

GBYP Steering Committee Meeting (on line, 13 October 2020)

Participants: SC members Gary Melvin (SCRS Chair), Rui Coelho (SCRS Vicechair) John Walter (W-BFT Rapporteur), Ana Gordo (E-BFT Rapporteur), Ana Parma (SC External Member), Camille Jean Pierre Manel (ICCAT Executive Secretary), Miguel Neves dos Santos (ICCAT Assistant Executive Secretary), Francisco Alemany (GBYP Coordinator) and Stasa Tensek (GBYP Assistant Coordinator)

The **immediate objective of the meeting** was to inform the Steering Committee (SC) about the budget available for Phase 11 and, subsequently, to decide on the split of these total funds by main items, since this information had to be posted for Commission consideration and approval before 15th October. So, the SC was informed that, due to the Brexit and the pandemics, there will be a significant cut of 20% in the **EU funding** for all ICCAT scientific programs. Therefore, the budget foreseen for GBYP Phase 11 is 1,600,000 euro. Further budget reductions are to be expected in the forthcoming years.

The second objective was to decide on the schedule of the actions to be taken in the next months in order to prepare the proposals for the **Phase 10 Grant Amendment** and the **Phase 11 Grant Agreement**. Therefore, the SC was informed that due to internal EU administrative **schedule**, the grant proposal for Phase 11, as well the proposal for the amendment of Phase 10, will have to be presented by the end of November 2020. It is challenging because the GBYP activities in 2021 will greatly depend on the input from scientific meetings that will take place later. Therefore, it was decided to present a proposal based on the currently available research recommendations from SCRS and Commission requests, as usual, and then modify it, if necessary, through a Grant amendment to be presented in April 2021, once the feedback from relevant SCRS meetings and GBYP workshops, as December 2020 and April 2021 SCRS BFT species group meetings and GBYP workshops on electronic tagging and Close-kin approach are available. It was noted that the EU asked the Secretariat to present an innovative proposal for Phase 11, deepening the changes in structure and contents in relation to previous proposals already initiated with Phase 10 proposal.

The GBYP Coordinator quickly informed the SC about status of the activities in the Phase 10. Given that the Secretariat will be overburdened by the Commission meeting and correspondence with CPCs in the following months, and the GBYP coordination team will be fully engaged in the drafting the Phase 10 amendment and the planning of Phase 11, it was proposed to postpone the tagging and close kin **workshops**, initially envisaged for October/November 2020, till the beginning of the next year (January/February), provided the main close kin experts are available in that period. In that way, the results from the workshops will be presented to the BFT group in April 2021 during the BFT SG intersessional meeting so it will be able to better plan the following GBYP activities. The GBYP SC approved this postponement of the aforementioned GBYP workshops dates. Regarding the **modelling contract**, it was commented that the foreseen budget increase does not seem necessary anymore, given that finally the work has followed the initial plan.

As for the **aerial survey**, the revision is ongoing and the first individual reports will be presented in following weeks, while the final report will be presented by the end of October or in the beginning of November at the latest. The GBYP Coordinator informed about some preliminary conclusions expressed by the reviewers during a meeting organized at their request with the team in charge up to now of GBYP aerial surveys analyses, held on October 12th. In general, it seems that the external reviewers consider that aerial surveys could be resumed, although with modifications, which will be further elaborated in the report. They spotted a bug in the code, implying that the index currently used for MSE is not correct,. They also noted that, if current sampling areas are to be preserved in future surveys, some habitat modelling should be included in the index post-adjustment, in order to account for the inter-annual variations in spawners distributions. They had various concerns regarding the survey in the Eastern Mediterranean, given that it probably occurs too late when spawners already leave the area. Therefore, they recommended to additionally use alternative methods to determine the temporal and vertical distribution of spawners in the area. The SC agreed to provisionally resume aerial surveys in 2021 based on the reviewers preliminary comments, although the final decision will depend on the reviewers' final report and the inputs of the BFT Group. The activity may be carried out within the extension of Phase 10, given that it is already foreseen in the budget. Therefore, it will not have to be included in Phase 11, which counts with reduced budget anyway.

Regarding the **amendment of Phase 10**, it was decided to ask for the extension of 6-7 months, in order to incorporate some pending activities that could not be done due to the pandemics and to better distribute the remaining funds. The coordinator presented a draft proposal and asked the SC members to send their comments in the following weeks, considering the further info detailed in the documents that should be sent to them in the forthcoming days. The amendment may encompass, among other tasks, tagging in the Eastern Mediterranean, aerial survey, re-calculation of aerials survey indices that are used for MSE and remaining aerial survey data correction, external review of the code used for aerial survey data analysis, acoustic campaigns in the Eastern Mediterranean to determine spawners vertical distribution in the time of aerial survey, spawning habitat modelling for the purpose of the aerial survey, close kin feasibility study, acoustic tags feasibility study and recovery of electronic tags data from Barbara Block. Upon receiving the comments from the SC, the Coordinator will prepare the final budget proposal, which will be discussed and finalized during the next SC meeting.

The general **budget structure for the Phase 11** to be presented to the Commission shortly, was discussed and agreed. The budget was distributed across the main lines of activities only, following the template table used by the Commission for that purpose. It should be noted that it does not properly reflect the real budget distribution, given that the structure of the table greatly differs from the standard table used by GBYP.

The **future activities**, some of them to be included within the Phase 11 and others in the extension of Phase 10, were briefly discussed as well. It was noted that, provided the positive decision on continuation of aerial surveys, some additional experts will have to be hired in order to review the code and the results. In addition, some extra effort will have to be put for getting information for better planning the aerial surveys in the East Mediterranean area, if they are to be resumed. The need for habitat modelling for adjusting the aerial survey data was also discussed, given that it was recommended by the aerial survey experts, but SC members recalled that this should be discussed in depth within the SCRS Methods Group. Regarding the modelling work on assessment, it was commented that some extra funds should be reserved in order to hire additional experts. Furthermore, the SC commented that more experts should be involved

in the BFT MSE process, either from the Secretariat or contracted by GBYP, to prevent depending on a single contractor to go on with the process. In addition, the SC recommended to consider investing in improving the stock assessment alternative models (like ASAP or Stock Synthesis), especially for E-BFT. It was also remarked that sampling in the Atlantic by the Japanese LL should be intensified and all these samples should be analysed genetically for determining their stock of origin. This should also be regularly done for the samples from the Moroccan traps.

The **next SC meeting** should be held in the second week of November (9-13 November) and the date will be agreed later through correspondence, depending on the availability of the aerial survey reviewers' final report. The meeting will focus on taking the decision on the continuity of the aerial surveys, taking into account the final recommendations from the external reviewers, and preparing the final and detailed list of the activities to be carried out within the extended Phase 10 and Phase 11, with the corresponding budget.