

Report of the Meeting of the Electronic Monitoring Systems Working Group (EMS WG)
(*hybrid/Brussels, Belgium, 1-2 June 2026*)

1. Opening of the meeting and meeting arrangements

The Chair of the Electronic Monitoring Systems Working Group (EMS WG), Mr Neil Ansell, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants. He thanked the European Union (EU) for hosting the meeting and the Secretariat for organising. The ICCAT Executive Secretary also welcomed everyone, outlined the meeting arrangements and introduced the 26 CPCs and observers attending.

2. Nomination of Rapporteur

The EU nominated Ms Sifra Blokhuis to serve as Rapporteur.

3. Adoption of agenda

The Chair indicated his intentions regarding the issues to be raised under each agenda item. The agenda was adopted without change and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

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

4. Update on CPC Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) national projects and pilots

The United Kingdom (UK) presented its “Draft Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 23-18 on minimum standards for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) in ICCAT fisheries”. It went on to inform that it intended to extend 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)* to small-scale vessels, specifically longline and purse seine vessels under 15 metres. It presented several suggestions for amendment to Rec. 23-18 and also sought the views of the EMS WG concerning how SCRS advice can be accommodated on certain provisions.

Several CPCs sought clarification on how this amendment would affect existing national frameworks for small-scale vessels, also noting technical and capacity limitations of this fleet segment. It was suggested that Annex 1 of the proposal could be divided into two sections (A1 and A2), creating a clear distinction between large and small vessels. It was noted that EMS could help address the issues of limited space on board and observer coverage on small vessels, and suggested that artificial intelligence (AI) could also be implemented for specific applications.

One CPC indicated that it would submit additional written comments to the UK on the proposal. Another CPC asked about the timeline for the new advice requested from the SCRS and sought clarification on the wording of Annex 1 regarding whether the measures would be mandatory.

It was clarified that the SCRS could be consulted through the SCRS Chair’s presence in EMS WG meetings as well as through the Technical Sub-group on EM. It was noted that such close coordination had been undertaken for the preparation and consultation leading to the adoption of the Minimum Standards. It was also noted that formal submission to the SCRS could also be considered if needed, although it would not be essential and could be timely in light of its existing workload.

The Chair of the SCRS then presented recent activities of the SCRS noting that EMS for small-scale vessels was identified as a priority and that a meeting of the SCRS Technical Sub-group on EM was planned for September 2026. The SCRS Chair confirmed that he would remain available and participate in the meetings of the Permanent Working Group for the Improvement of ICCAT Statistics and Conservation Measures (PWG) and EMS WG to ensure the appropriate coordination on EMS matters.

The UK concluded that separate annexes for large- and small-scale vessels could be incorporated in its proposal. Regarding the question on the inclusion of AI in EMS, the UK referred to paragraph 13 of its proposal. It also noted that paragraph 16.14 refers to “other gear types” and requested that the SCRS Technical Sub-group on EM provide advice on any additional suggestions relating to fishing gear under that provision. Finally, it expressed its appreciation as regards the views of the SCRS Chair and hoped that discussions on the proposal would continue during the PWG meeting at the Annual Meeting in 2026.

The meeting then proceeded with the EU’s presentation of two of its proposals. First, “A proposal to introduce Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) to improve control over bluefin tuna processing vessels” was presented which involves a modification to *Recommendation by ICCAT replacing Recommendation 24-05 establishing a multi-annual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean (Rec. 25-04)*. The second proposal, which was linked to the first, concerned a “Draft Recommendation by ICCAT amending Recommendation 23-18 establishing minimum standards and programme requirements for the use of Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS)”. The modifications focused on the addition of minimum standards for bluefin tuna processing vessels given that the current standard in Rec. 23-18 only covers purse seine and longline vessels.

A number of CPCs thanked the EU for its work on the proposals, highlighting that the work appeared quite developed. It was noted that the system had the potential to replace observers and provide transparency and control on these vessels and related operations for eastern bluefin tuna (BFT-E). Other CPCs expressed strong concerns regarding data and observer responsibility, particularly regarding relationship between human observer for harvesting and proposed EMS, the procedures to follow when the EMS malfunctions and operational costs.

