

REPORT OF THE INTERSESSIONAL MEETING OF PANEL 2

(Madrid, Spain, 4-7 March 2019)

PART 1: EASTERN ATLANTIC AND MEDITERRANEAN BLUEFIN TUNA FISHING, FARMING, INSPECTION AND CAPACITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. Opening of Part 1 of the Meeting

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Shingo Ota (Japan). Part 1 discussed and endorsed the capacity, fishing, inspection and farming plans for the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna stock in 2019 and discussed interpretation of certain rules of Recommendation 18-02.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur for Part 1

Antonio Lizcano (European Union) was designated as rapporteur of Part 1.

3. Adoption of Agenda (Part 1) and meeting arrangements

The proposed agenda was adopted and is attached as **Appendix 1**. The Executive Secretary introduced the participating delegations. **Appendix 2** includes a list of delegates from each Contracting Party, as well as observers.

4. Consideration of fishing, farming, inspection and capacity management plans for 2019 presented by CPCs with E-BFT quota

The European Union (EU) raised the issue of entry into force of the measures in the *Recommendation by ICCAT Establishing a Multi-Annual Management Plan for Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea* [Rec. 18-02], which following ICCAT rules would enter into force in June 2019 if no objection is raised. In case that Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, Entities, and Fishing Entities (CPCs) opted for an earlier implementation of Rec. 18-02, the EU stressed the need to apply all provisions of Rec. 18-02 including the new control obligations as well as the more flexible provisions of the management plan. Algeria, supported by Turkey, suggested working on the basis of Rec. 18-02 to ensure legal consistency. The Chair indicated that most plans have been submitted according to Rec. 18-02, instead of Rec. 17-07. Given its internal regulatory procedures, the EU indicated that it would manage its 2019 fishery in accordance with Rec. 17-07 up to June and subsequently the rules of 18-02 as soon as the Recommendation enters legally into force. For those CPCs managing their 2019 fishery in accordance with Rec. 18-02, it was agreed that implementation of required control measures must be ensured in plans submitted according to that recommendation.

Each CPC presented a summary of its tuna fishing, farming, inspection and capacity management plan. A discussion of each CPC plan, corresponding modifications or amendments and tentative endorsement followed. All capacity, fisheries, farming, and inspection plans were endorsed during the session, except that of Syria, which the Panel decided to adopt through correspondence by the 31 March 2019, deadline subject to its revision.

A recurrent issue during the discussion of many plans was the criteria for extending the fishing season for purse seiners due to adverse weather conditions. The EU suggested during this discussion to apply the criteria of paragraph 21 of Rec. 08-05, which set wind speed level 5 on the Beaufort scale for some vessels and 4 for others. Libya, supported by Tunisia and Turkey, proposed using scale level 4, instead of 5, for all vessels. There was consensus to set level 4 for all vessels, if weather reports and VMS positions are provided, to prove that vessels had been inactive. The extension would be equivalent to the number of inactive days up to 10 maximum days. It was agreed that for joint fishing operations (JFO) evidence of concurrent inactivity of all the vessels has to be proven.

The United States, supported by Japan and the EU, suggested a table of fishing seasons be created as well as the maximum number of fishing vessels for each CPC for the sake of transparency. Following this suggestion by the United States, the Secretariat drafted a table attached as **Appendix 3**.

Albania

Albania presented their plans on the basis of the template provided by ICCAT and Rec. 18-02. The capacity plan focusses on purse seiners, which is the fleet that has been allocated its quota. The fishing plan includes basically one purse seiner, which will fish for the season set by Rec. 18-02. Albania does not allow either by-catches of bluefin tuna or sport and recreational fisheries for bluefin tuna. All by-catches must be released alive. Albania has presented an inspection plan in ports that not only targets bluefin, but also other species, especially those that may be endangered.

Japan suggested amending the VMS polling and transmission rate to every one hour, instead of two, as required by Rec. 18-10. The EU noted that the purse seiner name is the same as in 2018, but the characteristics have changed. Norway and the EU indicated that a quota for by-catch must be established this year for all CPCs. The EU also asked for the clarification of the fishing season dates and the bad-weather clause (provision 30).

Albania adapted its plans to accommodate the concern about VMS. Albania explained that the purse seiner has been modified during the last year in a shipyard, so the information about the vessel has been updated in the plan. All vessels that may by-catch bluefin tuna fulfil the exceptions set by Rec. 18-02, fishing less than 1 mile from the coast and have less than 1 GT capacity. In case incidental catches are reported, Albania will deduct them from its quota.

The Chair, supported by some delegates, suggested setting aside for by-catch a minimum of 1 ton per CPC in the fishing plan.

The plan was endorsed after including the required amendments.

Algeria

Algeria's plan was drafted according to Rec. 18-02 and the national ministerial order for Bluefin tuna. New requirements have been set for their vessels, such as the compulsory IMO number. A by-catch quota of 9 tons has been set aside. The fishing season for purse seiners has been set from 26 May to 1 July. No authorizations are to be granted for sport and recreational BFT fishing. Algeria has increased its capacity, but the final number of vessels will not be decided before the end of April. Eight ports have been authorized for Algerian vessels.

The EU requested information on the effective start of operations of 4 farms, with a capacity of 1,800 t, envisaged by Algeria, as well as the monitoring and control measures adopted for this purpose. The E U also enquired as to what measures have been taken to implement the ICCAT Scheme of Joint International Inspection. The United States asked for consistency of the allocation of by-catch in the capacity table for all CPCs, discounting the by-catch from the CPC's quota and including it in the box for adjusted quota.

Algeria clarified that farm facilities will be operational in 2020. EU offers to Algeria the possibility of training Algerian inspectors regarding the use of stereoscopic cameras. As regards implementing the ICCAT Scheme of Joint International Inspection, Algeria noted that it is not able to provide a vessel due to lack of qualification of the inspectors who will participate in this mission, to ensure quality inspection. Algeria revised its fishing plan taking into account feedback from Panel 2 members so as to comply with ICCAT requirements on transmission frequency of VMS positions, and extension of the fishing period based on the criterion adopted by Panel 2 as well as correction of some typing errors, in particular the quota set aside for the directed fishery.

With the requested edits, the plan was endorsed by Panel 2.

China

China's plan was presented according to Rec. 18-02. China's capacity plan is based on a fleet of two longliners. 1 ton is allocated for by-catch and 44.5 tons to each longliner. China indicated that their observer coverage is much higher than the compulsory 20%.

