Prioritising the work of the Scientific Committee

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Background

Scientific Committee workload has grown considerably in recent years

Significant strain on SC annual agenda, SSP, and SC delegates

WCPFC22: Requested intersessional work on prioritisation

WCPFC22: Agreed to establish 8-day meeting schedule as default

SC21: Agreed on need for regular peer review of stock assessments

Two Papers for SC22 consideration:

GN-WP05: Prioritising the work of the Scientific Committee

GN-WP06: Scheduling independent reviews of stock assessments

Prioritisation through scheduling

Retain all our current priorities but schedule them to manage workload

Need to evaluate risk associated with delays or less frequent updates

Undertake three-year prioritisation process:

- SC22 - stock assessment schedule
- SC23 - harvest strategy workplan
- SC24 - reviews of CMMs related to the EB theme

SC convenors to prioritise within their respective themes on topics not covered above.

SC to establish a small group for prioritising the assessment schedule at SC22 via discussion of questions posed in the paper

Interim EB theme scheduling

Current two-year alternating cycle has proven insufficient for comprehensive CMM reviews

Proposed interim adjustment:

- SC23 - sea turtles and seabirds
- SC24 - cetaceans and elasmobranchs

Effectively trialling moving toward a four-year EB review cycle

Note: Shark CMM (CMM 2025-06) scheduled for review in 2027 – may require SC recommendation to reschedule

Clarifying CMM Review Obligations

We recommend the Secretariat prepares a paper for SC23 setting out all CMM review obligations requiring SC advice

Particularly those due within the next five years

We believe this will help Members understand dependencies and make informed scheduling decisions

Recommendations

a. SC to note the Commission’s request for prioritisation

b. SC to agree to a three-year prioritisation process while evaluating risks
   - SC22 - stock assessment schedule
   - SC23 - harvest strategy workplan
   - SC24 - reviews of CMMs related to the EB theme

c. SC to request convenors to conduct prioritisation in their themes

d. SC to establish a small group for prioritising the assessment schedule

e. SC to revise the EB theme schedule and provide advice on the scheduling of the review of the shark CMM
   - SC23 - sea turtles and seabirds
   - SC24 - cetaceans and elasmobranchs

f. SC to request the Secretariat provide a paper to SC23 on CMM review obligations requiring SC advice

Scheduling independent reviews of stock assessments

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Proposed Process

a. Establish criteria for identifying candidate stocks
b. Apply those criteria
c. Evaluate constraints (assessment schedule, harvest strategy workplan)
d. Develop draft schedule

Process should be applied on a periodic basis

Proposed Criteria

a. All key commercial stocks should be subject to review
b. Reviews: no more than once every 2 cycles, no less than once every 4 cycles
c. Prioritise stocks not yet reviewed
d. Prioritise assessments rejected by SC, applying substantial new methods, or with critical issues
e. Not scheduled in the year of an assessment
f. Not scheduled during MP development, adoption, or first implementation
g. Avoid concurrent reviews

Indicative example of identifying candidate stocks

Two tuna stocks not yet reviewed:

- Skipjack → review for SC25 in 2029 (after 2028 assessment, after initial MP period)
- SPA → review for SC27 in 2031 (after 2030 assessment, when CKMR data may be incorporated)

Billfish and Sharks

- Project 130 workshop (early 2027) will serve function analogous to independent review
- Additional reviews for these stocks may be duplicative at this stage

Link to SC Work Program Prioritisation

- Independent reviews could support benchmark/update assessment cycles

Recommendations

a. SC to recall its previous agreement to develop a schedule of independent reviews for WCPFC stock assessments.

b. SC to agree to a process to develop a schedule of independent reviews and endorse the proposed criteria for identification of candidate stocks.

c. SC to apply the process to develop a schedule of independent reviews.

d. SC to agree to undertake this process on a periodic basis.

Thank you

Questions for stock assessment scheduling (1 of 3)

a. Can the frequency and/or intensiveness of stock assessments for key tuna species be reduced while maintaining confidence in the assessment of these stocks?
   i. Can the number of years between tuna stock assessments be increased?
   ii. What conditions would need to be met for a stock to be considered for less frequent assessments (e.g. stocks subject to adopted management procedures, life history)?
   iii. Can the frequency of full stock assessments for tuna species be reduced, and replaced by less intensive update assessments that involve applying previous assessment model structures and assumptions updated with more recent data?
   iv. What conditions would need to be met for a stock assessment to be considered sufficiently mature that an update assessment may be appropriate (e.g. subject to independent review in the past 10 years/3 assessment cycles, stocks subject to adopted management procedures, potentially including those managed via mixed fisheries approach)?
   v. To what degree might it be possible to combine less frequent assessments and less intensive update assessments, and what conditions would need to be met?

Questions for stock assessment scheduling (2 of 3)

b. Can the frequency and/or intensiveness of stock assessments for billfish and sharks be reduced noting the challenges in conducting assessments for these stocks?
   i. To what extent are the questions above for tuna stock assessments also applicable to billfish and sharks? Are WCPFC’s assessment and management frameworks sufficiently mature?
   ii. What conditions would need to be met for a for a shark or billfish stock assessment to be considered sufficiently mature that the same approach applied to tuna species could be applied to billfish and sharks (e.g. defined reference points)?
   iii. Would risk-based scheduling of stock assessments for billfish and sharks be appropriate to consider?
   iv. What metrics are available to be used to generate a risk-based schedule (e.g. productivity, susceptibility, extinction/extirpation risk, monitoring of recovery)?

Questions for stock assessment scheduling (3 of 3)

c. To what extent may new assessment approaches (e.g. CKMR) support prioritisation of stock assessments based on the potential for these new approaches to justify a reduction in the assessment frequency and/or intensiveness?

d. Are there any other potential changes to the stock assessment schedule that would support prioritisation without unduly impacting SC's advice to the Commission?

e. Is there any analysis that would support SC's advice on any of the above prioritisation options?