
OUTCOMES OF THE 28TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

PREPARED BY IOTC SECRETARIAT, AUGUST 2026

PURPOSE

To inform participants at the 22nd Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch (WPEB22) 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 WPEB.

BACKGROUND

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

- recommendations to include the range of species for which reporting should be mandatory for each gear through revising Resolution 25/01;
- a recommendation to adopt a revised set of handling guidelines for mobulids;
- a recommendation to eventually adopt a single master handling guidelines document for all taxa;
- the encouragement for ongoing trials to better understand the impacts of loop gears on target and bycatch species;
- encouragement to improve reporting of interactions with whale sharks; and
- the recommendation to include whale sharks as a taxon of greatest biological vulnerability and conservation concern and to take appropriate action.

Discussions were held regarding the necessary protocols that must be followed when conducting experimental fishing trials relating to branchline materials and shark lines.

Other discussions related to: the low level of observer coverage in many fisheries and the suitability of retention bans as a conservation measure for certain species and so the need to analyse whether these measures are sufficient to aid the efforts needed for population recovery. The SC also noted the management advice arising from the blue shark assessment conducted in 2025.

Based on the recommendations arising from the WPEB22, 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 for the WPEB, including a revised assessment schedule, as detailed in **Appendix B**. A separate paper (IOTC-2026-WPEB22(AS)-09) will outline the review and development process for a Program of Work for the WPEB for the next four years (2027–2031).

DISCUSSION

In addition to the recommendations outlined in **Appendix A** and **Appendix B** the following extracts from the SC28 Report (IOTC-2026-SC28-R[E]) are provided here for the consideration and action of the WPEB22:

General discussions

(Para. 114) The SC **NOTED** that the 5% minimum required level of observer coverage (as stipulated in Resolution 25/04) refers to the minimum percentage of the total number of sets/operations

that should be observed. The SC **NOTED** that some longline fleets are still reporting this in terms of numbers of hooks instead of number of sets so the Secretariat has been required to estimate the coverage using assumptions around the number of hooks in each set.

(Para. 115) The SC **NOTED** that many CPCs are still struggling to achieve the 5% minimum level of observer coverage. The SC **NOTED** that this is often due to the vessels involved in these fisheries not being suitable to host an observer onboard. The SC **NOTED** that Pakistan has been rolling out a crew-based observer programme which aims to monitor data collection and bycatch to improve data reported from these fisheries which cannot host onboard observers.

(Para. 116) **NOTING** that data for bycatch species in IOTC fisheries are severely lacking, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission and Compliance Committee **ENCOURAGE** CPCs to provide observer data and work to reach at least the 5% minimum coverage level as required by Resolution [25/06](#).

(Para. 117) The SC **NOTED** a suggestion to run simulation work to assess the most cost-effective way to obtain high quality observer data by comparing the absolute level of observer coverage compared with the percentage of coverage of the total operations.

(Para. 118) **NOTING** that Resolution [15/01](#) includes a list of species for which reporting catch data is mandatory/optional and that varies by gear and by fishery type (i.e. artisanal vs commercial fisheries), the SC **NOTED** that many species of interest to the WPEB are not mandatory for reporting for all gears or fishery type. The SC **NOTED** concerns from some CPCs that making these species mandatory for reporting for all gears and fleets (including artisanal fleets) could place additional burden on many CPCs. This is particularly the case for many coastal fleets which are not necessarily targeting only tuna but instead target a wide range of species, making data collection complex. The SC therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission review the list of species that are mandatory for reporting to species level while considering the feasibility of such data collection for all CPCs. The SC included the following suggested changes:

- Silky sharks to be added also for gillnets fisheries
- Hammerhead sharks to be reported at species level at least for scalloped, smooth and great hammerhead sharks for all gear types (explicitly including purse seine fisheries)
- Mantas and devil rays to be reported at species level differentiating at least between manta rays (giant manta and reef manta) and other devil rays adding them for mandatory reporting at least for purse seine fisheries and for gillnet fisheries instead of optional
- Great white sharks as mandatory for all gear types
- Oceanic whitetip sharks as mandatory for all gear types.