The EU was interested in knowing where transshipment by Chinese vessels takes place. China indicated that all transshipments are made in authorized ICCAT ports. The EU asked China to specify the applicable area for the fishing season for longliners. The United States indicated that the new VMS provision (Rec. 18-10) requires that all longline vessels larger than 24 meters length overall (LOA) as well as those greater than 15 meters (LOA) fishing outside the jurisdiction of a flag State, report their position every two hours.

It was agreed that the 1 ton for by-catch may be transferred to the authorized BFT longliners before their BFT fishing activities end for the season if it has not been fully utilized. China modified the plan in accordance with the concerns raised and the plan for China was endorsed by Panel 2.

Egypt

Egypt drafted its plans in accordance with Rec. 18-02. A new national decree has been passed for bluefin tuna fishing. Catch documentation has been reinforced in order to fully implement the relevant ICCAT provisions. The capacity plan is focused on purse seiners. The bluefin tuna season is set from 26 May to 1 July, but is expected to start by 15 May if a joint fishing operation takes place. Sport and recreational fisheries of bluefin tuna is not allowed. Under-sized bluefin tuna should be released and discounted from the quota. From a total quota of 266 tons, 2.66 tons is set aside for by-catch. A special scheme for inspection of vessels with by-catches is planned. All authorized vessels should report VMS at minimum 4 hour requirement. Two compulsory observers on board authorized vessels are required; one ROP and one national observer.

The EU asked Egypt to clarify if they intend to open the fishing season by 15 May and the criteria for triggering a possible extension in case of bad weather conditions. The Chair indicated that VMS frequency must be increased to 1 hour.

Egypt clarified that fishing season for purse seiners will start on 15 May and finish on 1 July and also revised its VMS requirement in accordance with comments received. Panel 2 endorsed the modified fishing, capacity and inspection plan.

European Union

Eight EU countries fish for bluefin tuna, mainly with purse seiners and traps, but also with other gears such as artisanal vessels. The plan is drafted in accordance with Rec. 17-07 until Rec. 18-02 enters into force. The extra 87 t quota for the EU is still to be allocated. Maximum input and maximum capacity has been set for farms. A comprehensive inspection plan has been drafted, with coordination of means by the European Fisheries Control Agency. Carry-over in farms is allowed. A new system for random controls and intra-farm transfers is also included.

Japan suggested that the EU should clarify the figures about farming capacity and quota to be caged. By-catch reserve in the EU should be specified in case it is allocated among Member States. Japan asked for further clarifications about carry-over controls and about how growth rates will be used by the EU during control activities. The United States requested clarification in the plan regarding VMS transmission frequencies applicable to each fleet. Norway indicated that recreational fisheries have not been assigned any quota in the capacity plan and asked the EU to clarify that.

The EU indicated that random controls will take place between 7 September and first caging next year, covering more than 5% of cages in each farm or 5% of the total fish recorded in the cages, with additional details to be decided by Member States. Regarding VMS, the EU will apply Rec. 18-10 when it enters into force (to be coherent with the implementation of Rec. 18-02 as from 21 June 2019). The EU indicated that there are no catch rates for recreational vessels provided by SCRS, so it cannot be recorded in the capacity plan. Regarding growth rates, the EU indicated that current growth rates will be used until SCRS publishes the new ones.

The Ocean Foundation was interested in the recording of the artisanal and recreational vessels of the EU. Other CPCs have not included those fleets in their respective plans. They consider that it is important that the SCRS develops capacity rates for all types of vessel. In this regard, Japan suggested that Panel 2 provide further guidance on the concept of catch rates, so that SCRS may work on it.

The EU plan was endorsed after making necessary clarifications.

Iceland

Iceland did not attend the intersessional meeting, so the Chair suggested sending the questions by correspondence. Japan and United States posed questions about the consistency of the fishing plan with the new VMS recommendation.

Iceland revised the VMS frequency in accordance with Rec. 18-10 and the plan was endorsed during the meeting.

Japan

Only longline vessels are included in the capacity plan. The Japanese fisheries agency implements the plan under the Fisheries Act. The Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has not yet decided how many vessels will be included in the fishing plan. They expect to increase the number of vessels to 35 or 36. Japan has allocated 10 metric tons for by-catch in 2018, but the figure has yet to be decided for 2019 depending on the final vessels to be included in the plan. The fishing season is in accordance with Rec. 18-02. Japan does not allow undersized bluefin tuna to be retained if it exceeds 6% of total catches. Under-sized bluefin tuna should be released and deducted from the Japanese quota. Transshipments are only allowed at designated ports. Japan confirmed that it will implement 20% observer coverage on its fleet. Individual quotas will be allocated per vessel, but this quota is different from the SCRS catch rate. Tags are allocated only to vessels targeting bluefin. By-catch is not likely by other fleets because the fishing ground for tropical tunas is very distant from that of BFT. Japan has additional measures to ensure compliance, namely that landing is prohibited at foreign ports and quota allocated is enough to make operations profitable.

The EU asked for some clarifications, such as a discrepancy of total quotas in the tables, as well as by-catch allocation and its implementation. Japan indicated that by-catch has been addressed by allocation for dead discards, but it was pointed out that allocation for by-catch should be separated.

Japan amended the requested issues and provided further clarifications, including the 10 tons quota set aside, specifying that 9 tons will be reserved for discarded bluefin tuna and 1 ton for other by-catches. The revised plan was endorsed by Panel 2.

Korea

The available quota to Korea includes transfers from China Taipei (50 tons), adding up to a total of 234 tons. The plan is focused on 4 longliners. Quota for by-catch is set at 0.5 tons. No by-catch is expected because of the fishing areas of the other fleet. Transshipment is only contemplated at designated ports. They include VMS reporting in accordance with Rec. 18-10. Observer coverage is planned to comply with the compulsory 20%. Their observers cooperate with the GBYP. There was a 100% observer coverage in 2018. In 2019, the minimum observers coverage of 20% is guaranteed.

The United States suggested that open fishing seasons and areas are clearly specified in the plan, as well as the VMS transmission rate and observer planning. The EU and the Chair requested the removal of references to the 2020 fishing season, which approval was not the objective of this meeting. Korea accepted the suggestions and revised the text accordingly. The revised plan was endorsed by Panel 2.

Libya

No longliners or recreational vessels are contemplated in the Libyan plan. Their quota is allocated to purse seiners and 16 tons are set aside for by-catch, which represents 1% of its quota. Libya indicated that the initial fishing season had to be amended to reflect that some vessels fish in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the possibility of extending the fishing season. Transshipments are only allowed in designated ports. VMS reporting is required at a 1 hour frequency. Libya has no traps or farming activity. The plan includes national legislation that implements Rec. 18-02. Libya does not participate in the Joint International Inspection scheme.

