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EU COMMENTS ON SCIENCE COMMITTEE RE-STRUCTURING

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Subject: EU comments on the proposal for the re-structure of the Scientific Committee meetings in 2010 and possible application to SC6

Dear Mr. Soh,

Following the consultation we received from Ms. Lucilla Martinez on April 20 and 23 last, we would like to provide you with the European Union comments on the document "Proposal for streamlining the structure of the Scientific Committee Meetings for the WCPFC".

Firstly, we would like to thank you for consulting us, and to thank Dr. Robert Campbell for the excellent working document which has provided us with the opportunity to share with you and all WCPFC Members and scientific experts our views on the functioning of the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC) and its possible improvements.

As you are probably aware, the EU is committed to strengthen the role and action of the Regional Fishery Management Organisations' (RFMOs) Scientific Committees, and, it is along these lines that we currently support an action of sharing best practices amongst different bodies and experts in RFMOs (Kobe II Workshop in Barcelona, Spain 31 May – 2 June 2010).

We have, therefore, closely consulted with our scientific experts dealing with WCPFC matters, and our main observations on Dr. Campbell's document are the following:

1. GENERAL COMMENTS

In the EU opinion, there is no doubt that there was an urgent need to look into this matter and undertake a deep reflection on a possible reorganisation of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, as the latest SC meetings have been marked by the following weaknesses:

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- very long (and with many duplications) discussions within Working Groups and SC plenary meetings;
- a certain degree of "politicisation" of those discussions, due to the fact that a majority of the participants are not scientists but political representatives from WCPFC Members;
- very narrow or reduced scientific discussions, and as a result, not exhaustive, complete and effective scientific reports, conclusions and recommendations;
- SC reports often including political (and not merely scientific) statements.

In the EU's perspective, these weaknesses have jeopardised some of the SC works and conclusions, and have partially undermined the overall engagement and results of the SC works. This was also recognised in 2009 by SC5 scientists, and this is also the basic reason to undertake such a discussion based on Dr. Campbell's report.

As mentioned above, the EU's view is that Dr. Campbell's report and proposals are a good starting point to improve the past functioning of WCPFC SC, and that they include references to most of the identified problems.

This is the reason why the EU could, generally, support Dr. Campbell's report and approach; more in detail, the proposed "New structure for SC6 – Proposal A" would be preferable for us, as the "New structure – Proposal B" would be probably too short, taking into account the diversity and complexity of the scientific problems that need to be covered in the Western Pacific.

2. SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

In addition to the general remarks expressed above, the EU would like to stress quite clearly some specific points

In particular, it would be worthwhile for the SC to have clear rules on the following issues:

- all purely political statements would have to be avoided; consequently, the SC Chair would have to ensure that only scientific points of view are expressed around the table, and then included in the SC report. It is our view that all political statements should be left to the WCPFC Annual Meeting .
- A, perhaps, more complex point, represents the need to develop, within the SC, exhaustive and thorough scientific discussions and conclusions on the stock assessment results. Solutions to this somehow remain a bit cryptic in Dr. Campbell's report.

One of Dr. Campbell's recommendations appears to be reasonable ("*Strengthening the role of the Stock Assessment Preparatory Workshop (SAPW) convened by SPC-OFP in April each year*") and we fully support that. Nevertheless it still remains unclear whether the restructured SC, will give real possibilities for the SPC-OFP's conclusions on the status of the stocks to be taken up by scientific experts from WCPFC CCMs in a full-scale and open scientific discussion during the SC annual meeting.

This point is, in our view, essential, as it is our impression that, until today, the results and conclusions of stock assessments (mainly obtained by SPC-OFP) have been taken for granted and in the SC plenary discussions on them have been quite limited. As a result, we risk that that even a very questionable analysis gets approved by the SC, without, almost, any concrete debate during the SC annual meeting.

It is true that the SAPW meeting, which is a purely scientific one, could be in position to make this necessary peer review of the results, but this is not always the case: actually, the April SAPW meeting has limited goals, and it mainly focuses its discussions on the inputs of the stock assessment models, but unfortunately it does not have time/means to discuss its results. Therefore a certain vacuum is created between the SAPW and the SC meetings that leaves scientific experts from CCMs out of the loop.

The EU would like to insist on the need that all the results of the stock assessment models should be peer reviewed by an ad hoc scientific structure, and before the SC annual meeting. A suggestion could be these discussions on the stock assessment results to be held within a small group of WCPFC scientists, because of the complexity of the problems involved in the application of stock assessments models.

In conclusion our strong opinion is that stock assessment results should not be simply endorsed by a fairly large and heterogeneous SC annual meeting, but that they have to be previously analysed, discussed and queried by CCMs' scientific experts to their satisfaction. This could be achieved by small groups of scientists/experts in each field/species.

This is, actually, the methodology used in other Tuna RFMOs like ICCAT or/and IOTC, where the analysis are done before or/and during the technical Working Groups covering each group of species; in those contexts, the stock assessment results and reports are firstly discussed and approved by the specialists (coming from all RFMOs Members and Cooperating non Members), before their submission to the SC for final discussion and approval by a wide group of persons (which actually could also include non-scientists).

I hope that these comments will feed into the discussion launched by Dr. Campbell and the WCPFC Secretariat, and I would kindly ask you to distribute them amongst WCPFC Members and Cooperating Non Members.

Yours sincerely,



Roberto CESARI

Head of EU Delegation to WCPFC