(Para. 119) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission speak with CPCs to determine appropriate ways to improve data reporting from artisanal fisheries.

(Para. 120) The SC **NOTED** that the WPEB had **REVIEWED** the minimum standards set out in Annex III of Resolution 25/08 and **ADOPTED** the revisions made by members of the group which can be found in Annex XVII of the WPEB report. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider these standards for adoption in 2026. The SC further **NOTED** that work on best practice handling guidelines is ongoing and frequently evolves. The SC therefore **SUGGESTED** that the Commission consider adopting a master document containing handling guidelines for all taxa, rather than requiring Resolutions containing such guidelines to be updated when new information becomes available. Future Resolutions could then refer back to this master document adopted by the SC.

(Para. 121) The SC **AGREED** that a small working group will work on compiling these intersessionally for review by the SC.

(Para. 122) The SC **NOTED** that in 2024, the WPEB recommended the adoption of a revised set of handling guidelines for mobulids while **NOTING** that work was required to further develop the guidelines for gillnets. The SC **NOTED** that the WPEB worked to further develop these guidelines which were revised and adopted. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider these revised handling guidelines for mobulids for consideration for adoption in 2026. The details of the suggested revisions to the handling procedures can be found in Appendix XVI of the WPEB report.

(Para. 123) The SC **NOTED** that while evidence on post-release survival of whale sharks from purse seine interactions suggests low mortality when best-practices are followed, data on bycatch in other fisheries, particularly gillnets, remains scarce. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission **ENCOURAGE** CPCs to improve data collection and reporting for interactions with whale sharks involving all gear types as well as purse seine.

(Para. 123) The SC **ENCOURAGED** efforts to clarify the extent and nature of whale shark interactions with IOTC fisheries, and to assess the current stock status within the IOTC area of competence, **ACKNOWLEDGING** that the extent of the vulnerability of whale sharks to IOTC fisheries is unknown. Based on the available information presented by the WPEB, the SC classified whale sharks in the Indian Ocean as a “taxon of the greatest biological vulnerability and conservation concern for which there are very few data”, as defined in Resolution 25/08 and **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission take appropriate action based on this classification. The SC **NOTED** that this classification supports the consideration of precautionary management measures and prioritization of future research and data collection efforts by the Commission.

Blue shark stock assessment

(para. 137) The SC **NOTED** that a stock assessment for blue shark was conducted this year using Stock Synthesis.

(para. 138) The SC **NOTED** that reported catches of blue shark in 2023 were significantly higher than in 2022. The SC **NOTED** that this is due to the catches from Indonesia which have not yet been revised for 2023 using the same methodology that has been applied to the catch series for 2018-2022. The SC **ENCOURAGED** Indonesia to review these catch data for 2023 using the same methodology.

(para. 139) The SC **NOTED** that Indonesia had submitted a CPUE series for the blue shark assessment but this was not presented until the assessment meeting. The SC **NOTED** that this was not included in the assessment as it had not been fully reviewed by the WPEB during the data preparatory meeting unlike the other CPUE series included in the assessment which had been fully reviewed during that meeting. The SC **ENCOURAGED** Indonesia to develop CPUE series for future assessments and present them during the data preparatory meeting ahead of the assessment so they can be fully reviewed and so would be more likely to be accepted for inclusion in the assessment.

Status of development and implementation of national plans of action for seabirds and sharks, and implementation of the FAO guidelines to reduce marine turtle mortality in fishing operations

(para.124) The SC **NOTED** paper IOTC–2025–SC28–06 which provided the SC with the opportunity to update and comment on the current status of development and implementation of national plans of action for seabirds and sharks, and implementation of the FAO guidelines to reduce marine turtle mortality in fishing operations, by each IOTC CPC.

