

## **Report of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan (SCRS-SP) Meeting** (Hybrid/Madrid, Spain, 9-11 July 2025)

*The results, conclusions and recommendations contained in this Report only reflect the view of the participants in the meeting. Therefore, these should be considered preliminary until the SCRS adopts them at its annual Plenary meeting and the Commission revises them at its annual meeting. Accordingly, ICCAT reserves the right to comment, object and endorse this Report, until it is finally adopted by the Commission.*

### **1. Opening of the meeting and meeting logistics**

The SCRS Chair (the Chair) and the SCRS Vice Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants (the Group). The Executive Secretary also welcomed the participants, noting the importance of this meeting for the future of the SCRS and regretted the fact that this time no interpretation could be provided due to the lack of funding through the ICCAT regular budget. Moreover, he noted that this year there were no voluntary contributions from ICCAT CPCs to cover the costs of interpretation.

Several participants noted that the lack of interpretation hampered non-English participants to be fully and effectively engaged in the discussions. Moreover, the Group noted that having SCRS formal meetings without simultaneous interpretation in all three official ICCAT languages is not fully in line with the ICCAT Convention. The SCRS Chair also regretted the lack of interpretation and further noted that he would keep highlighting to the Commission the importance of making available the necessary funds to provide interpretation at all SCRS meetings.

### **2. Adoption of agenda and assignment of rapporteurs**

The Chair proceeded to review the agenda, which was adopted without changes (**Appendix 1**). The list of participants is provided in **Appendix 2**. The list of documents and presentations provided at the meeting is included in **Appendix 3**. Summaries of the documents and presentations are available in **Appendix 4**.

Rapporteurs were assigned as follows:

Section Name

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2. M. Neves dos Santos
3. C. Brown, L.G. Cardoso
4. B. Chavarria, Q. Kenneth Mketsu
5. M.S. Jallow, S. Reeves
6. K. Ramirez, C. Brown, L.G. Cardoso
7. G. Galland, M. Neves dos Santos
8. M. Neves dos Santos

### **3. General review of the draft SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031**

Document SCRS/P/2025/059 was presented, providing an update on the drafting process of the 2026-2031 SCRS Science Strategic Plan.

#### **3.1 Drafting process**

The drafting approach focused on updating the objectives and strategies of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan to reflect the current situation, removing elements that have become regular practice or are no longer relevant, while adding new objectives to address current and anticipated needs. An initial review was conducted during the 2024 SCRS Workshop in March (ICCAT, 2024), forming the basis for the first draft, which was made available ahead of the September 2024 SCRS Plenary. Due to time constraints, detailed discussion did not occur at that stage, and the SCRS recommended a continued inclusive drafting process during 2025, engaging SCRS scientists.

During spring 2025, a revised draft was developed through shared online documents with tracked edits and comments, with invitations extended to SCRS officers and CPC scientific delegations for participation. The resulting draft was presented at the Meeting of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers held on 8 July 2025 seeking feedback from Commissioners regarding content and perceived effectiveness in supporting the provision of scientific advice to the Commission.

### ***3.2 Highlighted objectives achieved through the Science Strategic Plan 2015-2020***

The presentation included examples of goals and strategies from the Science Strategic Plan 2015-2020 that were removed or adjusted, either due to achievements or to better align with evolving SCRS practices. For example, the reference to limited Commission guidance was removed, as guidance on management goals and risk tolerances has improved, particularly regarding Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). The call to “invest in capacity building” was transformed into “continue scientific capacity building,” reflecting the delivery of ongoing workshops while recognizing the continued need for capacity building. Strategies on electronic monitoring were updated to include additional gears and small-scale fisheries following progress achieved under the *Recommendation by ICCAT to establish minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) in ICCAT fisheries* (Rec. 23-18).

The plan’s dialogue objectives were updated to reflect the formalization and continued support for SWGSM meetings (*Recommendation by ICCAT on continuing to enhance the dialogue between fisheries scientists and managers* (Rec. 24-13)). The SCRS code of conduct moved from an adoption goal to a focus on implementation and enforcement, while research objectives on using floating objects to monitor abundance were reframed as continued exploration, following advancements in index development. Additionally, encouragement for CPCs to share detailed catch per unit effort (CPUE) data has led to improved model performance and reduced uncertainties, reflected in updated plan language. These changes ensure the Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031 remains relevant, building on past achievements while addressing current and future needs.

