

**Report of the First Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a  
Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF)**  
*(online, 16 January 2025)*

**1. Opening of the meeting**

The Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Administration (STACFAD), Ms. Deirdre Warner-Kramer, opened the First Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF) (the “Group”) which was held online, on 16 January 2025, from 12:00 to 17:00. The meeting was attended by 31 members from 17 CPCs.

**2. Introduction of participants**

The Chair of STACFAD welcomed all the participants. She briefly explained how to use the online meeting platform, the meeting schedule and the location of the documents. She indicated that the meeting focused on the format of the budget and the Meeting Participation Fund (MPF). The Agenda was adopted without any changes and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

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

**3. Discussion of options and proposals for key issues**

The VWG-SF took up each of the issues the Commission had referred to it, following the Tentative Agenda.

**a) Format and content of the annual budget presentation**

As a result of the latest conclusions reached at the last Commission meeting on the format and content of the presentation of the draft budget for the following years, the following should be noted.

The Chair informed that, in incorporating all the proposals for improvement made by the various CPCs for the discussions to begin, efforts have been made to seek a different approach to the budget, grouping related items to facilitate the reading and understanding of the draft budget. This is the spirit in which this preliminary proposal has been presented in order to stimulate the discussions and refine the improvements that have been requested.

The Secretariat (Head of Administration and Finance) proceeded to present the document that has been developed. The purpose of this document is to broadly present the proposed draft budget for the following years, how it is structured and how the expenses in the different areas are envisaged. The main difference in this document is the presentation of expenses by nature of the expense, and not by the broad headings of each application, i.e. it would be structured by headings of any nature, the numbering of the chapters would be restructured and the titles of some chapters would change. After a detailed point-by-point presentation of how the budget would be reflected and the potential addition of a table showing the evolution in expenses over the last four years (Appendix 4 to the [Report of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT \(VWG-SF\)](#), held in June 2024), so as to assess which budget items would need more funding and which would not, it was proposed that the future change in the structure of the draft budget to be decided should be implemented from 2026.

In general, the CPCs were satisfied with the template presented as it addresses most of the issues they had raised. Some members expressed their wish to see an overview of the implementation of science projects over the years, based on the relevant elements of the document of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). It was also suggested that, following the example of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), the Secretariat could propose line items where reductions might be possible.

As regards Appendix 4 to the [Report of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT \(VWG-SF\)](#), held in June 2024, the Chair requested from the Secretariat clarification on how it would be presented, whether it would be in Excel format or a text explaining the evolution of the years. The Secretariat informed that it would be in Excel format and that if this budget presentation format was adopted, as there had been modifications and changes in the chapters, it would be implemented from 2026.

One CPC raised the need to clarify which chapters or sub-chapters had been moved to enable comparison between the previous budget and the current one so as to follow the evolution.

Another CPC suggested that having more information not only for this year but for more years would be beneficial for decision-making, as the budget needs to reflect the strategic priorities of the organisation. In the case of the overall research budget, this premise is even more central; as for the activities that continue for several years, CPCs should have an overview of how these have evolved over the years, of what has been done and how much remains to be done; and for other activities that are not continuous in time, it is necessary to prioritise so as to decide which activities to fund or whether they are really necessary. It indicated that funding for these activities was allocated both from the regular budget and from other funds, making it difficult to understand what is actually spent on these activities.

It was noted that it is difficult for the Secretariat to provide this information in advance because the activities are partly funded by voluntary contributions, and it is hard to know sufficiently in advance how much money is available so that the SCRS can decide what activities can be carried out.

One CPC noted that the template would have to be fine-tuned during implementation, with the necessary adjustments being made. It also raised the question regarding what degree of breakdown is needed in the template, noting that in the case of salaries, the same level of detail may not be needed, as this information is not necessary for decision making and that a balance would have to be struck so as not to break confidentiality and that decisions could be made based on the categories and total amounts. Several CPCs agreed.

The Chair was also in agreement and indicated that the three important documents (financial and administrative reports and the budget) are linked to other documents where the information is broken down. It will be necessary to assess what detail needs to be included in the new template, and to list the comparisons between the new document and the previous one.

