

**Report of the Second Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a
Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF)**
(online, 22 May 2025)

1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Administration (STACFAD), Ms. Deirdre Warner-Kramer, opened the Second Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF) (the “Group”), which was held online on 22 May 2025, from 12:00 to 17:00 hours. The meeting was attended by 24 members from 14 CPCs.

2. Introduction of participants

The STACFAD Chair welcomed all the participants. The agenda was adopted without changes and is attached as **Appendix 1**. The Executive Secretary reminded where the meeting documents were found, emphasizing that these should only be shared with the members of the Group.

The List of participant is attached as **Appendix 2**.

3. Continued discussion of options and proposals for key issues

The VWG-SF addressed each of the items referred to it by the Commission, according to the tentative agenda.

a) Format and content of the annual budget presentation

The Chair recalled that the new budget template was presented at the First Meeting of the VWG-SF on 16 January 2025 and an additional revision was made. It was then circulated, and comments were only received from Brazil.

In light of the conclusions reached at the Annual Meeting of the Commission in 2024 as regards the format and content of the draft budget presentation for the coming years, the Secretariat briefly presented the document containing the comments from Brazil, the only CPC to have provided feedback.

During the discussion on this item, some members of the Group expressed their concerns on the assuming budget increase and their wish for greater clarity on the financing of the GBYP, expansion of some items under the headings of salaries and travel as well as clarification in the Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) of interpretation into Arabic, and inclusion in the tables of Chapter 7 of a column with the funds that finance the activities.

The Secretariat provided clarifications on the funding of the GBYP and Science and indicated that it would include the suggestions in the document. It also clarified that the Commission had approved interpretation into Arabic during the Commission meeting using the Working Capital Fund, and that this would therefore have to be reflected in the regular budget.

Another member of the Group requested that the document be presented at the meeting in an editable form. The Chair agreed and indicated that the budget template was very close to being defined.

b) Special Meeting Participation Fund (MPF)

The Chair introduced “Notes on the operational issues related to the implementation of the MPF”, and thanked Brazil for its contributions to the document, which are reflected in “Comments from Brazil on Notes on the operational issues related to the implementation of the MPF prepared by the ICCAT Secretariat as document VWG-SF_MAY_03”. She then opened the floor for discussion on specific points of the document. For the purposes of feedback, the Chair again commented on the document and suggested that some of the issues should be incorporated more specifically into the *Rules of procedure for the administration of the*

special Meeting Participation Fund (Ref. 23-25). She asked if the Group members were interested in including some of the suggestions from the document in Ref. 23-25, specifically the points 2, 4 and 9. She further enquired if there was interest in developing the other guidelines into a handbook that would be in the held by the Secretariat for formal consultation.

One CPC raised the need to clarify and know exactly how per diems were calculated and how often trips were cancelled. It agreed with developing a document or handbook with clear ideas. The Secretariat responded that it is not common for trips to be cancelled and that per diems are calculated with reference to the United Nations scale.

Another CPC reflected that consulates and embassies would have to expedite the issue of visas. It indicated that there are difficulties involved in obtaining a visa which cause delay and that hotels are consequently more expensive, a circumstance which is not taken into account in the per diem calculation scale. The Chair noted that visas are a matter for each country and invited host countries to heighten awareness among authorities in order to facilitate the process.

In addition, the Chair agreed to make changes to the regulations to provide more clarity and guidance for more targeted management. She also undertook to make the modifications to Ref. 23-25 for initial dissemination as an informal document for common advancement through a correspondence process with contributions. Once a consensus is reached, it will be distributed within the Commission.

4. Organization of the Annual Meeting

The Chair reminded the members of the Group that, while planning for the 2025 Annual meeting was well underway, there are issues that could be a problem if participation increases and also indicated that ways and means to potentially save funds had been studied. She reviewed the list of options under consideration and opened the discussion.

One CPC signaled that if there were no host country there would be items that would have to be reduced such as the cocktail reception and lunches. It informed that it was a concern that it would cost the same to organize a meeting regardless of whether or not there was a host country.

She presented the options to be considered in order to reduce the costs of Commission meetings, such as eliminating the gala dinner, with which several members of the Group agreed. This option would remain in the case where there was a host country that wished to offer it. While delegates agreed that the cocktail reception should be maintained for annual meetings, one CPC did not consider it necessary for intersessional meetings.