### ***3.3 SWOT analysis of the Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031***

The presentation included the SWOT analysis outlining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the SCRS.

Comments were received from the Group regarding the SWOT analysis that reflect the need for further discussion during the finalization of the Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031.

### ***3.4 Overview of the draft document***

The presentation outlined the draft's structured approach, organized into introduction including the Mission and the Vision, the SWOT analysis and values, and sections on Data Collection, Dialogue and Communication, Participation and Capacity Building, Research, and Provision of Management Advice, including Stock Assessments and MSEs.

Comments were raised by the Group regarding the overall structure of the draft document, noting that its structure should be reviewed to improve the navigation between sections, clarity and facilitate discussions. Detailed comments are provided in section 5.

## **4. Report of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM)**

### ***4.1 General feedback on the Draft SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031***

The Chair of the SCRS reported that a dedicated Meeting of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM) was held on 8 July 2025 to review the draft SCRS Strategic Plan 2026-2031. The SWGSM Co-Chairs clarified that the meeting aimed to enable a focused consultation on this key document, which is expected to be submitted for SCRS approval in September 2025 and for final endorsement by the Commission in November 2025. The *Report of the Meeting of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM)* reflects the comments captured after the presentation.

Participants expressed appreciation for the substantial effort invested in drafting the SCRS-SP and acknowledged its importance in maintaining the provision of high-quality scientific advice to the Commission. They emphasized the need to build consensus around its final content. General concerns were raised regarding:

- the structural organization of the SCRS-SP,
- the alignment between goals, objectives and strategies, considering the workplans of the Species Groups and sub-groups and the requests from the Commission, and
- the progress and performance measuring of the Plan and the proposed metrics (both qualitative and quantitative).

A specific agenda item allowed for a section-by-section review of the draft, enabling detailed discussion and input. Participants were invited to submit written comments and editorial suggestions by the end of the day. Some CPCs provided input during the meeting, which are being compiled into a separate working document.

Written submissions requested summarizing feedback provided at the Meeting of the SWGSM were provided for context of this meeting and are available as documents in the folder assigned to this SCRS meeting documents. Given time constraints and the necessity to focus on high level objectives of the strategic plan rather than detailed actions and targets, the SWGSM identified and acknowledged these high-level comments contained in these submissions and commits to take full account of the comments as the SCRS-SP is further developed.

#### ***4.2 Specific suggestions on the text and structure of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031***

The participants agreed that the high-level comments listed above should guide a preliminary restructuring of the document. It was further agreed that editorial revisions would follow once the structural framework of the SCRS-SP had been revised accordingly.

### **5. Focused discussion of the draft of the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan**

#### ***5.1 Review of overall structure***

Based on comments from the SWGSM provided during the Meeting of the SWGSM held on 8 July 2025 and also by the Group in this meeting, there was general agreement that the draft SCRS Strategic Plan 2026-2031 available at the start of the meeting was too long and that it would be useful to reduce the scope of the plan by trying to identify those components that it would be appropriate to retain in a strategic plan. There was some discussion around what criteria should be used to do this, including the extent to which the actions or strategies could be considered to be within the control of SCRS and whether the strategies had clear, measurable targets.

The process was helped by some meeting participants and the Secretariat preparing condensed versions of the draft plan, focusing only on the goals, objectives and their associated strategies. These condensed versions were supplied as either EXCEL spreadsheets or WORD documents. The EXCEL version was used for text review during the meeting, but the Group agreed to translate the resulting version to a WORD document for the SCRS Plenary in 2025.

#### ***5.2 Identification of key topics, objectives and strategies to be included***

Using one of the EXCEL versions of the plan the Group reviewed each objective and its associated strategies to identify which should be retained, reviewed for editing later, or deleted. In some cases, whole objectives and their associated strategies were identified for deletion, in other cases objectives were identified for deletion but only some of the strategies were marked for deletion, while the others were retained for potentially moving them to other objectives.