The EU raised questions about the national legislation regarding fishing season included in the plan, which dates back to 2013 and has not been updated to include Rec. 18-02. The rationale for shifting activity toward the Eastern Mediterranean should be included. Libya indicated that the 2013 decree was amended by a regulation in December 2018. The fishing towards the East is a decision of the vessel owner.

The plan was endorsed following the inclusion of the requested amendments.

Morocco

The Moroccan quota was distributed among traps, purse seiners and other vessels. 342 tons were allocated to the category which includes other artisanal and small-scale coastal vessels. Bluefin tuna purse seine fishing will be carried out by two purse seiners:

- One purse seiner will operate in the eastern Mediterranean within the framework of a joint fishing operation from 15 May to 1 July 2019.
- Another purse seiner will fish for bluefin tuna in the fishing grounds of the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, within the waters under the sovereignty or jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Morocco, from 1 May to 15 June.

Recreational and sport fishing for bluefin is not allowed in Morocco. Morocco will comply with fishing season, observer coverage and minimum size set by Rec. 18-02 amending Recommendation 17-07.

Japan raised questions about the by-catches allocated to small-scale coastal vessels and artisanal boats using longline and hand line, and their fishing season, as well as the way to ensure that fishing opportunities are commensurate with SCRS catch rates in the capacity plan. Japan questioned the rationale of setting a fishing season for by-catch. The EU considered that there must be consistency of fishing seasons with Rec. 18-02. The EU indicated that allocation of quota for small-scale vessels may be seasonally adjusted, but this is not applicable to other modalities. The EU required some clarifications regarding the association of authorised traps and vessels to authorised farms, and an initial farming capacity plan, including input and total farming capacity. The EU also indicated that observer activity in farms is included in the ROP, not the national observer program. Turkey suggested aligning the open purse seine season with the joint fishing operation envisaged between Turkish vessels and a Moroccan vessel. The United States requested the adjustment of the quota after allocating for by-catch.

Morocco indicated that their coastal vessels and artisanal boats using longline and hand line included in the artisanal category are small-scale, i.e. less than 7 meters in length. The final farming capacity will be provided before 1 June. The growth rate in farms used by Morocco comply with the ICCAT provisions in place. Morocco indicated 2,606 tons as provisional input capacity for farms in 2019.

Clarifications were made to the initial plan in order to accommodate the concerns expressed. and the plan was formally endorsed by Panel 2.

Norway

Norway provided a revised version of its initial document. From a total quota of 239 tons, most quota will be allocated to longliners and purse-seiners. 27 tons is set aside for by-catch. 1 ton is also set aside for sport and recreational vessels that practice catch and release in close cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research. They plan to include 4 longliners and 4 purse seiners, but the final number was still pending decision. Modifications of the fishing plan will be sent in due time to ICCAT Secretariat. All by-catch should be reported to the Norway Fisheries Monitoring Centre (FMC). Purse seiners will be required to report catches on a daily basis, even if catches are zero. Fishing seasons will be set according to Rec. 18-02. All by-catches of dead bluefin tuna will be landed and deducted from the quota. They will include VMS reporting frequency in line with the applicable recommendation (1 hour for purse seine vessels and two hours for longline vessels).

The plan was endorsed after including the requested amendments.

Syria

This CPC did not attend the intersessional meeting, but submitted the plan.

Japan asked to align VMS frequency of purse seiners according to the new recommendation (18-10), as well as references to domestic provisions that make transshipment not applicable. The Chair suggested including at least 1 ton for by-catch and amending the table accordingly. Another required amendment is

eliminating references to the 2020 season. The United States requested clarification of deducting discards of dead fish from the quota. The EU spotted some references to Rec. 14-04, which may need to be changed to Rec. 18-02.

The Secretariat transmitted these remarks to Syria, so that the corresponding plan may be amended accordingly. As the Syrian response was not received in time, it was agreed that the Panel would need to consider endorsement of Syria's plan by correspondence before the 31 March 2019, deadline.

Tunisia

The plan was presented according to Recommendation 18-02 and national law. It sets aside 1% of its quota for by-catch. The fishing season for purse-seiners starts from 26 May until 1 July and will be extended if needed, in accordance with the agreed interpretation of the bad weather clause. A maximum of 5% by-catch under minimum size is allowed. Discard is deducted from quota. Transshipment is only permitted at designated ports and after proper authorization. VMS positions will be sent every hour for purse seiners and every two hours for others, according to Rec. 18-10. A national observer plan is set for towing vessels, whereas the Regional Observer Program is applicable for purse seiners, transfers, and farming facilities. The capacity has been adjusted according to the limits, leaving 330 tons of under capacity. 2,400 tons of farming capacity was distributed to 6 farming companies. Carry-over will be authorized with additional control measures. Access to foreign vessels to Tunisian ports will be authorized by relevant authorities. Tunisia ensures the observer coverage set by Rec. 18-02 for all fleets. Control operations are planned for at least 10% of caging operations. Tunisia actively participates in the Joint International Inspection scheme.

The EU requested that the amount of by-catch allocation rather than 1% should be specified in the table. The EU also requested an indication of input capacity and total farming capacity for each farm, as well as the confirmation of the number of registered farms. Japan asked for further explanations to ensure proper control of carry-over in farms, including the possibility of separating cages for each season's fish. Japan raised concerns over the origin of the increase in the number of purse seiners in recent years, asking if there are new vessels or only vessels that have not operated during the recovery plan.

Tunisia provided extensive explanations about the required issues. Carry-over fish will be maintained in separate cages. The EU required that Tunisia send the figures of farming capacity per farm before 1 June. On that day, Tunisia provided the required data which were published as Tunisia's eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishing, farming, inspection and capacity management plan. The plan with necessary amendments was endorsed.

Turkey

The purse seiner fishing season is set from 15 May to 1 July. In case it is necessary, extension will be required for bad weather. 90% of the quota has been distributed among purse seiners. This quota has been assigned on an individual basis. 10% of quota has been assigned to artisanal, coastal, recreational and sport fishing as well as incidental and by-catches, 50 t of which was allocated to by-catch. The rest must be discarded and deducted from the quota. Sport and recreational vessels cannot market bluefin tuna. Transshipment is allowed only at designated ports. VMS reporting shall start 5 days before the fishing activity and end 5 days after it and be in line with the provisions of Rec. 18-10. Observers will be dispatched according to relevant provisions of Rec. 18-02. A total input of 2,338 t of live fish is included in the farming capacity plan, including imports. Carry-over in farms is authorized, with a reinforced system of control. Random inspections will be carried out before and after fishing season in ports. 100% of caging operations will be covered with stereoscopic cameras. Turkey will participate in the Joint International Inspection Scheme providing extensive human and material means.