(para. 125) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the current status of development and implementation of National Plans of Action (NPOAs) for sharks and seabirds, and the implementation of the FAO guidelines to reduce marine turtle mortality in fishing operations, by each CPC as provided in Appendix 6, recalling that the IPOA-Seabirds and IPOA-Sharks were

adopted by the FAO in 1999 and 2000, respectively, and recommended the development of NPOAs.

(para. 126) The SC **RECALLED** the request from WPEB15 in 2019 for the Secretariat to provide links in the NPOA portal on the IOTC website (<http://iotc.org/science/status-of-national-plans-of-action-and-fao-guidelines>) to the actual plan documents. The SC **NOTED** that work is being done to collect these documents from CPCs and thanked those who had already submitted them.

(para. 127) The SC **REQUESTED** that CPCs submit their NPOA to Secretariat for upload onto the NPOA portal.

(para. 128) The SC **NOTED** that there have been small revisions to the previous update on NPOAs in 2023 including the drafting of revisions of NPOAs by some CPCs and updates on the progress on the development of NPOAs by other CPCs.

Other matters

(para. 140) The SC **NOTED** paper [IOTC-2025-SC28-11](#), which summarises the development of an experimental pilot action by the Spanish surface longline fleet targeting swordfish in the Indian Ocean, employing terminal gear devices known as lazos, with the following abstract provided by the author:

“We present an experimental pilot action plan aimed at monitoring the use of loops (lazos in Spanish language) devices and assessing their effects on bycatch within the Spanish surface longline fishery operating in the Indian Ocean, with particular emphasis on Endangered, Threatened, and Protected (ETP) species. This initiative seeks to evaluate the ecological and operational implications of incorporating loops into fishing practices, providing a scientific basis for determining their potential to enhance swordfish catch efficiency while reducing incidental captures of vulnerable marine fauna.”

(para. 141) The SC **NOTED** that this gear appears to be very effective for catching billfish, particularly swordfish based on trials conducted in the Mediterranean Sea. The SC **NOTED** that the full process from attracting the animal to hauling it onboard is not well understood and **SUGGESTED** it should be filmed to better understand the method.

(para. 142) The SC **NOTED** that hooks are not required in the gear, instead the animals are attracted to the artificial bait (including lighting) and end up entangled in the loops.

(para. 143) The SC **NOTED** that there appear to be significant reductions in bycatch when using this gear in the Mediterranean Sea.

(para. 144) The SC **NOTED** that it is believed that this gear was initially introduced in the Pacific Ocean by Indonesian crew onboard Japanese and Spanish vessels before it was introduced in fleets in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean. The SC **NOTED** that the gears are therefore more or less identical between these two fleets but **NOTED** that Spanish fleets have made minor modifications to the gears to make them more cost effective.

(para. 145) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission **ENCOURAGE** ongoing trials with these gears (i.e., loop gears) to better understand their effect on target and bycatch species.

(para. 146) The SC **ENDORSED** the recommendation to add a specific code to longline logbook and ROS templates to enable the collection of data on the use of loop devices in longline fisheries. The SC **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the ratio between the number of hooks and loop lines may provide a simple and efficient metric for effort and further **NOTED** that species-specific catch data should be collected for both hook-based and loop-based effort units.

(para. 147) The SC **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-SC28-14, which summarises Japan's consideration on the framework of scientific fishing trial for shark mitigation measure from the operational viewpoint, including the following abstract provided by the authors:

“Japan is concerned the hastiness in taking decision of introducing wire-trace ban and selecting fishing trial in short time as a single way to suspend its introduction and evaluate its effectiveness. In addition, it concerned seriously to include blue shark, exploitable resources in healthy condition, in target for conservation in Resolution 25/08 and noted when excluding blue sharks, the required scale of experiment could be much broader than possible to conduct with one CPC.”