The following list provides some examples of the decisions across the goals in relation to the key objectives, nothing that this list is not full and some were included in the EXCEL file itself:

### *Data-Related Objectives (Element 1)*

- Objective 1.1.1 (Task 1, 2 and 3 Reporting), was retained but several Strategies within this objective were deleted and the others were flagged for further editing.
- Objective 1.1.2 (Improve Resolution of Catch Composition), was retained.
- Objective 1.1.3 (CPC Data Reporting), there was significant debate about whether to retain it as an advocacy item or remove it due to limited SCRS control. The Group ultimately compromised by moving it to an "External Recommendations" annex.
- Objective 1.3.1 (Enhance Observer Data), was flagged to be edited to focus on the areas within the SCRS control and how the data are used.
- Objective 1.3.2 (Data Needs for EAFM), was retained.
- Objective 1.2.1 (Biological Data Prioritization), was retained as SCRS-actionable, with participants emphasizing its value for guiding sampling efforts through simulation studies.
- Objective 1.2.3 (Biological Sampling Programmes), deleted with its associated Strategies flagged for consideration to be added to a different Objective.
- Objective 1.5.1 (Biological Sample Archives), although the Group recognized the importance of objective 1.5.1 for future research, this objective will be updated to be consolidated with objective 1.2.2.

### *Science-Manager Dialogue (Element 2)*

- Objectives 2.1.1-2.2.1 (Science managers dialogue on objectives, reference points, acceptable probability levels, and recovery time-frames), these were flagged to be merged into a single streamlined objective: "Enhance SCRS-Commission communication". Strategies included annual workshops and simplified science summaries.
- Objective 2.3.2 (Document Timeliness), was retained but the strategies were revised, particularly emphasizing enforcement of pre-meeting submission deadlines.

### *Participation & Capacity Building (Element 3)*

- Objective 3.1.1 (Conflict of Interest), was reworded to focus on "ensuring scientific integrity," moving away from potentially contentious terminology. A new strategy was added to standardize ethical reminders at meeting openings.
- Objective 3.2.1 (CPC Data Capacity), participants simplified the strategies (e.g. "Develop training programmes") and removed vague targets like "20% reduction in missing data."

### *Equity & Representation*

- Participants combined regional, CPC development status and gender diversity objectives into a single objective: "Promote diverse SCRS leadership," with emphasis on qualitative progress rather than quotas.

### *Management Advice & Stock Assessments*

- Objective 5.1.1 (Assessment Capacity), participants revised the focus to SCRS-led actions like "Develop standardized assessment templates" rather than CPC-dependent items.
- Objective 5.2.1 (Peer Review), the Objective was expanded to include Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and emphasized balancing model complexity with data quality.

In most cases, consensus was achieved relatively rapidly but there were a few points that resulted in more extensive discussion including:

- In the context of communication and obstacles to participation in SCRS meetings, a number of participants stressed the need for language interpretation at all SCRS meetings. While there was no disagreement about this, there was a discussion about whether it should be considered as a strategic issue. After extensive discussion, the Group added a new strategy to "Advocate for expanded interpretation services in ICCAT" to address language barriers. This point is also discussed in Section 2.
- It was recognized that implementing a code of conduct would help ensure the scientific independence of the SCRS. There was some discussion about the best approach to implementing the code, e.g. whether it should be included in the announcement document for each SCRS meeting or whether it should be included as part of the introduction at each meeting.
- There was disagreement about including a discussion of a "Research Steering Committee" in the plan. Some members argued this required further SCRS discussion and was not yet a formalized concept, while others noted its potential to help prioritize research. The Group flagged it for future intersessional discussion.

During the meeting, the Group agreed to focus on the Goals and Objectives primarily, but due to time constraints it was agreed that specific strategies and measurable objectives will be considered during consecutive revisions.

