REPORT OF THE EBCD TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (TWG)

This report summarizes the principal discussions and work of the Technical Working Group (TWG) throughout 2019 including from their meetings in March and September.   It does not elaborate on all technical issues discussed except those where the group felt a broader consideration by the PWG/Commission would be appropriate.   For more details on specific technical points please consult the reports by the developing consortium (TRAGSA) in the Annex.

1. Introduction and general state of play:

Following the decisions of PWG and Panel 2, the primary objective of the group's first meeting in March 2019 was to discuss the priority development items, including, in particular, changes to the system following the adoption of Rec. 18-02 (e.g. movements of fish within the same farm, including random controls and estimations of annual carry-over); system developments for which a cost/time estimation was needed or for which no decision had yet been taken by the group; and, finally, new technical issues reported by TWG members, the ICCAT Secretariat, and/or TRAGSA.

As had been coordinated previously by the Chair, all development items were ranked by the group in order of priority.   This approach was in line with current contractual and working practices and allowed a phased implementation of the various development items in accordance with available financial resources.

The list of all development items agreed and/or requested throughout 2019 are presented below together with those issues where further deliberations are sought from the PWG/Commission.

The meeting in September allowed the TWG to take stock of the financial situation in light of the new financial mechanism agreed by the Commission in 2018 as well as to have an exchange of views on the next steps concerning future engagement with TRAGSA.

2.   Technical issues/developments:

2.1 System development items

Following the receipt and approval of cost/time requests, the following list of development items were requested by the TWG in 2019:

Items	*State of play*
Reference: Registries maintained by the ICCAT Secretariat	Requested 11/09/2019
Reference 2019-1: Create a new type of section that allows recording movements between cages (Para's 9, 100 and 103 of Rec. [18-02]	Under development
Reference 2019-2 (16): Data extraction tool. Include information of all sections of BCDs in which a country is involved.	Requested 11/09/2019
Reference 2019-3: Include date of landing in catch section. Review of alert related with Para 13 d) of Rec. [18-13]	Requested 11/09/2019
Reference 2019-4A: Print functions: Notes fields	Under development
Reference 2019-6: Allow CPC/flag Administrator to modify the date of a section	Under development

Cost/time requests were requested to TRAGSA for the following list of items:

Items	*State of play*
Reference 2019-4B: Print functions, other presentations	Cost/time sent 31/05/2019
Reference 2019-5: Upload of excel file functionality	Cost/time sent 13/09/2019
Reference 2019-8 (35): Access by non-CPCs	Cost/time sent 31/05/2019
Reference: Parallel transfers: Adapt parallel live/trade/transfers functionality	Cost/time sent 18/10/2018

At the TWGs September meeting it was agreed to go ahead with the items Reference 2019-4B: Print functions and 2019-5: Upload of Excel file functionality.

Due to budgetary limitations and a sufficiency of time before the start of the next purse seine fishing campaign (where this issue/functionality is relevant), the group decided to defer a decision on development of Reference: Parallel transfers until early 2020.

It was felt that Reference 2019-8 (35): Access by non-CPCs, could benefit from further discussion from the Commission before requesting development of the functionality (see below).

Despite a request of the TWG, access to the system by ICCAT Inspectors operating under the JISI (Joint International Scheme of Inspection) could not be cost/time estimated by TRAGSA due to the need for further precision on the technical specifications.   The group discussed this issue at length in both meetings (see below).

2.2   System alerts and inconsistencies

The TWG has been discussing for some time the various alerts and blocks which have been developed in the system at the request of the TWG.   To ensure all are correct and in accordance with TWG requests and development specifications, TRAGSA was asked to provide a complete lists of all alerts/blocks in order that the group members may check them individually, and TRAGSA can adjust them where necessary.

3. Items requiring a discussion in PWG/Commission:

- *Access to the system by ICCAT Inspectors operating under the JISI:*

Following the recommendation of the IMM working group at its April 2019 meeting, the TWG explored how best to proceed with facilitating inspector access to the system.

A general approach was discussed whereby individual inspectors would be able to have their own "read only" eBCD user accounts facilitated by the incorporation of inspector lists into the system by the Secretariat on the basis of the information reported by CPCs under Rec. 18-02 through current data reporting formats (Form CP-01).   However, given the difficulties of knowing in advance in the field which vessels will be inspected, inspectors would require access to virtually all eBCDs in the system. Some TWG members considered that this approach could be too broad. The group explored ways of restricting inspector access to the system either temporally (such to the period of the fishing season/activities under inspection), or spatially (such as to individual deployment periods of inspectors onboard CPC patrol vessels).   It was noted that neither limitation would meaningfully reduce the possibility that an inspector would have access to all the eBCDs generated by relevant operators (e.g. catching vessels/traps/farms) during whatever authorization was granted.

