



DRAFT: REVISION OF THE WPNT PROGRAM OF WORK (2027-2031)

PREPARED BY: IOTC SECRETARIAT, JUNE 2026

PURPOSE

To ensure that participants at the 16th Working Party on Neritic Tunas (WPNT16) revise the Program of Work for the WPNT by taking into consideration the specific requests of the Commission and Scientific Committee.

BACKGROUND

Scientific Committee

At the 28th Session of the SC:

- (Para. 286) The SC **NOTED** IOTC-2024-SC27-08 which provided the SC with a proposed Program of Work for each of its working parties, including prioritisation of the elements requested by each working party.
- (Para. 287) The SC **NOTED** [IOTC-2025-SC28-08](#) which provided the SC with a proposed Program of Work for each of its working parties, including prioritisation of the elements requested by each working party.
- (Para. 288) The SC **NOTED** the proposed Program of Work and priorities for the SC and each of the working parties and **AGREED** to a consolidated Program of Work as outlined in Appendix 36a-g. The Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of each working party will ensure that the efforts of their respective working parties are focused on the core areas contained within the appendix, considering any new research priorities identified by the Commission at its next Session.
- (Para. 289) The SC **RECALLED** the process for developing the consolidated SC Program of Work (IOTC-2014-SC17-R, para. 179):
- Step 1: Working Parties to identify research needs (based on the needs of the Commission), rank them by order of priority, provide cost estimates and list potential funding sources;
 - Step 2: The SC and Working Party Chair and Vice-Chair, in liaison with the IOTC Secretariat should develop a consolidated document taking into account the different Working Party research needs and priorities, with the objective of ranking the research needs among all Working Parties;
 - Step 3: The Chair of the SC shall present these to the SC, to be discussed and endorsed as the consolidated research priorities for the IOTC Science process;
 - Step 4: The IOTC Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SC and Chair and Vice-Chair or relevant Working Parties, shall identify funding possibilities to undertake the consolidated research priorities;
 - Step 5: Once the funding sources have been committed to a particular research priority, the panel mentioned above in Step 2 shall develop terms of reference of the 'Expression of Interest' (including tasks, timelines and deliverables) and the selection procedure/criteria;
 - Step 6: IOTC Secretariat to advertise a call for 'Expression of Interest' among the IOTC Commissioner's and Science contact lists, and via the IOTC website;
 - Step 7: The Chair of the SC, Chair(s) and Vice-Chair(s) of the WP(s) concerned, in liaison with the IOTC Secretariat shall determine the most appropriate project proposal, based on the criteria defined in Step 5 and in line with the financial rules of the Commission and FAO. Potential contracted candidate will be contacted by the IOTC Secretariat to confirm availability.
- (Para. 290) The SC **AGREED** on the consolidated table of priorities across all working parties (Table 3), as developed by each working party Chairperson. The SC **REQUESTED** that the IOTC Secretariat, in

consultation with the Chairpersons and vice-Chairpersons of the SC and relevant working parties, develop ToRs for the specific projects to be carried out.

(Para. 291) The SC **NOTED** that the consolidated table of priorities does not replace the full programme of work of each Working Party (Appendix 37a-g) and that adequate attention and focus should still be allocated to those activities where possible. The SC further **NOTED** that Table 3 has been developed by the SC and Working Party Chairs to provide more specific direction to the IOTC Secretariat and the SC Chair as to the priorities of the SC so that, if and when external funding becomes available intersessionally, it is possible to clearly prioritise across all working parties based on the objectives of the SC (as agreed in IOTC–2014–SC17–R, para. 179).

Commission

In the past the Commission has made a number of requests that call on the Scientific Committee, via the WPNT, to undertake specific tasks. These requests need to be incorporated into the Program of Work for the WPNT:

Resolution 18/07 On measures applicable in case of non-fulfilment of reporting obligations in the IOTC

(para. 4) To facilitate the reporting of zero catches as required under paragraph 1 of Annex I of this Resolution, the following procedure shall apply:

- a) as part of the IOTC 1RC electronic form used to report nominal catches, the Secretariat shall include a matrix by IOTC species as well as the most commonly caught elasmobranch species according to records of catches and incidents as established in Resolution 15/01 *on the recording of catch and effort data by fishing vessels in the IOTC area of competence (or any subsequent superseding Resolution)* and main IOTC gear groups on the basis of the format set out in Annex II of this Resolution;
- b) CPCs, as part of their total catch data reporting, shall complete the cells in the matrix with either a value of ‘one’ (1) to indicate where that CPC had catches (positive catch) for a particular species/gear combination or a value of ‘zero’ (0) to indicate where that CPC had no catches (zero landings + zero discards) for a particular species/gear combination;
- c) The “Catch columns” section of the electronic Form 1RC shall only include reports of positive catches

Resolution 17/07 On the prohibition to use large-scale driftnets in the IOTC area

(para. 2) The use of large-scale driftnets¹ on the high seas within the IOTC area of competence shall be prohibited. The use of large-scale driftnets in the entire IOTC area of competence shall be prohibited by 1 January 2022.

(para. 7) The Commission shall periodically assess whether additional measures should be adopted and implemented to ensure that large-scale driftnets are not used in the IOTC area of competence and to take into account the latest advice of the Scientific Committee. The first such assessment shall take place in 2023.

Resolution 23/01 On the management of anchored fish aggregating devices (aFADS)

(para. 16) The IOTC Executive Secretary in consultation with the Scientific Committee shall develop a best practice guideline for construction of AFADs and submit it to the Commission for adoption no later than the 29th Annual Session of the IOTC.