### ***5.3 Proposals for specific edits to the text***

A proposal was made that the plan should include an artificial intelligence (AI) strategy. It was recognised that AI is already being used in a number of ways within the context of ICCAT including identifying and measuring fish. There is a need to be very deliberate in how we harness this new technology and take advantage of the positive aspects to facilitate the SCRS workplan. An ICCAT AI strategy could draw on similar documents already prepared by other organizations. The SCRS Subgroup on Artificial Intelligence was formed to work on preparing an ICCAT AI strategy.

The Group agreed to work intersessionally to draft a section on Innovation and Technology Plan.

## **6. Intersessional workplan to finalize the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031**

The Group recommended evaluating the previous SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2015-2020 to determine whether its objectives and measurable outcomes were achieved, to help identify which elements should be excluded in the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031 without prejudice to continuing the current drafting of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031. While informal evaluations occurred during the 2024 SCRS Workshop (ICCAT, 2024) and species group meetings, a formal evaluation, ideally included in an SCRS report, would better support the drafting of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031. A sub-group of SCRS scientists, in collaboration with the SCRS Chair, the SCRS Vice Chair and the Secretariat, will conduct this evaluation intersessionally and present the results at the September SCRS Plenary meeting.

Following a review of the initial revision of Part 1 of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031, the SCRS Chair noted substantial progress during the meeting and proposed a timeline to circulate a draft to CPCs by September 2025. The Group agreed to continue developing the draft according to this timeline, using Google Drive folders to share updated versions of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031 reflecting edits made during the meeting. Participants who wish to assist with the drafting process will be able to review and incorporate the comments recorded during the meeting, available in the Working Documents folder of the meeting document repository.

The plan also includes holding informal online meetings to advance the draft efficiently. Several participants expressed interest in contributing but noted potential time constraints due to heavy workloads until September 2025. The SCRS Chair acknowledged these challenges but emphasized the importance of completing the process.

It was noted that a Google Drive folder with the current draft will be shared to allow participants to provide edits and comments, and a summary document may also be prepared to support the process.

The SCRS Scientific Strategic Plan (2026-2031) work proposal will be drafted considering the following steps:

- **By 18 July 2025** - Send an email to the meeting participants, inviting them to participate in the process, and then giving them permission to edit documents.
- **By 22 August 2025** - Deadline comments from participants.
- **By 25 August 2025** - SCRS Chairs compilation and deliver new version to the Secretariat.
- **By September 10, 2025** - Deadline for final comments from CPCs
- **By 17 September 2025** - Deadline for the Secretariat to receive final version for translation and dissemination.
- **29 September 2025** - Present the final version into the SCRS Plenary.

## **7. Other matters**

There was a brief presentation of SCRS/2025/149 which provides a conservative estimate of ex-vessel revenues generated by ICCAT fisheries in 2018. Using existing sources for major tunas, blue sharks, and small tunas – and proxies for other ICCAT species – the authors estimated that ICCAT fisheries generated at least \$2.03 billion at the first point of sale (ex-vessel) in 2018. This revenue was compared to the core ICCAT budget, which was approximately \$4.25 million in 2018 or less than one quarter of one percent of the revenues generated that year.

The Group noted that there are other investments in ICCAT science and management. The authors recognized that other investments were made in ICCAT science and management (e.g. the cost of hosting a meeting, voluntary contributions by CPCs, the cost of attending meetings). Still, the primary conclusion of the paper and presentation was that ICCAT budgets and voluntary contributions should be increased, in recognition that ICCAT is not only managing fisheries for long-term sustainability but also that ICCAT fisheries are a significant source of revenue for coastal communities around the Atlantic.

The Group noted the economic importance of the ICCAT fisheries, and commented that the estimated value is clearly a conservative estimate, as recreational fisheries estimates likely did not reflect the full economic value, and the added value in the market chain from the ex-vessel price to the final price for consumers.

The Group also welcomed the paper as a helpful first estimate that would benefit from further work and refinement and highlighted that it is a good example of why socioeconomic is an important consideration for ICCAT and why economic objectives should be included in future management procedures. The Group agreed that the paper should be presented to the Commission in some form.

## **8. Adoption of report and closure**

The Chair thanked the participants and the Secretariat for all the work done. The report was adopted and the meeting was adjourned.

