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**ISC's RESPONSE TO MRAG REPORT: INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE
COMMISSION'S TRANSITIONAL SCIENCE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS**

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**INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR TUNA
AND TUNA-LIKE SPECIES IN THE NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN**

**RESPONSE TO MRAG REPORT: INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE COMMISSION'S
TRANSITIONAL SCIENCE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS**

3 November 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

This document is a response to the MRAG review of the WCPFC's transitional science structure and functions, as it pertains to ISC. While in its report MRAG indicates that Commission members have no doubt of the technical and scientific competence of the ISC scientists undertaking assessments, some parties interviewed expressed concern over aspects of ISC's functioning and the flow of advice to the Commission. MRAG provides suggestions for addressing these areas of concern. ISC, however, finds that some of the suggestions are based on misinterpretations or misunderstanding of some aspects of how the ISC works. This document attempts to clarify the misinterpretations and misunderstanding and focuses on how the ISC is addressing the following issues:

- (1) Transparency of ISC science;
- (2) Peer review of ISC stock assessments;
- (3) Data issues;
- (4) Timing of meetings;
- (5) Revising the WCPFC-ISC MOU.

2. ISSUES

(1) Transparency of ISC science

a. Participation in ISC assessment activities

Participation is open to members, approved observers and invited experts. Through the MOU between the ISC and WCPFC, the WCPFC is an approved observer and its Secretariat is alerted to plans of all meetings. Stock assessment reports are provided to the Northern Committee in a timely manner as required by the MOU; they are also provided to the Commission and the SC.

Because the WCPFC is an approved observer, there is no barrier to SC scientists participating in the ISC meetings. The MRAG recommendation of SC designating an SC

team to review ISC information and advice through attending and participating in ISC has also been suggested by the ISC, and ISC encourages SC scientists to attend its meetings.

b. Making working group working papers available

ISC provides details of stock assessments in working group (WG) reports for the Commission, the SC and the NC to review. The ISC is endeavoring to make WG working papers available with the authors' consent in a way that does not undermine the assessment quality or the assessment scientists' ability to have their working papers peer reviewed by external experts for publication.

The current ISC working paper policy states that working papers presented at WG workshops, excluding information papers and other non-working paper documents, shall be released publicly through the ISC Web site or other means with the authors' permission. If an author chooses not to release the working paper publicly, the title and author's email address will be released so that interested parties may contact authors directly to request copies. In addition, all working papers, especially those used for decision making, are summarized and cited in ISC reports.

ISC is also currently developing a new Web site where working papers and/or authors' contact information will be available to the public. This Web site is currently under construction: <http://isc.ac.affrc.go.jp/>.

(2) Peer review of ISC stock assessments

ISC supports the idea of peer review of its stock assessment results but acknowledges the need to explore processes that minimize cost and time to ISC participants. ISC is currently investigating mechanisms for peer review of its assessments including the use of peer-review providers such as the Center for Independent Experts (CIE).

(3) Data issues

a. Data harmonization

ISC is developing an inventory of data and metadata that ISC members (not ISC) hold and may be available for stock assessments. For example, ISC members hold operational data used for CPUE standardization, rather than the ISC; this differs from the practice of SPC/WCPFC of holding both public and non-public domain data. In addition, a catalog of data held by ISC will be produced by ISC10. This catalog will be shared with WCPFC as part of a process of reviewing the holdings of each organization and as a starting point for periodic consultation to review overall consistency between data sets and to identify data gaps.

b. Data consistency

An ISC database administrator position, to be located in Shimizu, Japan, is in the recruitment process. The person selected will be responsible for managing all data and information needs for the smooth functioning of the ISC and its working groups while maintaining confidentiality regulations. This database administrator will ensure consistency in catch data reporting, archive reports, and support the ISC Web site.

(4) Timing of meetings

The ISC Plenary meeting schedule was determined after considering the meeting schedules of members and other HMS organizations and the MOU requirement of providing "...requested scientific information and advice...one (1) month before the annual meetings of the Northern Committee." The Northern Committee has been meeting in September, thus sufficient time has been available to prepare and deliver the ISC Plenary report to the Northern Committee with the ISC Plenary meeting in July. If similar advanced submission of scientific information to the SC, which meets in August, is required, then both the ISC and SC must explore accommodations to meet the requirement.

(5) Revising the WCPFC-ISC MOU

ISC is open to discussing revision of the WCPFC-ISC MOU in a way that is consistent with the charters of both the NC and the ISC. ISC notes that there are historic and logistic reasons that went into the structure of the current MOU. Those should be maintained while adjusting elements to accommodate recent requirements.

3. CONCLUSION

ISC believes that the actions it is planning to execute will address the above valid issues noted in the MRAG Report and improve ISC operations while addressing concerns raised by some WCPFC participants. The success of these actions depends on cooperation and collaboration from interested parties, the availability of additional funding to cover new costs, and the availability of time for the ISC leadership to implement the actions.