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Consideration of Changes to Scheduling of SC and TCC

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Purpose and Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to the Commission relating to resourcing challenges facing the Commission's Scientific Services Provider (SSP) in the provision of robust stock assessment information and the potential for changes in scheduling of annual SC and TCC meetings to alleviate some of those challenges.
2. While reviewing the results of the WCPO skipjack stock assessment in 2022, time constraints to thoroughly conduct input data analyses and stock assessments as well as limited time for full discussion on the outcomes of the assessment were highlighted as a critical issue to be addressed in future SC meetings. Therefore, SC18 provided the following general recommendations for WCPFC stock assessments:

103. SC18 noted the challenge of fully reviewing the key inputs into WCPFC stock assessments and providing feedback within the time available. SC recommended that approaches that may address this issue be discussed at SC19 and recommended that the Scientific Services Provider develop a discussion paper to inform those discussions.
3. Subsequently, SC19 considered [SC19-SA-WP-14 \(Options to address time challenges in the review of WCPFC stock assessment inputs\)](#) from the SSP containing a range of options (not mutually exclusive) that might remove some of the recent timing and resource challenges faced by the SSP's stock assessment team in delivering best available science to the Commission.
4. Related to the timing, SSP's timetable to produce tuna stock assessments and other meeting papers for the SC is influenced by:
 - The annual SC-agreed stock assessment schedule;
 - The 30th April scientific data provision deadline, defining the availability of catch, effort and size composition data, and the subsequent period of data loading and verification;
 - The dates of the SC meeting and hence deadline for SC papers; and
 - The delivery of the cumulative requests for additional regular reporting following the data provision deadline, such as expansion of the GN-WP-01 paper, South Pacific albacore

trends paper, and key tuna species indicators paper, all of which require resources to be allocated.

5. Noting these constraints, [SC19-SA-WP-14](#) highlighted some of the issues to be considered by SC , including the need to work with other CCMs and regional partners to deliver specific data inputs, limitations in the resources available to the SSP and regional partners, the need to ensure equal opportunity within any input review framework, and the challenges in implementing any feedback received via early SC review within the timeframe available for annual assessments.
6. The SC19 paper presented options that could provide the desired additional time for Scientific Committee review of input analyses prior to the SC meeting, along with perceived pros and cons. The ideas represent those of the SSP and are not exhaustive nor are they mutually exclusive. The options take the view that additional ‘time’ could be created by:
 - changing existing deadlines;
 - adjusting the level of work undertaken;
 - extending the period over which work is undertaken; and
 - increasing resources available.
7. TCC19 held limited discussion on this matter, primarily to acknowledge that serious consideration by the Commission on the timing of the subsidiary body meetings may be warranted and to note concerns by some CCMs with adjusting the current timing of SC and TCC meetings, an obstacle that was also raised by some delegations at SC19.
8. Related to this, the Secretariat also considered ongoing discussions based on previous consultations for ways to further streamline the work of the Scientific Committee to identify efficiency gains, where possible. [SC19-GN-WP-06](#) on *Future operations of the Scientific Committee* offered 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. Options included streamlining SC’s agenda, adjusting deadlines for submission of SC papers, and streamlining or simplifying assessments. The latter option in particular is linked to the challenges described by the SSP in delivering stock assessment advice.
9. SC19 adopted the following recommendations relating to the SC’s structure and functions, and the SSP’s timing constraints, respectively:
 - a. [Paragraph 243 of SC19 Outcomes Document](#): *SC19 recommended that the options outlined in the Table to Attachment 7 ([SC19-GN-WP-06](#)) be further explored by the Secretariat, SC Chair, Vice-Chair and Convenors in order to develop recommendations for improving the structure and functioning of the SC to be presented to SC20;*
 - b. [Paragraph 120 of SC19 Outcomes Document](#): *Noting the need for the SSP to have more time to complete the work required to conduct annual stock assessments and other analyses reviewed by the SC each year, SC19 recommended that:*
 - 1) *the data manager at the SSP liaise and consult with CCMs about the possibility of bringing forward the data submission deadline for fleets, especially historical data updates,*
 - 2) *the Secretariat explore options for moving the dates of the SC meeting to a later period in the calendar year,*

- 3) the Secretariat and SSP explore options for the WCPFC website to include a portal for CCMs to enter/edit/manage their ACE data submissions, and
- 4) the SSP develop guidelines for standardised structure/file layouts for Annual Catch Estimates and aggregate catch/effort data that can be used by CCMs to submit these data.