She also indicated that efforts have been made in recent years to incorporate at least a percentage of the overall research budget into the regular budget, and that if it had been incorporated or were known, the amount of the voluntary contribution necessary could be known. For better management, it is essential to control the regular budget and the voluntary contributions so as to partly address the issue that the input from the SCRS is not available at the time when the budget has to be prepared. It would be more practical if the Commission could decide how much it can contribute and then the SCRS could allocate according to the implementation needs.

The Chair went on to discuss the approval period i.e. whether a two-year budget should be presented but that a decision for one year be taken. At regular meetings, the expenses are approved for two years. On very rare occasions, both years have been approved. Usually, at the subsequent special meeting, revisions and adjustments are made. Several CPCs indicated their wish to continue with this practice i.e. for a two-year budget to be presented, which includes an estimate for the second year that is as realistic as possible. The focus at the regular meeting is on the first year, but CPCs are under an obligation with respect to the second year. Subsequently at the special meeting, a review of the second year is carried out. All parties agreed that an estimate for the second year should always be submitted for decision making and information purposes. This can be done by email and templates can be used to link the three documents with what has happened in previous years or a new document with all this information can be created.

#### ***b) Special Meeting Participation Fund***

The Chair reminded the members of the Group that the document “Notes on the operational issues related to the implementation of the MPF” had been submitted to the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF) held in June 2024, proposing guidelines to resolve a

number of recurring issues in the processing of requests for funding through the MPF (Appendix 5 to the [Report of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT \(VWG-SF\)](#)). She also noted that given the issues raised in June 2024, it would be necessary to amend the rules of procedure or further elaborate the points (Appendix 6 to the [Report of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT \(VWG-SF\)](#)).

The Secretariat (Head of Administration and Finance) summarized the [Report of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT \(VWG-SF\)](#), indicating that the payment of the per diem at least 14 days prior to the start date of the meeting had already been implemented.

One CPC requested that, if the number of participants per CPC funded by the MPF increases to two, the restriction on participation according to room size be applied to all CPCs equally, including any reductions. As regards visas, it indicated that it is easier to obtain a visa for meetings that are held in central areas and that cities or areas for which it is difficult to obtain a visa should be avoided. Also in relation to visas, another CPC insisted that it was necessary to assist developing CPCs if there is no Embassy in their country and travel and accommodation costs are incurred.

The Chair commented that if a CPC wishes to host a meeting, it should consider how to facilitate the visa process for CPCs when inviting them.

The Chair requested that the Secretariat prepare a document with the guidelines for circulation. It will either be a new document or the guidelines therein will be used to complete the existing guidelines.

In closing this item, the Chair invited the Executive Secretary to inform about the preparations for the next annual meeting. The Executive Secretary indicated that no invitation to host the Commission meeting had been received from any CPC. It had therefore been decided to explore potential venue options in northern Spain, but that it would be necessary to know the size of the meeting to carry out an assessment.

As to the meeting size, the Chair indicated that the number of people in the room should be limited and reduced so that the Commission meeting can be organised and to receive offers to host from CPCs. The Chair asked the Secretariat to provide more information on where the Commission meeting could be held. Taking into account the size and possibilities, she informed the Group that it will be necessary to see if the number of participants needs to be reduced.

#### **4. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed**

The Chair informed that the discussions had been very useful and that she would make a summary and share it with the members. The Chair reminded that the Secretariat will work with her to submit documents on the budget template and the MPF guidelines for circulation. She asked VWG-SF members to submit written comments on these two documents. She informed that it would be useful to continue to compare the experiences of other Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) when organising meetings and presenting the budget.

The Chair would work with the Group to consolidate these documents which will be submitted to the Second Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF) (online, 3 April 2025).

The Chair thanked all 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. Discussion of options and proposals for key issues
  - Format and content of the annual budget presentation
  - Special Meeting Participation Fund
4. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed
5. Other matters
6. Conclusions and closure

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