(para. 148) The SC **NOTED** Resolution 25/08 and the request from the Commission to start to begin the MSE process for blue shark, that this species is being managed more as a commercial target species and not intended as a vulnerable species. The SC **NOTED** that this is supported by the recent assessment for the species which considered the stock to be **not overfished** nor **subject to overfishing**.

(para. 149) The SC **NOTED** that the north of 20°S provision in this Resolution was designed to avoid impacting both the main areas of the commercial longline fishery targeting blue shark and the specific longline fishery for oilfish. The SC further **NOTED** that the range of data collection and spatial data considerations requested in the Resolution for SC consideration aim to ensure that the SC can consider and assess whether the specified boundary is appropriate in terms of minimising impacts on blue shark/oilfish fisheries while maximising conservation benefits for vulnerable species.

(para. 150) The SC **NOTED** that there are differing views regarding the results of past research on the effectiveness of wire leaders in reducing bycatch of vulnerable species which have been discussed in detail by the WPEB in the past. The SC **NOTED** that many CPCs consider the evidence examined by the WPEB and the outputs from the specific workshop convened on this issue which was referenced in the SC’s advice to the Commission is sufficient to provide evidence on the effectiveness of this gear modification. The SC **NOTED** that others considered it important to obtain better information on the level of use of this gear and to examine the effectiveness in reducing shark mortality in species other than blue sharks and the SC **NOTED** that there have been limited studies to date in the Indian Ocean on this topic.

(para. 151) In accordance with Paragraph 17 of Resolution 25/08 concerning principles for conducting experimental fishing trials, the SC **AGREED** the criteria specified below, while recognising the operational complexities, time constraint and difficulties associated with field activities.

- Select the areas and seasons with known high shark abundance (including of vulnerable shark species), based on existing data from Indian Ocean Regional Observer Scheme (ROS), research and surveys.
- Before the trial, conduct a power analysis (following Watson et al. 2005) informed by historical Indian Ocean bycatch data to determine the number of sets required to detect a true effect (for each vulnerable pelagic shark species, not including blue shark), thereby avoiding a Type II error.
- Standardise (and record) gear and operational practices during the trials, including, inter alia, setting/hauling times, bait type, hook types, line weighting and branch line/leader lengths and diameter and other gear configurations (e.g. use of lightsticks) to assist the trial in isolating the effect of leader material. Record any variations from standardised gear/practices, if they occur.
- Use at least one independent observer or scientific researchers who are trained in longline operations and species identification to minimise human error and observational bias. If using observers, the observers should be debriefed post trip to discuss/document any variations from the planned design.

- Collect data for each branchline at least on size and species of individual catch, their fate (retained/discarded) and condition at haulback, and the occurrence of bite-offs (as much as possible), together with corresponding leader material.
- Brief the trial vessel skipper, crew(s) and observer(s) on the trial's objectives and design, and the experimental protocols prior to the fishing trial to ensure their understanding and support to the trial.
- Apply the appropriate statistical analysis, including hierarchical or mixed-effect models to evaluate potential differences in CPUE, bite-off rate, sizes and haulback mortality rate according to different leader materials in use.

(para. 152) The SC **AGREED** that trials should employ a "paired comparison" approach, by alternating the control (nylon monofilament) and experimental (wire) leaders. However, there were divergent opinions on the operational designs that would meet this criterion, for example, whether alternating treatments should be implemented at the level of individual branchlines, baskets, or by groups of baskets (i.e., section). The SC **AGREED** that a basket is defined as a section of hooks between floats.

(para. 153) The SC further **AGREED** that the above criteria is basic requirement for ensuring a fishing trial to obtain results trustworthy for scientific analyses. The SC also **ADVISED** the Commission to encourage CPCs to continue research on leader materials in use and its impacts on shark bycatch and mortality, as well as alternative gear configurations (for example loop gear) and mitigation measures to reduce shark bycatch mortality in Indian Ocean tuna fisheries.

