC28.31 (para. 293) **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.

Data preparatory meetings and Hybrid meetings

SC28.32 (para. 295) **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 in addition to stock assessment meetings for the main IOTC species. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that data preparatory meetings could continue to be held virtually so as not to increase the travel and costs required for the already full IOTC timetable of meetings.

APPENDIX B

ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE FOR IOTC SPECIES AND SPECIES OF INTEREST FROM 2026–2030

Extract of the Report of the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee

(IOTC–2025–SC28–R; Appendix 38, Page 258)

The SC **ADOPTED** a revised stock assessment schedule, ecological risk assessment schedule and other core projects for 2026–30, for the tuna and tuna-like species under the IOTC mandate, as well as the current list of key shark species of interest, as outlined in Appendix 38 (IOTC-2025-SC27-R, Para. 292)

Working Party on Neritic Tunas					
Species	2026*	2027*	2028	2029*	2030
Bullet tuna	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment
Frigate tuna	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment
Indo-Pacific king mackerel	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment
Kawakawa	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation
Longtail tuna	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation
Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel	Assessment	Data preparation	Data preparation	Assessment	Data preparation

* Including data-limited stock assessment methods.

** Including species-specific catches, CPUE, biological information and size distribution as well as identification of data gaps and discussion of improvements to the assessments (stock structure); one day may be reserved for capacity building activities.

Note: the assessment schedule may be changed dependent on the annual review of fishery indicators, or SC and Commission requests