Norway asked for the final figure allocated exclusively for by-catch. The EU suggested separating the input capacity from the total farm capacity in the farm plan. The United States indicated that the section on minimum size is not in line with Rec. 18-02, which sets that discarded bluefin tuna should be deducted from the quota.

Turkey submitted a revised version of the fishing plan on the basis of these comments, which was endorsed by Panel 2.

Chinese Taipei

Chinese Taipei submitted a fishing plan, but this CPC indicated it is not going to fish for bluefin tuna in 2019.

The EU indicated that, despite Chinese Taipei not targeting bluefin tuna, a quota should be allocated for by-catch. The Secretariat communicated this request to Chinese Taipei, which accepted. The revised plan was endorsed by Panel 2.

5. Determination of actions to be taken with respect to the plans under item 4

All plans were endorsed by Panel 2 during the meeting, except that of Syria. Panel 2 decided to consider endorsement of Syria's plan through correspondence subject to its revision and further circulation to CPCs by e-mail.

The plans are included in **Appendix 4**.

6. Clarification of provisions of Rec. 18-02

Two documents were provided under this agenda item. The *Requested clarifications for recommendation 18-02 from the ROP-BFT implementing consortium* included requested clarifications for Rec. 18-02 from the ROP-BFT consortium. This document was not discussed during the session, following a suggestion that they be part of the discussions of an informal meeting with the Consortium to be held in 5 April 2019. In addition, the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures may consider the issues raised in this document, as appropriate.

Panel 2 discussed *Requests for clarification on 18-02 from CPCs and Secretariat (Appendix 5)*. Several CPCs had already provided comments on these questions. During the session, the Chair provided tentative conclusions for each question that were adopted or further elaborated by Panel 2.

The Secretariat was requested to revise the table with the clarifications provided by Panel 2 and distribute it before the meeting with Consortium.

Paragraph 8. The question was related to carry-over and traceability of bluefin tuna. The Chair indicated that the farming capacity plan should include ensuring legality of traceability of carry-over. The EU indicated that the e-BCD Technical Working Group (TWG) should discuss this issue at a technical level. Panel 2 agreed to refer the question to the e-BCD TWG.

Paragraph 9. Panel 2 repeated the reply that was provided for paragraph 8. Tunisia raised questions about the ability of the current version of e-BCD to record the information required by paragraphs 8 and 9. The Chair indicated that the e-BCD TWG will discuss a solution before the fishing season starts. If no solution is reached or can be developed in time, one solution may be to use an existing field in eBCD to provide an explanation. The Panel also considered that any concerns may need to be worked out between the trading partners if the needed eBCD developments are not ready for use in 2019.

Paragraph 29. Libya asked for the applicable fishing dates for JFOs with some vessels that fish in the eastern Mediterranean. Libya specified that this question was related to caging operations of Libyan vessels that sell fish to Turkish farms. The Chair indicated that Libya may be allowed to fish in the eastern Mediterranean in the framework of its fishing plan. The EU indicated that the boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean are clear, and that allowing vessels originated outside the eastern Mediterranean was not the intention when the recommendation was drafted. Furthermore, allowing vessels from non-coastal CPCs to enjoy derogations to the general rules not designed for them may lead to an increase in fishing effort, so this early period may only be requested by coastal States in that area. On that basis, the EU proposed to set only one period for JFOs. The Chair indicated that each JFO should include a period and an area. Libya committed not to carry out JFO in different areas. All fishing vessels in the same JFO shall operate fishing as a group in accordance with paragraph 29 in accordance with time and area.

Paragraph 30. Panel 2 agreed that it was the decision of each CPC to extend the fishing season due to adverse weather conditions. This extension will follow the agreed approach so that it will be implemented consistently by all CPCs. Japan asked for the proper communication of the justification for any extensions. A protocol of communications to this effect (how, when, to whom, which format to be used) was not discussed.

Paragraph 42. With regard to the provision of data on catches from sport and recreational fisheries, the Chair indicated that amendments should be made to Rec. 18-02, so the deadline is changed from 1 July to 31 July. Panel 2 agreed that the Commission shall consider the corresponding erratum in November.

Paragraph 45. Regarding tag and release in sport and recreational fisheries, Panel 2 endorsed the EU response. Under the GBYP program 20 tons have been foreseen for this activity, which fits this purpose if the SCRS procedure is followed. Norway indicated that it would be a good practice that CPCs specify tag and release activity, including allocation of quota, in their fishing plans, so that it is easier to control the fishing mortality when deducted from the national quota.

Paragraph 46. Lists of sport and recreational vessels. The Chair indicated that there is confusion about this provision. If the Commission requests this list, the Secretariat must request the CPC concerned to provide the list that is based on the information submitted by CPCs that authorize vessels in the framework of paragraph 45. The EU indicated that the request of the list must be properly justified with a clear need, since sport and recreational vessels are not included neither in some CPCs fleet register nor in the ICCAT list of commercial vessels. Furthermore, it is not infrequent that authorisations are issued for a very limited period (one day, one week, ...). This interpretation was endorsed by Panel 2.

Paragraph 50. The list of catching vessels should be submitted 15 days before the activity starts, but the provision does not set a date for submitting other fishing vessels. The EU representative clarified that it was an involuntary deletion when the text was drafted and suggested to follow the same procedure that it is now defined in Rec. 17-07. The Chair suggested that next time that Rec. 18-02 is amended, this point should be clarified. The Secretariat suggested that CPCs continue to apply a 15 day deadline for 2019 on a voluntary basis, which was endorsed by Panel 2.

Paragraph 51. Libya posed two questions on this provision. Panel 2 indicated that paragraph 50 also apply to fishing vessels that are not catching vessels. Panel 2 also confirmed that when a purse seiner exhausts its quota, it can operate doing other activities if the vessel is properly registered before that activities start. The EU indicated that if a vessel changes activity, no gear or setting equipment should be carried to prevent possible fishing activities of that vessel. Panel 2 agreed to allow other activities if the 15 day rule is fulfilled in order to change modality and the fishing authorization is revoked.