(para. 154) The paragraphs below outline the summary of each of the differing views:

(para. 155) Japan: *"Implementation of "paired approach" using the sections, i.e. multiple baskets, as a unit of pair alternating controls, is commonly utilized including many works that were utilized to support an introduction of the wire-trace ban in Resolution 25/08. Frequent switching of gears often causes confusion and errors in particular when operating with commercial vessels and a certain level of flexibility should be allowed in choosing the appropriate unit for a paired approach."*

(para. 156) Australia: *"The SCs role is to agree what the best practice criteria are, and to evaluate if there are any implications for interpretation of the results where a given fishing trial does not achieve this entirely. Australia expressed three concerns with Japan's proposal to use treatments comprising 10 baskets of same leader material per alternating treatment. Firstly, wire leaders and nylon monofilament leaders have different weights, impacting fishing depth, particularly when wire leader branch lines are grouped across multiple baskets. Secondly, varying oceanographic conditions along the length of a longline can effect shark interactions differently at different points along the line. And thirdly unexpected operational issues (e.g., vessel slowing down, gear issues) during setting can impact gear performance (e.g., depth of fishing) for different segments of the longline. Alternating leader type by branchline is a best practice approach to standardising out the impacts of these factors and helping isolate/identify leader specific effects."*

(para. 157) The SC further **NOTED** the concerns of some that it is not appropriate for the SC to revisit issues that have already been examined thoroughly, through the proper scientific channels, such as the WPEB. The SC **NOTED** that requiring science to be repeatedly re-verified places an unnecessary burden on those proposing conservation measures to the Commission.

(para. 158) The SC **NOTED** that it would be beneficial to conduct analyses to determine if the non-retention of thresher and oceanic whitetip sharks are sufficient conservation measures to reduce mortality of these species.

(para. 159) The SC **NOTED** that retention bans are only effective (in reducing species specific shark mortality) to the extent that they ensure survival of at least some sharks (of those species) hauled to the vessel, but are highly dependent on the proportion of sharks alive and healthy at haul and their survivability post release, two factors known to vary among species.

(para. 160) The SC **NOTED** that there are vulnerable species in addition to threshers and oceanic whitetip sharks which would benefit from strong management measures including shortfin mako shark (which the 2024 assessment indicated is overfished and subject to overfishing) and silky shark (for which the IOTC ERA indicated they are at least as vulnerable to IOTC fishery impacts as species already subject to retention bans).

(para. 161) The SC **NOTED** paper IOTC-2025-SC28-INF02 which summarises some preliminary results from a CKMR study on whale sharks in the Indian Ocean.

(para. 162) The SC **NOTED** that the study has assessed the population of adult whale sharks across the Indian Ocean to be small and to have been declining in the period 2000-2019. The SC further **NOTED** that the study found that there is a 97% probability of population decline and a 73% probability of the decline being greater than 2% per year.

(para. 162) The SC **NOTED** that the full results of this study will be presented to the WPEB in 2026.

(para. 163) The SC further **NOTED** that these results demonstrate that ocean-scale CKMR is a viable technique for monitoring shark species. The SC further **NOTED** that research efforts should focus on facilitating tissue sampling and aligned data collection.

APPENDICES

[Appendix A:](#) Consolidated set of recommendations of the 28th Session of the Scientific Committee to the Commission, relevant to the Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch.

[Appendix B:](#) Schedule of stock assessment for the WPEB (2027-2031)

APPENDIX A

CONSOLIDATED SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 28th SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
TO THE COMMISSION RELEVANT TO THE WORKING PARTY ON ECOSYSTEMS AND BYCATCH

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

(IOTC-2025-SC28-R[E]; Appendix 40, Page 264)

Sharks

SC28.04 (para. 271) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for a subset of shark species commonly caught in IOTC fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species:

Blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) – [Appendix 23](#)

Oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) – [Appendix 24](#)

Scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*) – [Appendix 25](#)

Shortfin mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) – [Appendix 26](#)

Silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) – [Appendix 27](#)

Bigeye thresher shark (*Alopias superciliosus*) – [Appendix 28](#)