(para. 17) The IOTC Scientific Committee shall analyse further information, when available, and provide advice on existing, additional or alternative AFAD management options for sustainable fisheries.

¹ “Large-scale driftnets” are defined as gillnets or other nets or a combination of nets that are more than 2.5 kilometres in length whose purpose is to enmesh, entrap, or entangle fish by drifting on the surface of, or in, the water column.

Resolution 25/06 On a regional observer scheme

(para. 15) The IOTC Scientific Committee shall update in 2024 the IOTC ROS Observer Manual and the IOTC Observer Forms used for reporting (including minimum data fields) and provide advice on a training program.

DISCUSSION

Participants at the WPNT16 are requested to consider the priorities set by the Commission and the Scientific Committee, via Conservation and Management Measures, and revise its Program of Work to match those priorities.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the WPNT:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IOTC–2026–WPNT16–08, which encouraged the WPNT to further develop and refine its Program of Work for 2027–2031 to align with the requests and directives from the Commission and Scientific Committee.
- 2) **RECOMMEND** a revised Program of Work for 2027–2031 to the Scientific Committee for its consideration and potential endorsement.

WORKING PARTY ON NERITIC TUNAS PROGRAM OF WORK (2027–2031)

The current Program of Work as approved by the SC consists of the following:

- **Table 1:** Priority topics for obtaining the information necessary to develop stock status indicators for neritic tunas in the Indian Ocean;
- **Table 2:** Stock assessment schedule.

This is to be reviewed, discussed and updated for the next 5 years by participants during the WPNT15 meeting to be put forward for consideration by SC28.

Table 1. Priority topics for obtaining the information necessary to develop stock status indicators for neritic tunas in the Indian Ocean

Topic in order of priority	Sub-topic and project	Timing				
		2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
1. Stock structure (connectivity)	<p>Genetic research to determine the connectivity of neritic tunas throughout their distributions (This should build on the stock structure work conducted in other previous studies):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of stock structure methodologies with genetic expert during WPNT15 in order to determine the best approach to regional stock structure studies. Based on discussions develop and implement regional genetic sampling collection programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling of tissue samples • DNA extraction and storage for preservation • Carry out genetic sequencing on extracted DNA 					
2. Stock assessment / Stock indicators	<p>Explore alternative assessment approaches and develop improvements where necessary based on the data available to determine stock status for longtail tuna, kawakawa and Spanish mackerel</p>					
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Weight-of-Evidence approach should be used to determine stock status, by building layers of partial evidence, such as CPUE indices combined with catch data, life-history parameters and yield-per recruit metrics, as well as the use of data poor assessment approaches (e.g. CMSY, OCOM, LB-SPR, Risk based methods). 2. Exploration of priors and how these can be quantifiably and transparently developed. 3. Review size data and their suitability for monitoring stock status. 					

	<p>Improve the presentation of management advice from different assessment approaches to better represent the uncertainty and improve communication between scientists and managers in the IOTC.</p>					
<p>3. Data mining and collation</p>	<p>Improved collation and characterization of operational level data for the main neritic tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean to investigate their suitability to be used for developing standardised CPUE indices. Improved characterisation of fisheries when CPCs present information to WPNT. The following data should be collated and made available for collaborative analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ catch and effort by species and gear by landing site; ➤ operational data: stratify this by vessel, month, and year for the development as an indicator of CPUE over time; and ➤ operational data: collate other information on fishing techniques (i.e. area fished, gear specifics, depth, environmental condition (near shore, open ocean, etc.) and vessel size (length/horsepower)). ➤ Reconstruction of historical catch by CPCs using recovered or captured information. ➤ Re-estimation of historic catches (with consultation and consent of concerned CPCs including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, Kenya) for assessment purposes (taking into account updated identification of uncertainties and knowledge of the history of the fisheries. ➤ Improvements to species identification 					

Other Future Research Requirements	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
<p>4. Biological information (parameters for stock assessment)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and summarise information on key biological parameters for neritic species. 2. Review of studies for all neritic tunas throughout their range to determine key biological parameters including age-at-maturity, and fecundity-at-age/length relationships, age-length keys, age and growth, longevity which will be fed into future stock assessments. 3. Increase ecological traditional knowledge of all neritic tunas throughout their range. 4. Exploring the development of tools and other methods which can be used to improve species identification. 5. Exploring improved methods for ageing of neritic species including exploration of epigenetic techniques. 					

5. Social economic study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake quantitative studies on socio-economic aspects (including traditional knowledge) to determine and explore other sources of data, such as but not limited to trade data from individual countries, nominal catch or other catch data on neritic tuna, information on important and significance of neritic for food security (animal protein), nutrition, contribution to national GDP. (priority countries, Indonesia, Iran, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan) 2. Identify and utilise other sources of information, by engaging with other bodies such as SEAFDEC, SEAFO, RECOFI, BOBLME, SWIOFC, IOC, among others. 3. Integrate or evaluate market support and recognition for neritic tuna (sub-regional markets) with a focus on data acquisition. 4. Explore alternate sources of data collection, including the rapid use of citizen science-based approaches which are reliable and verified by the SC. 5. Assess/scope/explore the significance and importance of neritic species for food security, nutrition and contribution to national GDP. 6. Strengthen the data collection of catches and species complexes and develop socio-economic indicators of neritic species, related to the national and regional livelihoods and economics of coastal CPCs. 7. Collate information and address data gaps and challenges by taking advantage of regional programmes or joint collaboration with NGOs/CPCs in order to support and facilitate data collection for neritic species. 					
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Table 2. Proposed assessment schedule for the IOTC Working Party on 2026-2030

<i>Working Party on Neritic Tunas</i>					
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);

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