

21 September 2026

Chair's Explanatory Memo TCAC Resolution and Proposed Approach

TCAC17, 13 - 14 October 2026
Virtual

Summary

This memo proposes two alternative options for TCAC to consider:

1. Draft high-level resolution on allocation guidelines
2. Negotiate agreement on two foundational matters for allocation

Background

As noted by some members at IOTC30, much has changed since the initial formation of the TCAC many years ago. The IOTC has since adopted various resolutions implementing management procedures and catch limits for a number of species. Meanwhile, the TCAC has made some progress on high level allocation criteria but has failed to agree on substantial details. Since 2024, TCAC has discussed many issues relating to allocation and has agreed on the following (among other things):

- TCAC13 AGREED to the development of a 'package deal' which would be structured around three allocation criteria (Baseline, Catch History, Special Requirements) with details to be developed through the decision tree, focusing first on five principal species (yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack albacore and swordfish).

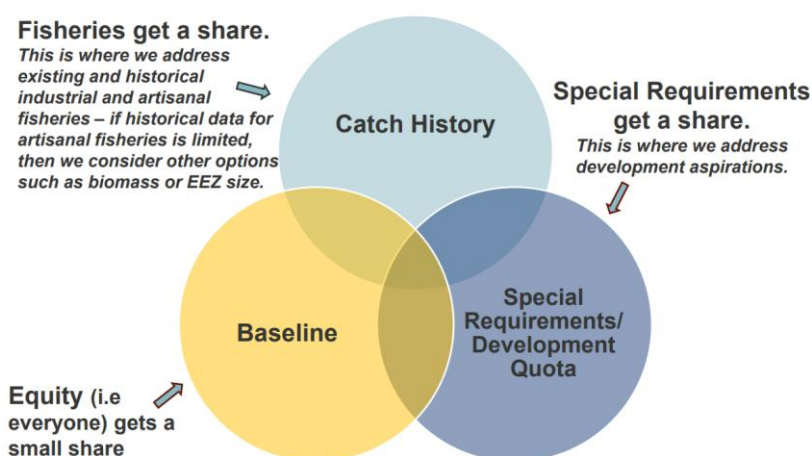


Figure 2: TCAC13 report - three foundational criteria for an allocation framework

- TCAC14 AGREED to a workplan that would develop a comprehensive allocation framework as a package deal and conclude with a draft resolution to be finalised at TCAC18 in early 2027.

- TCAC15 AGREED to key components that shall be included in a transferability framework:
 - Temporary transfers – CPs shall be able to sell, gift or trade quota to other CPs under terms mutually agreed by each CP. This can enable a market to develop that can provide benefits, while minimising disruption to existing operations. Temporary transfers shall not affect long-term allocation rights, and must be linked to a robust allocation system.
 - Membership – CPs shall only be able to transfer quota to other CPs. This ensures that all catches are reported and managed within IOTC jurisdiction.
 - Timeframe – CPs shall only be able to record catch against transferred quota in the year that it was transferred. All transfers shall lapse on an agreed date. This ensures that transfers do not undermine sustainability goals and remain within scientifically recommended limits. Transfers must be notified by the end of the 3rd quarter.
 - Notification – Transfers shall be prohibited by the IOTC unless transfer notifications are submitted to the secretariat in a consistent format and within an agreed timeframe. Notifications shall be recorded in a manner that enables catches to be reported against the relevant quota. Notifications shall include information on: the CPs involved; the amount of quota traded (i.e. tonnage and species); terms of the transfer (i.e. gift, sale or trade). No authorisation by the IOTC is required. Transfer shall take effect upon receipt of the notification by IOTC Executive Secretary. This shall then be circulated to all members.

- TCAC15 AGREED that compliance is fundamental to the successful implementation of an allocation regime, noting that many members agreed that compliance should only apply to the application of the regime and should not include past compliance issues, and that TCAC AGREED that a systematic sanction mechanism would need to be established to ensure compliance with an allocation framework.

- TCAC16 AGREED that a stepwise process to address the treatment of artisanal/small-scale/subsistence fisheries should be included in the TCAC workplan to advance these discussions moving forward:
 - a. Gather information on livelihood and subsistence fisheries
 - b. For the purposes of allocation, agree on the characterisation of fisheries to be granted special treatment
 - c. Calculate the catch represented by this sector
 - d. Consider the special treatment of these fisheries

Some members stressed that this issue should be addressed before finalising the allocation framework.