The EU provided clarification on the points raised by CPCs, stating that the proposal does not replace human observers, but rather complements them. The Flag State would have ultimate responsibility for the operation of the EMS and also for finding solutions in case of EMS malfunction. Concerning the approach raised on observer coverage and overall approach, the EU suggested freezing the discussions at this stage and continuing discussions with other interested CPCs to address the remaining questions with the intention of presenting an amended new version at the Annual Meeting in 2026.

Norway presented its proposal related to “Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) and observer coverage for the Norwegian pilot project on short-term live storage of Atlantic bluefin tuna”. It informed that the purpose of the programme was to document and evaluate how EMS may be used as a supplementary monitoring, documentation and verification tool to observer coverage during the Norwegian pilot study on BFT temporary live storage. Discussions followed on technical and practical aspects and Norway noted that the proposal remained at an exploratory stage and looked forward to further discussions at the Annual Meeting in 2026, where it intended to proceed with discussing alternative approaches to observer coverage given the specificities of its BFT fisheries and associated control and monitoring requirements.

5. Review of CPC EMS domestic programmes

Japan presented “Japan’s Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) Domestic Programme”. It informed that the main purpose of its domestic use of EMS was the collection of scientific data on longline vessels in line with Rec. 23-18. CPCs proceeded by asking several technical questions on data retrieval and analysis, EMS providers and the advantages of human observers over EMS systems for addressing specific tasks and data fields.

Belize presented its “Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) Domestic Programme Description”. It informed that it operates its domestic programme with one longline and one purse seine vessel. Questions from CPCs related to risks involved with data satellite transmissions, data retention periods and the percentage of EMS coverage on its domestic fleet segments.

It was noted that some working documents had not been translated into all ICCAT languages, making it difficult for some CPCs to prepare and fully engage on all aspects. The Chair called for translations, where possible, so CPCs can properly review CPC domestic plans, while noting the concerns of the Secretariat which also called for standard templates and submission time limits. The Secretariat agreed, noting that developing these would significantly assist with the translation of domestic programmes.

The EU continued with a presentation of its proposal “Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) Program for Tropical Purse Seine Fishery (2025)”. It informed that the proposal was similar to last year’s and elaborated on a number of technical elements. Questions from CPCs revolved around review rates, interoperability between EMS technologies and data submission. The EU thanked CPCs, informing that it would revert with responses on the questions made.

6. Discussion on the use of EMS in small-scale fisheries

See item 4 of this report.

7. Coordination with the SCRS and the Technical Sub-group on Electronic Monitoring

See item 4 of this report.

8. Intersessional work

See item 4 of this report.

9. Other matters

The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) provided a “Report on the Electronic Monitoring Minimum Standards Harmonization Workshop”. It informed that the workshop promoted greater consistency and interoperability in EM standards, while preserving existing safeguards and supporting broader, more effective use of EM in ICCAT. The report recommends that ICCAT build a flexible but harmonised EM framework: common minimum standards, strong oversight, and interoperability without constraining the organisation to rigid technical specifications.

10. Adoption of report and closure

The Chair concluded that discussion on the UK proposal would be included in the Agenda of the 19th Meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Monitoring Measures (IMM). In the interests of time it was agreed that, rather than producing an official report, a brief summary would be prepared of the points discussed and views shared during the IMM meeting. It was agreed that the official meeting report would be adopted through correspondence.

The Chair thanked participants and declared the meeting adjourned.

Appendix 1

Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting and meeting arrangements
2. Nomination of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Update on CPC Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) national projects and pilots
5. Review of CPC EMS domestic programmes
6. Discussion on the use of EMS in small-scale fisheries
7. Coordination with the SCRS and the Technical Sub-group on Electronic Monitoring
8. Intersessional work
9. Other matters
10. Adoption of report and closure

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