

GBYP Steering Committee Meeting (Madrid, 23 September 2022 18:30-21:00)

Participants: Steering Committee (SC) members: Gary Melvin (SCRS Chair), Camille Jean Pierre Manel (ICCAT Executive Secretary), John Walter (W-BFT Rapporteur) and Enrique Rodriguez-Marín (E-BFT Rapporteur).

Invited: Haritz Arrizabalaga (SCRS Vice-chair), Miguel Neves dos Santos (ICCAT Assistant Executive Secretary), Francisco Alemany (GBYP Coordinator), Stasa Tensek (GBYP Assistant Coordinator), Franco Biagi (EU representative), Stanislovas Jonusas (EU representative)

The Executive Secretary welcomed all the participants and opened the meeting. Apart from the GBYP SC members and the Secretariat, the meeting was also attended by the representatives of the GBYP mayor funder, the European Union, which were not included in the decision process, but were allowed to intervene in the discussion. The meeting was chaired by the SCRS Chair, following the meeting agenda prepared by the GBYP Coordinator (**Annex 1**), which was circulated beforehand.

The GBYP Coordinator shortly informed the participants about the status of the activities. Phase 11 successfully finished, but in-person meetings were postponed to Phase 12, which is currently ongoing. Phase 12 started in March 2022 with the initial duration of one year, but it will be necessary to ask for an extension, since some activities will need more time to be completed. The participants were also informed that EU changed the financing system and now it functions through an online platform, operated by The European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) funding agency, which resulted in less flexibility in project management.

As regards the pending workshops, it was acknowledged that all of them are deemed important and have been in the agenda for a long time waiting to be held. It was recalled that during the last BFT SG meeting it was decided to merge biological sampling and close kin workshops in one, so only 3 GBYP workshops were envisaged for the following period. It was decided that workshops will be held following a hybrid format, in order to ensure wider participation. The workshops will tentatively be held in the first semester of 2023, but it will depend on the SCRS calendar which is yet to be finalised. It was acknowledged that it was challenging to find an empty slot to schedule these workshops, given the busy agenda of the Secretariat and SCRS. Therefore, in case there will not be possible to hold all workshops, it was decided to follow the order of priority: 1. Close kin and biological sampling, 2. Tagging, 3. Larval surveys. It was also commented that the larval survey workshop, although does not have a high priority, may be held earlier because it is specific, does not involve a lot of SCRS scientist and does not have to be held in Madrid.

The SC acknowledged that some preliminary work will be needed before each workshop, in order to better prepare and maximize the effectiveness. It was recalled that preparing a reference document on BFT biology was already defined as a requirement prior to holding the close kin workshop. That document will have to be drafted by several SCRS scientists. With that regard, it was decided to take advantage of the close kin ICES training course which will be held by CSIRO scientists in AZTI premises in November not only for better understanding the methodology, but also for meeting with CSIRO scientists (Dr. Mark Bravington etc.) and getting

their input to properly prepare the aforementioned reference document and planning the future CKMR work on bluefin tuna. With that end, the GBYP Coordinator will attend the course and, prior to that, will make preliminary contacts with CSIRO scientists to check their availability to stay in Spain 1-2 days after the AZTI's course, hired by GBYP, for preparing, besides other SCRS scientists, the next GBYP CKMR workshop. In case that CSIRO scientists cannot dedicate these days for planning the work on BFT, GBYP coordinator will agree with CSIRO experts on the terms and timing of a contract to provide advice on CKMR approach, including advice on this preliminary work to elaborate a reference document for the CKMR workshop that should be held on 2023.

The EU representatives acknowledged the ICCAT efforts in exploring the possibility of implementing the CKMR approach, but stressed that every action should have operational results, because it is important for the EU not only to understand methodology, but also to implement operational activities. Therefore, it is important that every plan be feasible and operational, taking into account practical issues. The EU representatives informed that there are several teams in the EU already working on close kin methodology and ICCAT should invite them to the GBYP CKMR workshop to benefit from their expertise. They also informed about the finalization of the "Fish genome" project which contains many interesting information and will be published soon in public domain, in connection to the EU data collection framework.

With reference to the support to MSE development, the SC stressed that it is imperative to ensure that all code and related products are delivered in a manner that can be replicated by another entity. Therefore, the code must be prepared to be handed off, with clear instructions how to run and update it. This should be done as soon as possible, while the contractor is still hired. The GBYP Coordinator will make some preliminary contacts to investigate how much additional time it would imply and what would be the corresponding budget. John Walter will help to draft the TORs. If this task needs additional budget, the funds will have to be reallocated from other activity, but it is still to be checked where from.

With reference to the MSE review, it was recalled that it was the Commission's recommendation to hold a global review of MSE process in general and it was not only linked to bluefin tuna. It was commented that this task has not been initiated yet and it would be useful to request it again from the Commission, as well to define future steps. With regards to the GBYP related activities, the funds are already allocated in Phase 12, but no concrete plan has been drafted yet.

In relation to the development of alternative stock assessment methods, it was recalled that this activity was initially planned for Phase 11, but once confirmed that the BFT stock assessment were to be completed in 2022, involving most of the stock assessment specialists, it was moved to Phase 12. However, the SC was informed that this activity could be covered by the USA's program BTRP, and it was agreed that in any case the development of these methods was not an urgent priority and could be delayed to future GBYP phases. So, it was decided to propose to reinvest these funds in other priority activities, as the development of statistical methods to ensure that when a new annual value of a given index is presented, the previous time series do not change, this methodology for update of indices to be input to Management Procedures has been recently defined by the BFT SG.