- TCAC16 AGREED to the framework below for future discussions of catch attribution:
 - In Year 1, X% of the historical catch of a Flag State CPC fishing in another CPC's jurisdictional waters shall be attributed to the corresponding coastal State CPC. The remainder shall be attributed to the Flag State CPC.
 - Y-X% shall be attributed to the corresponding coastal State CPC in a stepwise manner over the following Z-year period, concluding with a permanent arrangement according to a pre-agreed schedule. The remainder shall be attributed to the Flag State CPC each year during the Z-year period.

* The value of X and Y will be a range from 0 and up to 100.

- And finally, TCAC16 NOTED discussions on the three allocation criteria that provided further insights but no agreement. Perhaps the most critical of these related to the treatment of ‘catch history’ and whether this should be viewed as a criterion or as an indicator of fishing interest alongside other indicators such as biomass proxies (i.e EEZ size), proximity to fishing grounds, geographical tuna migration patterns, and the spatial distribution of the stocks within the Area of Competence, including within EEZs of coastal States. In this discussion, TCAC16 AGREED with Australia’s proposal that an independent scientific consultant review the theoretical basis for a biomass proxy methodology and provide this advice through the Working Party on Tropical Tuna and Scientific Committee in the period leading into the next TCAC subject to extra-budgetary funding being available.

IOTC30 confirmed that TCAC17 will meet virtually 13-14 October and determine if a revised workplan is possible. If agreement is reached, then an in-person TCAC18 will be held in February 2027.

Proposed Approach for TCAC

While progress has been made on high level principles, TCAC has repeatedly noted strong opposing positions by members on foundational matters that leave little room for compromise or agreement. Recent circulars and objections continue to reiterate some of these positions.

In my previous memo, I suggested that we focus TCAC17 workplan discussions on the prioritisation of foundational matters that are pre-requisites for an allocation framework, and we then identify two priorities for discussion at TCAC18. I encouraged members to provide feedback and consult with me on this suggestion and the agenda for TCAC17.

I have since held a small number of informal consultations and have also considered the recent objections and subsequent circulars relating to IOTC30 resolutions. Following reflection, I propose two options for TCAC17 to consider.

1. Resolution on Allocation Guidelines

TCAC17 provides instructions to the chair to draft a brief resolution that will provide guidelines for future allocations of catch limits. This guidance would be kept intentionally high-level, identifying key values and principles that shall be considered in future resolutions. It shall not include any percentages or numbers.

Since the establishment of the TCAC, the IOTC has progressed and adopted resolutions and MPs for skipjack, bigeye, swordfish and now yellowfin. Future developments of these species resolutions would then consider these allocation guidelines when distributing or allocation fishing opportunities and catch limits.

The draft resolution would include a preamble that briefly summarises key discussions and international frameworks, and then outlines principles, values and tools that will guide future allocations.

If approved, TCAC17 would instruct the chair to draft a brief resolution for distribution in December, and discussion and adoption at a final in-person TCAC18 in February 2027. If agreed, this resolution would then be recommended for adoption by IOTC31 in May 2027, concluding the work of TCAC and thereby dissolving the committee.

2. Foundations for Allocation

In August 2026, I suggested that TCAC17 focus workplan discussions on the prioritisation of foundational matters that are pre-requisites for any subsequent allocation framework. TCAC17 would identify two 'balanced' priorities for discussion at an in-person TCAC18 to be held in early February 2027. It is important that these discussions adopt a 'balanced' approach so that different member priorities are advanced together. The objective of these discussions would be to recommend a resolution for IOTC consideration that contributes to the overall effectiveness of IOTC and provides incremental progress towards an allocation framework.

I previously sought feedback on which foundation matters should be prioritised for discussion but have so far received no advice. Consequently I will leave this decision open for TCAC17 to confirm. If TCAC17 selects option #2, then I will request instruction on the selection of two balanced priorities such as:

- treatment of artisanal fisheries AND jurisdiction
- treatment of artisanal fisheries AND catch attribution
- defining indicators for measuring fishing interest AND catch attribution
- or other foundational matters that balance IOTC member interests

Conclusion

We can recognise our general agreement on key principles and adopt these as a simple high-level guiding resolution, thereby concluding the work of the TCAC (Option #1).

Or members can choose to negotiate foundational matters if they believe there is an opportunity to find a middle ground (option #2).

If TCAC17 is unable to agree on either option, then I suggest that TCAC17 consider cancelling TCAC18 and instructing the chair to prepare a final report for IOTC31 that summarises key discussions and insights, and recommends the dissolution of the TCAC.

I encourage you to contact me if you would like to discuss these matters before TCAC17. I am grateful to those delegations that have provided useful feedback and encourage everyone to contact me if you have any concerns or suggestions.

I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Quentin Hanich
Chair - IOTC Technical Committee for Allocation Criteria (TCAC)