As regards the second item on the list “reduction of the cost of lunches”, the CPCs considered possibilities to offer a more economical alternative so that participants can have lunch at the meeting venue or to charge participants a certain amount for the meal. The Chair recalled that previous discussions in the VWG had noted that if the duration and level of participation are maintained, it would be complicated to eliminate the lunches altogether.

Some CPCs considered that lunch be provided without charge for set number of delegates per CPC, and that any additional delegates taking advantage of the lunch would need to pay. Other CPCs proposed that no lunch or very limited lunch be provided, and that any registered delegates that are no-shows should be requested to reimburse the full or partial cost of the lunch. However, they indicated that these limitations would probably place an additional burden on the Secretariat.

While noting the desire of several interested parties to maintain meals and coffee breaks, the Chair encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to negotiate with hotels to reduce the cost of lunches. She proposed that the number of participants could be provided as early as possible so that unnecessary costs would not be incurred, and in addition, it could be ascertained whether there are any catering alternatives should the meeting be held in a conference centre. Furthermore, the possibility of charging participants who did not attend was discussed, but no conclusion was reached.

As to the possibility of modifying the room layout, some CPCs indicated that they would have no problem with it being changed to a classroom format, and there being other listening rooms. Other CPCs commented that they supported fewer participants in the room but that that could lead to reduced interaction.

The Chair summarized the Group's recommendation that if a large room were available, the U layout would be maintained, but that if it were a smaller room, another format (classroom or two smaller ones) may be used.

The Chair opened the discussion on whether it would be appropriate to establish a maximum number of people in the room. On this issue, CPCs broadly supported not limiting the number of delegates per CPC for the time being but were in favor of limiting the number of participants in the Plenary room at any one time, since they are not active throughout the meeting. The number of participants in the room could be reduced in two ways: a) all delegates are accredited the same way but CPCs would need to manage the number of their delegates allowed in the Plenary room, or b) CPCs identify how many delegates could attend the meeting in the main room, and accreditation for the main room would be different from the listening room. There was also discussion of exploring the possibilities that conference centres can offer to further expand the options. The Chair concluded that there was a clear intention to reduce the number of delegates in the main room during sessions.

As regards increasing the contribution to the regular budget for the Commission meeting, the Group showed interest but ultimately did not support increasing the budget and indicated that other avenues of financing should be explored.

The Chair concluded that other sources of funding, and even sponsors, could be explored, but recalled the VWG's earlier discussion that there should be limits or criteria to ensure that the objectives and interests of the Commission are preserved.

5. Update and options for Secretariat staff pension

The Chair presented and explained the "Proposal to amend the pension plan scheme for the new wording of Article 6 of the *ICCAT Staff Regulations and Rules* concerning the pension plan", which had been prepared by the Secretariat. She commented that the proposed option to remove the reference to a pension plan from the Staff Regulations and Rules but maintain the amount previously allocated to pension contributions under a different heading would not have a financial impact on the Commission's budget.

While some CPCs generally supported the Secretariat's proposal, one CPC requested more detailed information on how this option would be developed including a legal analysis.

The Chair concluded that the Secretariat would provide more information in terms of legal analysis and implications.

6. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed

The Chair noted that there were issues that required additional development and summarized the next steps. First, the Secretariat will post a further updated budget template in the Group's folder so that it can be finalized and used to prepare the next biennial budget proposal.

Second, the Chair would develop an initial draft of possible changes to [Ref. 23-25](#) governing the MPF, and the Secretariat would consider developing an internal handbook aimed at those requesting the funds. These documents would be worked on by correspondence.

Third, the Secretariat will continue to explore options to reduce the cost of lunches and that interested host CPCs should evaluate the catering possibilities to facilitate its decision to host and the venue they select. The gala dinner would not be mandatory, the decision being left to the host country. The Secretariat will also explore possibilities to seek reimbursement of expenses from delegates who have registered to participate in the Commission meeting but fail to attend.

Finally, the Secretariat will continue to work on developing a document with detailed information on the implications of changes to the pension plan and Staff Regulations and Rules.

7. Other matters

No other matters were discussed.

8. Conclusions and closure

The Chair thanked all the participants for their extremely useful and constructive contributions and adjourned the meeting.

Appendix 1

Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Introduction of participants
3. Continued discussion of options and proposals for key issues
 - a. Format and content of the annual budget presentation
 - b. Special Meeting Participation Fund (MPF)
4. Organization of the Annual Meeting
5. Update and options for secretariat staff pension
6. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed
7. Other matters
8. Conclusions and closure

List of participants

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