Considering this and the timing of other Phase 12 activities, it was considered that probably it will be necessary to request to the EU a contract amendment, asking for reallocation of some funds and a time extension, without additional associated costs. The SC will be asked for its

advice and final decisions on this topic later, when further information on the needs for time extension of ongoing activities be available. The EU commented that, although it is understandable some activities will have to be amended, the time extensions should be asked only in exceptional cases, given that the overlapping of various phases makes it difficult to control if targets have been fulfilled and ensuring that no duplications have been made. It was announced that the application for Phase 13 will be presented along with other species research projects from the SCRS. The EU representatives welcomed this decision, stressing that investigation of other species was also important, so the funds for scientific research within ICCAT should be well balanced.

The SC also discussed the epigenetic ageing study, which was recommended to be carried out by the BFT SG. Given that only the preliminary feasibility desk study has been done by now, it was decided to further pursue this line of research developing a practical pilot study. The SC was informed that CSIRO had already made a proposal to carry out this activity, but it could not be presented on time in response to the GBYP call for tenders for biological studies. It was therefore decided to contact CSIRO and invite them to send a detailed proposal for its consideration and, if deemed convenient, assign part of GBYP Phase 12 budget to perform this task, reallocating funds from other activities.

The GBYP Coordinator presented an outline of activities and related budget for Phase 13 (2023-2024). It was stressed that it was only a tentative budget, which will be refined later. It was commented that the e-tagging results have improved a lot along the last two years, given the increase in deployment time and recoveries rates, and that hence would be worth to continue the e-tagging program in Phase 13. The aerial surveys in Western and Central Med will also be continued, to update the aerial survey index already used for stock assessment. As for the biological studies, the budget for sampling activities will have to be reduced in the future. The intention is to rely more on EU data collection framework for sampling activities. In addition, if it is finally decided to implement the close kin approach in the BFT Eastern stock and it is proven that epigenetic ageing is feasible, it will be possible to rely on ROPs for genetic sampling, given it will not be necessary to collect otoliths. The budget for MSE activities will also be greatly reduced and will be invested mainly in process review and communication of results.

GBYP SC Meeting 23th September 2022.

ANNOTATED AGENDA

- **Short introduction about current status of GBYP activities**
- **Dates, format and updating of ToR of the pending workshops: larval surveys, etagging and CKMR, the latter including implications of CKMR implementation on BFT biological sampling and international coordination of BFT biological sampling. Relation of these workshops with the three new SCRS BFT subgroups on these lines of research.**
 - These workshops were already approved in previous GBYP Phases, but postponed due to COVID since it was considered that they would be presential, and have already clearly stated objectives. Initially they are planned to be held along the first trimester 2023, to prevent overlapping with BFT group intersessional meetings. Maybe some of them could be used as an appropriate forum to constitute formally the proposed SCRS subgroups, since most of specialists in each field will be there and probably it would be easier to find some volunteers to lead or simply engage themselves in the new subgroups.
- **Refining and updating the workplan for CKMR related issues**
 - A workplan was decided within the first workshop held in 2021, which is already ongoing (first step of epigenetic feasibility desk study already done, pilot epigenetic studies ongoing in Phase 12 Biological studies contract). The second step was the elaboration, by a group of SCRS selected experts of a reference text on the consolidated knowledge relevant for applying Close kin, which would constitute the basis for the discussions in the second Close Kin workshop. This has not been done yet due to MSE and stock assessment derived workload of key people, and match perfectly with the proposal of creating a subgroup on this topic, whose first task could be to elaborate such a reference document. The third step was to organize the workshop to discuss on the practical issues of MSE implementation on solid basis and, with the advice of CSIRO invited experts, elaborate a draft CKMR Easter stock proposal. The last step would be to refine this proposal, contracting if necessary CSIRO experts, and present it to the September 2023 SCRS meetings. We are a bit in delay, so the objective now could be to update this work plan
- **Concretize the GBYP support to MSE process along next year**
 - MSE developer tasks till December 2022 have been already contracted. There are funds in Phase 12 to cover another 6 months of Tom's work in 2023, that could be enough for financing all the envisaged MSE tasks in 2023 (no need of more funds for this concept in GBYP Phase 13)
- **Update the ToR and timing of GBYP support to the development of alternative stock assessment methods**
 - Alternative stock assessment methods was initially planned for phase 11, when it was thought that the BFT stock assessment would be carried out in 2023 as requested by SCRS. Then, when it was confirmed that the SA would be done in 2022, and the key people would be too busy to do it in 2022, it was moved to phase 12. However, now there is not any hurry in doing that in 2022 or beginning 2023. In addition, maybe this objective will be covered by the "sister program" BRTP. So, maybe this activity could be cancelled or further delayed, and reinvest the budget to cover the new proposed "indices" activity.

- As a result of the decisions taken on previous points, decide on Phase 12 Grant amendment proposal (time extension, possible modification of some activities)
- General outline of GBYP activities and related budget for Phase 13 (2023-2024)

Bluefin tuna	2023
Tagging, rewards and awareness	
Electronic and conventional tagging, rewarding and awareness	€160,000
Fishery Independent Indices	
Biological studies:	
Microchemistry	€20,000
Age and growth	€20,000
Genetic	€70,000
Other (if any, i.e. fisheries independent indices)	
Aerial surveys	€365,000
Sample collection and shipping	€80,000
Workshops/meetings	
GBYP workshops (TBD, probably further WS for BFT sampling coordination and Close Kin)	€20,000
Experts attendance to intersessional meetings	€5,000
MSE	
Progress of the BFT MSE + process review and communication	€35,000
Sub-TOTAL	€775,000
Programme coordination (include staff salaries, SC external member contract, SC members and GBYP coordination team travels, overheads and ICCAT staff participation)	€4750,000
TOTAL	€1,250,000