



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
NINETEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

Koror, Palau
16 - 24 August 2023

FUTURE OPERATIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

WCPFC-SC19-2023/GN-WP-06 (Rev.01)

Secretariat

PURPOSE

1. This paper supports ongoing discussions based on previous consultations for ways to further streamline the work of the Scientific Committee (SC) for the efficient and effective work of the SC as needed. This paper provides potential options for rationalizing the way the SC operates in future, including issues related to SC in-person meeting days, without hampering its key functions as stated in the WCPFC Convention. This paper should be considered in conjunction with the issues raised by the Scientific Services Provider (SSP) contained in document [SC19-SA-WP-14](#).

BACKGROUND

2. The latest guidelines for the SC Chair and Convenors ([WCPFC-SC13-2017/GN-IP-03](#)) were adopted at SC13. Since SC14, CCMs have had discussions on ways to improve the future operations of the SC, noting the workload associated with the development of Harvest Strategies (HS) and associated Harvest Control Rules (HCRs), Management Procedures (MPs), and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). The Commission also recognized that given the heavy workload in 2023, particularly with the review of the Tropical Tuna CMM, WCPFC19 agreed not to hold a Science-Management Dialogue (SMD) in 2023 and agreed to assess the need to hold an SMD in 2024 depending on progress in the Commission's harvest strategy work.¹

3. In previous SC meetings, some CCMs viewed that there were substantial areas to consider improving the functions of the SC, and to address this, several suggestions were expressed, including earlier submission of meeting papers to allow sufficient time to digest and critical review of the number of agenda items to accommodate the science management dialogue (SMD)².

4. At SC15, New Zealand prepared a paper [SC15-GN-WP-03 \(A Proposal for the Guidelines for the SC Chair and Theme Convenors\)](#) that included some options for rationalizing SC's work. These included reducing SC's meeting time by 2 days, from the present 8 days to 6 days, to allow for a 2-day SMD meeting. Discussion on this paper was deferred due to the Commission's decision at WCPFC15 to not convene a 2-day SMD at the SC meeting, as well as a need to address comments received on the paper.³

¹ Paragraph 291, WCPFC19 Summary Report

² Paragraphs 680 – 684, SC14 Summary Report

³ Paragraph 636, SC15 Summary Report

5. Some CCMs consider that the current meeting duration of 8 days is lengthy, which requires participants to consider a significant number of documents. In order to rationalize future operations of the SC, it may be worthwhile to consider: i) the use of alternative platforms such as the online discussion forum (ODF) and virtual meetings, ii) streamlining the SC agenda in line with the Commission's requests or on its own initiative⁴, and iii) review of the number of SC working papers to be presented at SC and timeframe for the submission of SC papers.

OPTIONS TO RATIONALIZE FUTURE SC OPERATIONS

6. Noting the guidelines for the SC Chair and Convenors ([WCPFC-SC13-2017/GN-IP-03](#)) adopted at SC13, which has been practiced efficiently for the past years and noting the discussions to further improve future SC operations, below are some options that may be considered for the future meeting structure, especially relating to reducing the SC meeting days if feasible.

I. Use of Alternative Platforms

7. The following alternative platforms may be considered to assist in facilitating SC work as these platforms have proven effective during the absence of in-person meetings (i.e., during the global COVID-19 pandemic).

a) Online Discussion Forum (ODF)

The ODF platform has been utilized since SC16 to supplement plenary discussions by providing for electronic discussion on ongoing SC projects and other SC documents on which authors request feedback. As a complementary tool to SC's plenary discussions, the ODF platform has demonstrated its utility in delivering intended outputs to the SC during a virtual meeting period. This platform could be further utilized before and during the SC meetings to gather constructive feedback on a paper which could in turn, reduce time during the SC meeting for discussions, while efficiently producing meaningful outcomes. Pending the Commission's and its subsidiary body's decision on how to formally incorporate ODF outcomes into SC proceedings, this avenue for considering and advancing SC's work presents a viable option for rationalizing SC's work.

b) Virtual Meeting

A virtual meeting platform, e.g., using the Zoom, has been utilized in the absence of an in-person meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been proven to be efficient in delivering the outcomes needed from SC. One key challenge is setting the virtual meeting times, noting some CCMs located in different time zones, which may not be ideal for some CCMs. However, the virtual meetings with carefully selected agenda items could be useful as an opportunity for CCMs to have preliminary discussions in advance of the plenary meeting, such that discussions during the SC plenary should require less time. One of the key issues to be addressed in implementing an advance virtual meeting approach is related to how to authorize the virtual meeting outputs.

II. Streamlined SC Theme Agenda

8. During the COVID-19 pandemic when global travel was restricted, the Commission decided that SC's deliberations should focus on items deemed as essential to provide the necessary scientific advice to inform key decisions of the Commission in that year. The success experienced from this approach warrants consideration of continuing this practice of streamlining the SC's focus such that the work required to support the Commission in any given year results in a reduced number of meeting days

⁴ Paragraph 2 (g) in Article 12 of the WCPF Convention

required by SC. Detailed options and approaches to streamline the SC agenda will require further consideration, and addressing issues raised in the SSP paper contained at SC19-SA-WP-14 may support this consideration.

III. SC Document Deadlines

9. Noting the discussions in previous SC meetings that members are faced with consideration of a substantial volume of materials, some CCMs suggested to review the timeframe in which papers are submitted to the SC to be earlier than the current schedule of two (2) weeks prior to the start of meeting. An earlier deadline for submission of SC papers, while also allowing more time for the SSP, could ease the burden on members in their preparations and potentially contribute to more efficient SC discussions. In this regard, the below table presents the current and proposed changes for consideration of SC paper deadlines. As the majority of SC’s papers are prepared by the SSP, an associated change could be to switch the timing of SC and TCC meetings, which would require TCC consideration and the Commission’s decision.

| SC Document | Current Timeline | Proposed Timeline |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Annual Report – Part 1 | 30 days before SC | 7 July each year |
| Titles and Abstracts | 35 days (5 weeks) in advance of the start of SC | 50 days prior to the SC (Drafts) |
| Full Paper | 18 days in advance of the start of SC | 30 days prior to the SC, allowing some delays for SSP papers |
| Paper Posted to SC Meeting Webpage | 14 days (2 weeks) in advance of the start of SC | 27 days prior to the start of the SC |

IV. Streamlining/Simplifying Assessments

10. Some CCMs have suggested that assessments should be streamlined or simplified to fit more appropriately as elements of the monitoring strategy of management procedures as the harvest strategy approach is developed, noting that discussion on this issue can be expected under SC19 Agenda Item 5.1.1.2 *Monitoring strategy for WCPO skipjack tuna*.

11. A simplified approach to some shark assessments in the face of uncertain data may also be warranted, which could be initiated with the silky shark assessment, comparing both the current and a more simplified approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. SC19 is invited to consider the options set forth in this paper for rationalizing SC’s work, together with SC19-SA-WP-14 and in line with ensuring that SC’s key functions are maintained, as set out in *Article 12. Functions of the Scientific Committee* of the WCPFC Convention.