## **Reference**

ICCAT. 2024. Report of the SCRS Workshop (hybrid/ Madrid, Spain, 18-20 March 2024). Collect. Vol. Sci. Pap. ICCAT, 81(8), SCRS/2024/011: 1-64.

## Appendix 1

### Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting and meeting logistics
2. Adoption of Agenda and nomination of section rapporteurs
3. General review of the draft SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031
  - 3.1 Drafting process
  - 3.2 Highlighted objectives achieved through the Science Strategic Plan 2015-2020
  - 3.3 SWOT analysis of the Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031
  - 3.4 Overview of the draft document
4. Report on the Meeting of the Standing Working Group on Dialogue between Fisheries Scientists and Managers (SWGSM)
  - 4.1 General feedback from SWGSM on the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan
  - 4.2 Specific suggestions on text or structure of the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan
5. Focused discussion of the draft of the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan
  - 5.1 Review of the overall structure
  - 5.2 Identification of key topics, objectives and strategies to be included
  - 5.3 Proposals for specific edits to the text (e.g. additions, deletions and modifications)
6. Intersessional workplan to finalize the new SCRS Science Strategic Plan (if necessary)
7. Other matters
8. Adoption of report and closure

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**Appendix 3****List of papers and presentations**

<b>DocRef</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Authors</b>
SCRS/2025/149	A conservative estimate of ex-vessel revenues generated by ICCAT fisheries in 2018	Galland, G.R., Wilson A., McKinney R.
SCRS/2025/153	Draft 2026-2031 SCRS Science Strategic Plan	Anonymous
SCRS/P/2025/059	General review of the draft SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031	Brown C., Cardoso L.G.

**Appendix 4****Summaries of the documents and presentations**

SCRS/2025/149 - Revenues generated by ICCAT fisheries in 2018 were estimated using existing data sources and proxies where existing studies were not available. The resulting total – more than U.S.\$2 billion – is a substantial amount for fleets operating in the region. Efforts were taken to avoid unintentionally overestimating the revenues, so the result is considered conservative. This amount does not account for added value gained throughout the supply chain, with the total revenue generated at the final point of sale potentially three times higher. It also does not include revenues generated by other, non-extractive uses of ICCAT stocks (e.g. catch and release recreational fishing). In 2018, the ICCAT budget was less than one quarter of one percent of the revenue reported here. As ICCAT and its Standing Committee on Research and Statistics consider a long-term strategic plan and negotiate future budgets, it is clear that decreases should not be considered and increased investment of fisheries revenue into ICCAT science and management may be important to ensure long-term sustainability of this revenue.

SCRS/2025/153 - The document presented the background and structure of the draft SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2026-2031. It described how the new plan builds on the 2015-2020 plan, with outdated or fulfilled strategies removed or revised, and new ones added to address emerging scientific needs. The drafting process began in 2024, with an initial review at the March SCRS Workshop. Subsequent drafts were developed collaboratively by SCRS Officers and nominated CPC scientists through shared online documents.

SCRS/P/2025/059 - The presentation provided the background and structure of the draft 2026-2031 SCRS Science Strategic Plan. The presentation described how the new plan builds on the 2015-2020 plan, with outdated or fulfilled strategies removed or revised, and new ones added to address emerging scientific needs. The drafting process began in 2024, with an initial review at the March SCRS Workshop. Subsequent drafts were developed collaboratively by SCRS Officers and nominated CPC scientists through shared online documents. A preliminary version was made available during the 2024 SCRS Plenary and later reviewed by commissioners at the June 2025 SWGSM meeting. Feedback from these consultations informed the discussion at the July 2025 Strategic Plan meeting. The presentation highlighted examples of progress under the previous plan already reflected in the updated one, including enhanced scientific capacity-building, adoption of electronic monitoring recommendations, and formalized dialogue between scientists and managers. An updated SWOT analysis was presented, along with the structure of the new plan, which is organized into five thematic areas: Data Collection, Dialogue and Communication, Participation and Capacity Building, Research, and Provision of Scientific Advice. Each includes specific goals and strategies aligned with the SCRS mandate.