Paragraph 65. Norway asked about the obligation of reporting of catches in case that the vessel is in port. The EU specified that it is required for JFOs. Panel 2 concluded that as a general rule it is not compulsory to make daily catch reports if the vessel is at port, but each modality should comply with their specific information requirements according to Rec. 18-02.

Paragraph 74. The suggestion of the Secretariat was agreed by Panel 2 regarding this question. The Secretariat will continue to publish the corresponding catch statistics on a secured website.

Paragraph 77. Libya asked if transfers of dead bluefin tuna among vessels of the same JFO is considered as an at sea transshipment. Panel 2 agreed to that such an act would be considered an at sea transshipment. Dead fish must be retained by the catching vessel and landed or transhipped at designated ports.

Paragraph 84 and Annex 6, Paragraphs 5 and 6. There are some contradictions in those provisions among nationality and languages of the observers. Following the suggestion of the Chair, Panel 2 agreed that the priority should be given to the difference in nationality first and language skill as a second requirement. If it is not possible to find foreign observers with proper language skills, observers of the same nationality may be allowed. For the EU the most important thing is the independence of the observers. The EU suggested amending paragraph 84, indicating that the observer should not be of the same nationality while satisfying language used in vessels, traps and related facilities. For Turkey the knowledge of the language is key. The Secretariat indicated that Turkey is very particular, since it is not easy to find Turkish speaking observers from foreign countries, because even if they inhabit other countries usually they keep the Turkish nationality.

Paragraph 92. Turkey asked for clarifications about several observer requirements in different farming and purse seiner associated activities. Amendments to ensure solid investigation is needed. After fishing operations, the ROP observer is over and towing vessels use national observers. Turkey explained that one voluntary transfer has to be done with ROPs observers whereas control transfer operations are done with CPC observers, otherwise the purse seiner would disrupt its operations. The transfer of bluefin tuna to the towing vessel is done under ROP and if it is not agreed, the ROP observer issues a PNC. It was agreed that for the second transfer under the CPC national observer the video should be provided to the ROP. Panel 2 agreed to stick to paragraph 92, but the video shall be provided to the ROP observer even in control transfers through the Consortium at some time. This important issue may be dealt with in the framework of the revision of Rec. 18-02.

Paragraph 92 (continued). Bis. Turkey highlighted a sentence that required an editorial amendment. This amendment was agreed.

Paragraph 99. The question related to the communication of results of stereoscopic cameras to the catching CPC. Japan considers the results should be provided to ROP observers, but in practice the ROP observer may not still be there. The Chair considered that the ROP observer should be provided the opportunity to see the video, if needed. Japan indicated that it may be useful to discuss this issue within the EU proposed Working Group on BFT monitoring and control measures if such a group is created by the Commission. The Secretariat agreed with the interpretation of the Chair. Following the proposal made by the EU, Panel 2 agreed that the results should be sent to the Consortium with time flexibility. Amendments of the wording of paragraph 99 may be considered in the future.

Paragraph 102. This provision refers to the obligation of sending caging reports. Panel 2 agreed that both caging reports and caging declarations are required to be sent. The EU also indicated that this issue could be clarified in a future revision of Rec. 18-02.

Annex 6, paragraph 2. The Secretariat asked for guidance on how to appoint observers for purse seiners before it is known which vessels will be operating. Panel 2 agreed that CPCs should submit the information of the vessels as soon as possible, so the number of observers can be determined on time. The Secretariat indicated that the Consortium needed information such as languages and countries. The EU indicated that a breakdown by EU member countries would be provided as soon as possible.

Annex 11. Libya raised the question on how to proceed when bluefin tuna is dead in purse seiner operations supplying farms and how to fill in eBCD when the fish is dead. The eBCD has a functionality to allow for this, and Panel 2 agreed to refer this technical issue to the eBCD TWG for additional consideration as needed. Libya indicated that the option of transferring dead fish to another vessel implies an at sea transshipment, which is not allowed at present. The EU is not in favour of introducing exceptions to the transshipment regulations. The EU and Chair suggested that that kind of problem may be formally tabled and discussed by Panel 2 at the forthcoming Commission meeting. Panel 2 took note of the practical problem raised by Libya.

Japan presented a *Request for clarification to farm CPCs regarding traceability of live bluefin tuna in a cage paper* outlining that Japan had received some e-BCDs that show different catches with different e-BCD numbers that are caged in the same cage. Japan noted that the grouped eBCD function does not apply in this case but that consideration should be given to improving eBCD to enhance traceability of such fish since there is currently no way of knowing which fish is associated with which eBCD at the time of harvest. This situation led to inconsistencies about sizes of catches at harvest that required further explanations. Panel 2 noted the request by Japan, as well as the information submitted by Turkey in response, and recognized the need for further discussion through the e-BCD TWG and possibly in PWG.

7. Requirements and procedures for the submission of data and information collected under CPC observer programs (Rec. 18-02, para 83)

This point was presented by the ICCAT Secretariat. This requirement was included in previous recommendations, but the Commission had not determined procedures or formats and each CPC sent its own observer reports or information in a variety of formats. Some CPCs did not send the reports. The preference of the ICCAT Secretariat is for the use of current statistical forms for every CPC.

Panel 2 agreed to use ST09 and ST11 formats for recording minimum information on by-catches in national observer reports. Other information, such as catch, size and biological data can be transmitted through the regular ICCAT data reporting processes, and through national scientist input at SCRS meetings.

8. Other matters

The Secretariat circulated the list of potential non compliance issues (PNCs) currently being reported through the Regional Observer Programme. It was agreed to defer discussion on these to the informal meeting with the Consortium in April, but that CPCs could forward comments in writing to the Secretariat before 20 March. In addition, the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures may consider this matter, as appropriate.

Review of best catch rates

The Chair of SCRS indicated that a preliminary discussion on this issue had taken place at SCRS. It is possible to update the catch rates according to the available data, but more guidance must be provided as input for the SCRS.

The EU indicated that the data set is incomplete, and that variability existed, suggesting to consider geographical parameters for catch rates, as well as the number of sets per vessel, vessel length, JFOs and fishing seasons. According to the EU, the main goal is to avoid overfishing, but current rates seem to be rather low. Japan stressed the need to narrow the scope for the definition of catch rate.

The SCRS Chair doubted that the catch information would provide such level of detail suggested by the EU. A preliminary report will be presented to the Commission in November with clear explanation on the calculations, so Panel 2 can decide on how to use or modify them. If necessary, further guidance can be provided to the SCRS at this time.