Pelagic thresher shark (*Alopias pelagicus*) – [Appendix 29](#)

porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*) – [Appendix 30](#)

Marine turtles

SC27.05 (para. 180) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for marine turtles, as provided in the Executive Summary encompassing all six species found in the Indian Ocean:

Marine turtles – [Appendix 31](#)

Seabirds

SC27.06 (para. 181) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for seabirds, as provided in the Executive Summary encompassing all species commonly interacting with IOTC fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species:

Seabirds – [Appendix 32](#)

Marine Mammals

SC27.07 (para. 182) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for cetaceans, as provided in the newly developed Executive Summary encompassing all species commonly interacting with IOTC fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species:

Cetaceans – [Appendix 33](#)

Mobulids

SC28.08 (para. 275) SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the management advice developed for Mobulids, as provided in the newly developed Executive Summary which encompasses all species commonly interacting with IOTC fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species:

Mobulids – [Appendix 34](#)

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION

STATUS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL PLANS OF ACTION FOR SEABIRDS AND SHARKS, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAO GUIDELINES TO REDUCE MARINE TURTLE MORTALITY IN FISHING OPERATIONS

SC28.20 (para. 125) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission note the current status of development and implementation of National Plans of Action (NPOAs) for sharks and seabirds, and the implementation of the FAO guidelines to reduce marine turtle mortality in fishing operations, by each CPC as provided in [Appendix 6](#), recalling that the IPOA-Seabirds and IPOA-Sharks were adopted by the FAO in 1999 and 2000, respectively, and recommended the development of NPOAs.

OTHER MATTERS

SC28.13 (para. 116) **NOTING** that data for bycatch species in IOTC fisheries are severely lacking, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission and Compliance Committee **ENCOURAGE** CPCs to provide observer data and work to reach at least the 5% minimum coverage level as required by Resolution [25/06](#).

SC28.14 (para. 118) **NOTING** that Resolution [15/01](#) includes a list of species for which reporting catch data is mandatory/optional and that varies by gear and by fishery type (i.e. artisanal vs commercial fisheries), the SC **NOTED** that many species of interest to the WPEB are not mandatory for reporting for all gears or fishery type. The SC **NOTED** concerns from some CPCs that making these species mandatory for reporting for all gears and fleets (including artisanal fleets) could place additional burden on many CPCs. This is particularly the case for many coastal fleets which are not necessarily targeting only tuna but instead target a wide range of species, making data collection complex. The SC therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission review the list of species that are mandatory for reporting to species level while considering the feasibility of such data collection for all CPCs. The SC included the following suggested changes:

- Silky sharks to be added also for gillnets fisheries
- Hammerhead sharks to be reported at species level at least for scalloped, smooth and great
- hammerhead sharks for all gear types (explicitly including purse seine fisheries)
- Mantas and devil rays to be reported at species level differentiating at least between manta ray (giant manta and reef manta) and other devil rays adding them for mandatory reporting at least for purse seine fisheries and for gillnet fisheries instead of optional
- Great white sharks as mandatory for all gear types
- Oceanic whitetip sharks as mandatory for all gear types

SC28.15 (para. 119) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission speak with CPCs to determine appropriate ways to improve data reporting from artisanal fisheries.

SC28.16 (para. 120) The SC **NOTED** that the WPEB had **REVIEWED** the minimum standards set out in Annex III of Resolution 25/08 and **ADOPTED** the revisions made by members of the group which can be found in Annex XVII of the WPEB report. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider these standards for adoption in 2026. The SC further **NOTED** that work on best practice handling guidelines is ongoing and frequently evolves. The SC therefore **SUGGESTED** that the Commission consider adopting a master document containing handling guidelines for all taxa, rather than requiring Resolutions containing

such guidelines to be updated when new information becomes available. Future Resolutions could then refer back to this master document adopted by the SC. The SC **AGREED** that a small working group will work on compiling these intersessionally for review by the SC.