Discussion

10. At the heart of this matter is the need for the Commission to ensure it is receiving the best available scientific information on which to determine robust conservation and management measures in line with the Convention's objective. The WCPFC continues to be strongly supported by its SSP and as the Commission's scientific needs and priorities have shifted or increased, there has been a corresponding shift and increase in the regular demands of the SSP under its annual services agreement, including the expanding work within the stock assessment process to ensure the SC can continue to provide the best available scientific information to the Commission within the time constraints. Over time, some of those shifts have also been accommodated through the annual review and prioritization exercise by CCMs of scientific projects, which are then endorsed by the Commission through its adoption of the budget at each annual meeting. As can be expected, where an increase in scientific requirements takes place without a corresponding decrease in other work streams, available resources will inevitably be challenged.
11. Although there may not be a single option that can resolve the current resourcing challenges faced by the SSP, at least not immediately, there may be a combination of options that could be applied on an incremental or phased basis that taken cumulatively over time, would alleviate the concerns without compromising robust scientific advice over the long term.
12. The implications of shifting reporting deadlines are perhaps the main considerations in a decision to adjust the timing for SC and TCC meetings, which is further illustrated in Figure 1, below. The top half of the timeline identifies that in the SC stock assessment process, there is a key tension period for the SSP to arrange data¹ following the April 30 deadline for Scientific Data to be Provided and the timeline for posting of SC papers, which is usually in late July. The lower half of the timeline illustrates key dates in the TCC and Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) process, alongside the current annual report deadlines (AR Pt1 and AR Pt2) and TCC paper deadlines. The tension period for the Secretariat in TCC and CMS preparations is May to September and the Secretariat necessarily commences planning for the dCMR and TCC early each year. Figure 1 highlights that one of the constraints to be considered when exploring adjustments to the timing for SC and TCC meetings is that CCMs will need to also consider the extent to which changes to annual reporting deadlines, including Scientific Data Provision, are possible for CCMs. Constraints for some CCMs in terms of final data reporting deadlines are highlighted, although some flexibility in the provision of updated data for historical years was noted at SC19.

¹ Refer to footnote 2 of SC19-SA-WP-14 for the data process prior to stock assessment.

Options for moving forward

16. The absence of a Commission Strategic Plan² is relevant to this discussion, where it could serve as direction on annual and multi-annual priorities to organise the Commission's service providers, accordingly. The Secretariat's planned restructure of the Compliance team is a parallel scenario where resources are being reorganised with a view to identifying efficiency gains and positioning Commission resources to ensure support is maintained and where necessary, strengthened. Similarly, the challenges faced by the SSP are reflective of a need for realignment of the Commission's scientific resources and processes to meet expectations going forward. A Strategic Plan that clearly identifies the Commission's short- and medium-term priorities and expectations could be appropriately resourced such that the SSP is able to continue to deliver best available science to the Commission and more importantly, that CCMs and stakeholders are positioned to adequately understand and utilise scientific information to support strengthened conservation and management decisions.
17. Annex 14 of [WCPFC20-2023-FAC17-06_Rev1](#) on the *Proposed Budget for the Commission's Work Programme For 2024 and Indicative Budgets for 2025 and 2026* outlines the additional financial resources that were provided in-kind by the SSP to deliver the Commission's annual scientific services requirements in 2022 (See Annex 12 of FAC1-06_Rev1). Noting the additional funding lines for stock assessment scientists put forward within the Science and Technical & Compliance Programme items of Annex 3 of FAC17-06_Rev1, while these SC-led requests for additional resources address part of the challenges faced by the SSP, it is not a total solution to addressing the time constraints related to preparation of data for stock assessments. CCMs should bear this in mind when considering the proposed budget for 2024 and the Commission's service contract with its SSP.
18. Intersessional discussions in 2024 tasked by SC19 and reflected in paragraph 9a-b, above, could be expanded to include the TCC Chair and Vice Chair in respect of reporting deadlines relating to annual reporting and compliance review, and include informal consultation with interested CCMs. Additional considerations should include the timing of other relevant international scientific and technical meetings, particularly in other tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (trFMOs) such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Reporting deadlines and stock assessment schedules should also be among the primary considerations, including relevant timeframe requirements contained in CMMs that may be impacted or have an impact.

Recommendations

19. The Commission is invited to:
 - a. **consider** how strategic planning may be able to support allocation of scientific resources on an annual and multi-annual basis to ensure continued delivery of best available science to underpin conservation and management decisions.
 - b. **expand** SC19's recommendations with respect to intersessional work in 2024 as described in paragraph 18, and **request** that a report of intersessional discussions, including any

² See also discussion in [WCPFC20-2023-29](#).

options and recommendations, be provided to SC20, TCC20, and WCPFC21 for consideration.

- c. **confirm** that in 2024, the deadlines for AR Pt 1 reports will be 7 July 2024 and AR Pt 2 reports will be 15 June 2024.