Panel 2 took note of this tentative SCRS plan and the discussion foreseen in November.

Proposal by the EU of terms of reference to convene an ICCAT Working Group on bluefin tuna control and monitoring measures

The EU indicated that Rec. 18-02 included references to set further measures to ensure that traceability and control measures are effective. The EU proposed setting up a working group on bluefin control and monitoring measures under Panel 2. This group would hold at least one meeting before the Commission meeting in November. Participants should be nominated by 29 March.

Japan expressed interest in providing an expert for the working group and asked about the expected type of output that will be provided by the group, such as a possible modification of Rec. 18-02. Japan suggested designating a contact point instead of participants before 29 March.

The Chair raised concerns about procedural issues and possible implications of Secretariat resources, which implied that a decision to adopt terms of reference for the proposed group must be addressed by the Commission. Panel 2 agreed with the view of the Chair. China and the United States asked for clarification on the scope of the working group, in particular if it was limited to considering monitoring and control matters related to the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna fishery.

PEW and WWF welcomed the proposal by the EU and showed interest in being part of the group as observers.

The EU noted its intent to modify the paragraph that sets various deadlines. The scope is eastern bluefin tuna, but the working group may discuss other measures beyond Rec. 18-02. The goal is to identify problems to be addressed and options to tackle them.

To progress this matter before the November Commission meeting, the Chair suggested the EU invite interested parties to an informal meeting to discuss the terms of reference and identify relevant issues. The EU may decide to include observers in any informal group. Should the Commission adopt a proposal to create a working group on bluefin tuna monitoring and control at its November annual meeting, intersessional meetings for this Group could then be held in 2020 (**Appendix 6 - not adopted**).

Reciprocal exchange of inspectors for random controls

The EU wanted to discuss among CPCs the practice of reciprocal exchange of inspectors for random controls for farming. The EU has experiences that show it has deterrent effects. Random controls are made on the basis of risk analysis. The exchange of inspectors ensures transparency and equality. The idea is to open the participation of foreign inspector that may be interested, but on a reciprocal basis to ensure level playing field for CPCs with farming facilities. The EU specified that the professionals would act as observers, not inspectors.

Tunisia indicated that foreign inspectors are not allowed in their facilities according to its internal legislation. Turkey was not able to decide during the session and was open to discuss this issue bilaterally with the EU.

Farming CPCs were not ready to agree to the reciprocal exchange during the session, so this proposal may be further discussed during the year and at the Commission meeting.

Information on the use of growth rates by Japan

Japan informed Panel 2 members that for its imports Japan has used 120% of the growth rates provided by the SCRS in 2009 as a benchmark for dialogue, so if growth was more than 20% of these figures, Japan asked concerned CPCs for further clarifications. For the 2019 fishing season, Japan will use a 110% benchmark, if more than 10% difference is detected through e-BCD, Japan will require further clarifications.

The EU suggested that this issue be discussed in the framework of PWG and eBCD TWG. It was also noted with concern that the SCRS had not been able to provide updated growth rates for bluefin tuna in farms despite years of requirements that farming CPCs provide data to allow SCRS to make these calculations. Panel 2 agreed that this was an urgent matter and all efforts should be made by CPCs to carry out existing responsibilities to support SCRS in its work.

PART 2: INTERSESSIONAL MEETING PANEL 2 ON BFT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION (MSE)

1. Opening of Part 2 of the Meeting

Part 2 of the meeting was chaired by Mr. Shingo Ota (Japan). Part 2 discussed issues related to BFT Management Strategy evaluation (MSE), including the identification of initial operational management objectives.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur for Part 2

Ms. Rachel O'Malley (United States) was appointed as rapporteur.

3. Adoption of Agenda and meeting arrangements for Part 2

The agenda was adopted without change.

4. MSE for bluefin tuna – general considerations and review of outcomes of the intersessional meeting of the Bluefin Tuna Species Group

Dr. John Walter, Chair of the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Species group, gave a general presentation describing the MSE process. Panel 2 members were referred to the ICCAT BFT MSE quick reference (**Appendix 7**), which provides key definitions and describes the steps involved in the development of management procedures (MPs). It was recalled that ICCAT committed to this approach in Rec. 15-07 and developed a roadmap in 2016 to guide the progress of its work. Work on the BFT MSE has progressed more slowly than was anticipated in the original road map adopted by the Commission mainly due to source code errors that are currently being fixed.

Dr. Walter explained that the SCRS has predominately been developing empirical management procedures for the BFT MSE, with only a few model-based approaches of the type that was used in the MSE for North Atlantic albacore. Empirical MPs use empirical proxies of biomass, such as indices of abundance. The logic underpinning this approach is that, in principle, it is relatively simple to implement: as the indices increase, the TAC increases; as the indices decrease, the TAC decreases. Despite some model-based MPs having been developed, age- or length-structured models (like the Virtual Population Analysis [VPA]) used in the last stock assessment) are not feasible at this time, although exploration to implement a surplus production model is already undergoing for possible use within the current MSE.

Dr. Gary Melvin, SCRS Chair, summarized outcomes of the BFT MSE Technical Group meeting (7-9 February 2019) and the BFT Species Group Meeting (11-15 February 2019). Participants in those meetings reviewed the MSE work completed since September 2018 by the BFT MSE Technical Group, initially focusing on the plausibility of operating models (OMs) and evaluating progress toward the development of candidate MPs. At these meetings the SCRS identified issues with the input data, including issues related to electronic tagging data, microchemistry, and genetics, and scientists are working to address potential sources of bias. Coding errors were also noted and have been or are being addressed. Prior analyses are being corrected and updated as these issues are identified.

Other issues discussed at the February 2019 SCRS meetings included historical biomass; assignment of fish to certain strata based on stock of origin data; and, movement exclusions (i.e., no fish expected in certain areas during certain quarters of the year). The BFT Species Group developed a list of sensitivity runs to identify sources of data conflict within the models and to evaluate sensitivity to model parameter assumptions. As not all sensitivity runs could be completed during the meeting due to time constraints, further analysis is required.

The BFT MSE, in its current form, is not able to evaluate the status quo management strategy of F0.1, which is used as the basis of Recs. 17-06 and 18-02. Currently, the BFT MSE takes into account these main uncertainties: future recruitment (3 scenarios); mixing (2 scenarios); and natural mortality/maturity (2 scenarios). Current specifications for the OMs include: two spawning areas (Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean); seven spatial areas; and, a two-stock mixing model, western stock and eastern stock. The indices currently used in the MSE include 14 CPUE indices and 5 fishery independent indices. A CPC asked how the SCRS will make decisions about the combination and weighting of various indices, and emphasized the importance of transparency so that these decisions are well understood. Dr. Walter noted that changes to OMs and candidate MPs are described in the Trial Specification Document, a living document that will be updated as needed by the SCRS to reflect the current status of the MSE.