SC28.17 (para. 121) The SC **NOTED** that in 2024, the WPEB recommended the adoption of a revised set of handling guidelines for mobulids while **NOTING** that work was required to further develop the guidelines for gillnets. The SC **NOTED** that the WPEB worked to further develop these guidelines which were revised and adopted. The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider these revised handling guidelines for mobulids for consideration for adoption in 2026. The details of the suggested revisions to the handling procedures can be found in Appendix XXVI of the WPEB report.

SC28.18 (para. 122) The SC **NOTED** that while evidence on post-release survival of whale sharks from purse seine interactions suggests low mortality when best-practices are followed, data on bycatch in other fisheries, particularly gillnets, remains scarce. Therefore, the SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission **ENCOURAGE** CPCs to improve data collection and reporting for interactions with whale sharks involving all gear types as well as purse seine.

SC28.19 (para. 123) The SC **ENCOURAGED** efforts to clarify the extent and nature of whale shark interactions with IOTC fisheries, and to assess the current stock status within the IOTC area of competence, **ACKNOWLEDGING** that the extent of the vulnerability of whale sharks to IOTC fisheries is unknown. Based on the available information presented by the WPEB, the SC classified whale sharks in the Indian Ocean as a “taxon of the greatest biological vulnerability and conservation concern for which there are very few data”, as defined in Resolution 25/08 and **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission take appropriate action based on this classification. The SC **NOTED** that this classification supports the consideration of precautionary management measures and prioritization of future research and data collection efforts by the Commission.

SC28.21 (para. 145) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission **ENCOURAGE** ongoing trials with these gears (i.e., loop gears) to better understand their effect on target and bycatch species.

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.

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

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 Experts to be regularly invited to scientific working party meetings. The SC **NOTED** that there are generally funds to support 3 or 4 Invited Experts to attend IOTC's working parties.

IOTC species identification guides: Tuna and tuna-like species

SC28.29 (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.

REVIEW OF THE DRAFT, AND ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 28TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

SC28.33 (para. 303) The SC **RECOMMENDED** that the Commission consider the consolidated set of recommendations arising from SC28, provided at [Appendix 39](#).

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 256)*

The SC **ADOPTED** a revised assessment schedule, ecological risk assessment 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-SC28-R[E], Para. 292).

Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch					
Species	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	Data preparatory meeting	-	-	Data preparatory meeting	Data preparatory meeting
Blue shark	-	–	–	–	Full assessment
Oceanic whitetip shark	Indicator analysis*	-	–		Indicator analysis*
Scalloped hammerhead shark	Indicator analysis*	–	–	–	–
Shortfin mako shark	-			Full assessment	
Silky shark	Indicator analysis*	-	Indicator analysis*	-	–
Bigeye thresher shark	-	Indicator analysis*	-	–	–
Pelagic thresher shark	-	Indicator analysis*	-	–	–
Porbeagle shark	-	Indicator analysis*		–	–
Mobulid Rays	-	Interactions/ Indicators	-	Interactions/ Indicators	–
Marine turtles	-	–	Indicators	–	Indicators
Seabirds		Review of	–	Development of draft workplan	

Marine Mammals	-	—	—	Review of mitigation measures Review of handling	
Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries	Pilot ecosystem fisheries overviews for				
Series of multi-taxa bycatch mitigation workshops	Focus: tbd	Focus: tbd	Focus: tbd	Focus: gillnets	Focus: tbd

* Including data poor stock assessment methods; Note: the assessment schedule may be changed dependent on the annual review of fishery indicators, or SC and Commission requests.

NOTE: (i) the “indicator analysis” is a simple analysis to provide guidance on the stock status based on fishery data such as CPUE, catch, and size frequency data ;(ii) the “full stock assessment” is an assessment to provide the stock status and fishing pressure based on a stock assessment model such as stock synthesis or production model; (iii) the “data preparatory” is a the submission and review by the WP of the fishery data as well as biological parameters for the upcoming stock assessment.