Dr. Melvin explained that the initial tuning process for the BFT MSE, with a view of an initial comparison among possible candidate management procedures (CMPs), is based on a single OM. During the second round of tuning, other potential OMs will be evaluated and the SCRS will attempt to obtain good performance across all OMs in the reference set for the identified suite of management objectives. This reference set will cover broad ranges of plausible stock status and productivity. The SCRS will present the results of the simulation testing of candidate MPs, highlighting the tradeoffs associated with each MP's performance. Based on this information, the Commission will be able to select an MP that performs well across multiple performance metrics in order to meet its identified management objectives.

5. Consideration of initial operational management objectives for BFT MSE

The Panel 2 Chair stressed that decisions in an MSE process are provisional and if CPCs do not like the results of simulations, they can go back to earlier stages of the process and restart with different parameters. CPCs agreed to consider Res. 18-03 as a starting point for discussion of possible operational management objectives. The SCRS Chair agreed with the Panel 2 Chair and explained that any values identified by Panel 2 will be applied on an interim basis for purposes of testing candidate management procedures (CMPs). These are exploratory approaches that can be refined after the Commission receives the outputs of the MSE from the SCRS. It was also noted that standard practice is to have regular reviews of the management procedures and the management objectives.

Dr. Melvin encouraged Panel 2 not to focus on a specific value at this stage, as a range of values can provide more flexibility to identify a candidate MP that best meets the objectives. Panel 2 agreed to start gradually by identifying a range of figures for the initial operational management objectives.

It was noted that objectives relating to Status and Safety apply to each of the two biological *stocks* (the western stock and the eastern stock), while objectives relating to Yield and Stability would apply to the respective western and eastern Atlantic management *areas*. The general understanding is that the MSE will treat each stock separately but have a common approach.

It was also noted that probabilities should be understood in the context of associated timeframes. For example, the probability of the stock being overfished in the *final* year is different than the probability on average throughout the timeframe. Also, when dealing with multiple operating models, the SCRS will need to determine whether to select the probability associated with what they consider to be the best model, or to apply a weighted average under the different models. Given the complexity of these issues, the SCRS may present results to the Commission in a variety of ways and provide the necessary context.

5.1 Stock Status

The Panel 2 Chair asked CPCs to consider the probability – or probabilities – of the stock occurring in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot, along with a timeframe or timeframes for the evaluation period. There was general agreement that the probability to be tested for being in the green zone of the Kobe plot should be 60% or greater. Depending on the outcomes of testing the candidate management procedures, the SCRS may show a range of outcomes to include probabilities above and below 60%.

There was consensus on 30 years as a useful timeframe over which to evaluate Status, given stock dynamics; the SCRS was requested to provide information on Status for specified intervals within the 30 years as determined to be appropriate in the Trial Specification Document. Some CPCs expressed a preference for evaluating the stock status at the *end* of the 30 year timeframe, while others preferred evaluation over the duration of the 30 years.

There was general agreement that SCRS should be asked to show different ways of looking at the probabilities of being in the green zone across the operating models in individual years, across years and at the terminal year (i.e., 30 years). It was suggested that there should be a management objective or performance indicator to show Status during the 30-year period, but the Commission needs advice from SCRS to show how to reflect this. This output could be provided in the form of trajectories to be evaluated by the Commission.

Dr. Melvin confirmed that the simulation outputs will allow the Commission to see a picture of stock status at the end of the selected timeframe, as well as at intermediate intervals throughout.

Several CPCs supported the identification of operational management objectives that will work for any quadrant (i.e., to maintain the stock in the green zone, or return the stock to the green zone if necessary). It was recognized that different OMs may provide different answers about the current status of the stock; some may show the stock in the green zone, while some may show the stock in the red zone. The SCRS will consider ways to present the results of simulation testing so that managers can evaluate this information.

Dr. Melvin noted that the SCRS intends to include an option where catch is reduced to zero within the candidate MPs, which will illustrate the bounds on the extent to which the Status and Safety management objectives can be achieved under the most extreme case of closing the fishery.

An observer from the Ocean Foundation noted that a generation time for eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna is shorter than for western Atlantic bluefin, and suggested that this be taken into account when determining timeframes (in particular, those related to rebuilding).

5.2 Safety

It was noted that a B_{lim} has not yet been determined for bluefin tuna. Rec. 15-07 defines B_{lim} as “a conservation reference point based on a level of biomass that should be avoided considering that beyond such limits, the sustainability of the stock may be in danger.”

There was general agreement among managers that the conceptual management objective is a very low probability of serious harm to the stock. Different views were expressed about how to quantify this risk; some CPCs noted that it is difficult to quantify an acceptable probability when a limit reference point has not yet been defined.

CPCs agreed that it would be useful to see a range of probabilities. SCRS scientists noted that the probabilities associated with falling below any particular interim value of B_{lim} could be provided.

Managers would like to be informed by the performance of a range of candidate management procedures, but, ultimately, they desire a very low risk of irreversible harm to the stock.

There was general agreement that the SCRS should advise on a B_{lim} , given its biological basis. B_{lim} has been established at $0.4B_{MSY}$ for North Atlantic swordfish and North Atlantic albacore, which may or may not be appropriate for bluefin tuna. This could be considered in terms of a B_{MSY} or in terms of B_0 ; the SCRS could test both ways and consider the results.

One CPC suggested that an important metric to consider for Safety is the highest risk in any single year that $B < B_{lim}$ (i.e., the highest probability during the 30-year period that $B < B_{lim}$). This concept is covered in one of the current performance metrics called “Lowest depletion” (Row 10).

Several CPCs supported a Safety objective of 5% risk of breaching B_{LIM} , while others suggested that 20% might be acceptable, depending on where the B_{LIM} is set. One CPC pointed out that it is sometimes difficult to identify the level that will cause irreversible harm to the stock. If a limit reference point is set at a point higher than the level of irreversible harm, a higher probability may be appropriate to consider. However, if the limit reference point is set at a potentially dangerous level, several CPCs expressed a preference for a very low percentage (5% or no more than 10%) that represents a precautionary approach. Following an extensive discussion, two options were remaining: 0 - 15% or 5 - 15%. The Panel 2 Chair asked scientists whether there would be any difference of workload and the answer was that there would not be. Accordingly, the meeting agreed on a range of 0-15% for testing purposes, pending a recommendation from the SCRS on the appropriate level of B_{LIM} . The Commission will be better informed to select a desired probability when B_{LIM} has been identified.

5.3 Yield

Panel 2 discussed the merits of a range of operational management objectives related to maximizing mean catch levels (i.e., yield) over the short-term, medium-term and long-term. It was recognized that the SCRS needs guidance on the range of years to be used for calculating each of these general timeframes.

Dr. Walter clarified that the MSE is designed to look separately at maximizing catch in the east and maximizing catch in the west, although managers can consider these outputs in tandem. While the management implications of mixing remain unquantified, scientific evidence based on genetics, electronic tagging and otolith microchemistry, illustrates that mixing does occur. Dr. Melvin emphasized that east-west interchange of bluefin has implications for both stocks, and that a TAC set for the eastern area may impact the western population and vice versa.

Specific ranges of years corresponding to short-term, medium-term and long-term catch were considered for the table of performance indicators to guide the SCRS in its refinement of the MSE.

5.4 Stability

Following a discussion of different possible figures, there was agreement to request that the SCRS look at a broad range of limits on the percentage change in TAC between management periods, and also look at scenarios with no limitation on the change in TAC. It was also acknowledged that the Commission should retain the ability to reduce the TAC by more than the identified maximum amount if it is necessary to respond to a rapidly declining stock. This could be tested through the MSE and/or accounted for in the candidate MPs.

Another CPC suggested that the SCRS should test the MSE with a minimum threshold below which a TAC change would not take effect. The threshold would be determined separately for each stock. This approach would allow the Commission to avoid having to adjust the TAC for what might be only an insignificant increase or decrease between management periods.

It was noted that the current management period for BFT is three years for both western and eastern Atlantic management units. There was no proposal to change this; thus, a management period of three years may be assumed for purposes of testing.

5. (Continued) Initial Operational Management Objectives

In summarizing these discussions relating to Status, Safety, Yield and Stability, the Chair recalled that additional specificity in the initial operational management objectives will help guide the SCRS as scientists continue to develop and refine the BFT MSE. The SCRS Chair reminded Panel 2 that individual management objectives will not be considered in isolation; the outputs of testing different candidate MPs will demonstrate performance relative to multiple objectives. Ultimately, it is the Commission's role to decide on acceptable levels of risk.

Panel 2 agreed to provide the following guidance on initial operational management objectives, which will be tested and will, in turn, inform further development of management objectives.

Status (of biological stock, East and West)

- There should be a 60% or greater probability of being in the green zone of the Kobe plot.
- The SCRS will present results of the simulation in plots with a trajectory so that managers can evaluate the status of the stock (F relative to F_{MSY} and B relative to B_{MSY}) at intermediate points between zero and 30 years, and at the end of the 30-year period.

Safety (of biological stock, east and west)

- There should be no more than a 15% chance of the stock falling below B_{LIM} at any point during the 30 year evaluation period.
- A definition of B_{LIM} should be recommended by SCRS.

Yield (of catch by area, east and west)

- Evaluate outcomes related to maximizing mean catch levels with respect to each management area over the short, medium, and long-term.

Stability (of catch by area, east and west)

- Evaluate outcomes of 20%, 30%, and 40% as well as no limitation on the change in TAC between management periods.

Dr. Walter presented the current set of BFT performance statistics (indicators) and posed a number of questions to Panel 2 relating to appropriate ranges of probabilities and timeframes. It was agreed that none of the performance indicators should be eliminated at this stage. These indicators may be modified after further testing. On the basis of all its previous discussions, Panel 2 agreed on several adjustments to the current set of performance indicators, as well as several new indicators (**Appendix 8**).

6. Consideration of next steps and timeframes

It was recognized that the BFT Species Group and BFT MSE Technical Group have made substantial progress in developing OMs. At the same time, there was general agreement that the process should not be rushed to meet current deadlines and that the SCRS should revise its work plan as needed. The SCRS is now considering two options for providing 2021 TAC advice: (Option A) to continue with the MSE development process as outlined in the roadmap; (Option B) to begin planning for a 2020 stock assessment. Panel 2 took note of the revised plans of the SCRS. There was general agreement that Option A is preferred, but that the SCRS should take the necessary time to ensure that the technical issues are addressed in a thorough and satisfactory way.

In order for the Commission to adopt an MP in November 2020 as the basis for 2021 TAC advice, the SCRS would need to present initial results on the performance of the candidate MPs in 2019. This is essential so that managers can get a sense of the tradeoffs well before the selection of an MP from among the candidate MPs while being reassured on the soundness of the MSE framework under development. A meeting of the BFT MSE Technical Group meeting will take place in July 2019 to review the OM conditioning. If the OMs meet acceptability criteria, they will be forwarded to the September BFT Species Group, where the SCRS will make a decision to either proceed with the roadmap or to begin planning and preparing for a stock assessment. However, if development of the MSE has not progressed to the satisfaction of the SCRS, then Option B is the likely path forward. In this case, the MSE process would be further delayed by at least one year as the SCRS focuses its attention on preparations for a 2020 stock assessment, with MSE to be used as the basis for TAC advice in 2022 at earliest.

Some CPC recognized that the MSE and the traditional stock assessment are conceptually alternative approaches also demanding substantial human resources and that should not be carried out in the same year; nonetheless, considering the complexity of the BFT MSE framework, they wonder whether, in case of the first MSE application, wouldn't be more adequate to have and contrast the results of both approaches. The SCRS Chair explained that due to the amount of work involved for national scientists, it would be nearly impossible for the SCRS to provide a candidate management procedure through the MSE process and to conduct a stock assessment in the same year.

If work on the MSE proceeds under Option A, the Panel 2 Chair proposed that a similar intersessional meeting of the Panel should be held in March 2020. Scientists suggested that a second Panel 2 intersessional or SWGSM meeting in July 2020 might be required as well. The Panel 2 Chair responded that any additional intersessional meeting would need to be considered at the 2019 Commission meeting, taking into account other possible intersessional meetings and the available budget.

7. Other matters

No other matters were discussed.

8. Adoption of report (Parts 1 and 2) and adjournment

The meeting had insufficient time to review Part 1 and Part 2 of the Report prior to the close of the meeting. The report will, therefore, be adopted by correspondence.