As alternatives, the group considered the following two main options:

1. A facility/procedure whereby the entity being inspected (vessel representatives onboard of the vessel) grants access to the system for the inspector either by making available their user account credentials or by logging on securely and letting inspection personnel review eBCD records directly.   It was noted that an operational guidelines best practice may need to be elaborated including the need for passwords to be re-set/changed after the inspection if the former approach were taken.

2. A facility/procedure whereby a .pdf version of the eBCD(s) concerned is downloaded from the system by the entity being inspected (vessel representatives onboard of the vessel) during the inspection and transmitted/emailed/passed to the inspectors. It was noted, however, that some vessels (e.g. towing vessels) may not have onboard internet access.

In both cases, a search function would need to be developed that allows the inspector to locate the concerned vessel/eBCDs in the system by way of search criteria including vessel identification number, name, and/or vessel flag.

The TWG also discussed the possibility of modifying the system to automatically generate and send an email to the Flag State Administrator of the inspected vessel informing them an inspection is ongoing/has taken place and possibly even requesting access to the eBCD system to check relevant records. This would, however, not imply the need for authorization from the Flag State with respect to the inspection; it would simply be a notification.

The PWG/Commission is encouraged to reflect on these approaches and provide direction to the TWG on the way forward with respect to this matter in order that the technical specifications can be confirmed.

- *Use of the eBCD system by ICCAT non-contracting parties without cooperating status (non-CPCs)*

The TWG has discussed this issue extensively for some time following the instructions and previous decisions of the Commission. TRAGSA were asked to provide a cost/time request in mid-2019 which came in at just under €50,000. The TWG has not yet given its approval for development of the new functionality in light of the need for further technical discussions and an overall reflection on its cost-benefit. The TWG felt that a general discussion by the PWG would be useful given the relatively high costs required to develop this item and the limited amount of trade in BFT by non-CPCs.

In that regard, the TWG noted that the total quantities of BFT traded with non-CPCs captured in the eBCD system was 323 t, 107 t of which was traded in 2019 (in 907 transactions). The TWG further noted that substantially more non-CPCs are involved in the catch and trade of Pacific BFT, and it was highlighted that discussions are ongoing in Pacific tuna RFMOs regarding the possible development of a catch documentation program for Pacific BFT. Given that, the timing of any new eBCD development should be well considered.

- *How the 7-day provision as laid down by para 13d) of Rec. 11-20 and para 6a) of Rec.17-09 should be implemented and reflected in the system[1].*

Despite requesting TRAGSA to proceed on this development item, the TWG considered it appropriate to confirm the specifications which will apply in accordance with the provisions laid down in Recs 18-12 and 18-13.

Rec. 18-13 paragraph 13-d states: *"Where the bluefin tuna quantities caught and landed are less than 1 metric ton or three fish, the logbook or the sales note may be used as a temporary BCD, pending the validation of the BCD within seven days and prior to export."*

In light of this provision, a new field for 'landing date' will be included in the eBCD system.

Rec. 18-12 paragraph 6 states: a) *"Landings of quantities of bluefin tuna less than one metric ton or three fish. Such paper BCDs shall be converted to eBCDs within a period of seven working days or prior to export, whichever is first."* In light of this provision, the system will create an alert if the conversions are not carried out within seven calendar[2] days.

With regard to the amounts of BFT subject to the above-mentioned provisions, namely *"less than 1 metric ton or three fish"*, the system will only apply the functionality to less than or equal to 9.999,99 metric Kilos or 2 fish (BFT).

Finally, it was confirmed that, as laid down in Rec. 18-13 paragraph 13d), this will only apply to BCDs that require validation (i.e. not those which are tagged).

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1 Recommendation 11-20 replaced by Recommendation 18-13 and Recommendation 17-09 replaced by 18-12.
2 The recommendation mentions 'working days' however the TWG proposes calendar days given the possible inconsistency of what constitutes a working day across all CPCs.

- *Data access, data confidentiality, and reporting*

In parallel with the TWGs instruction to TRAGSA to develop the data extraction tools and the deliberations of the IMM working group from its meeting in April 2019, the TWG felt it appropriate for the PWG to review and consider any needed improvements to the annual reporting provisions of Rec [18-13] and other relevant measures, such as paragraph 1 of Rec. [06-13] on trade measures, to ensure data provided from the eBCD system are useful and meet the needs of the Commission. The TWG also discussed whether there should be a data extraction tool available to the public that allows aggregated catch, trade, and related data to be compiled and downloaded. The pros and cons of this idea were discussed, including that the data from eBCD system is not always straightforward so that if a publicly available data extraction tool were developed, explanations would need to be given with regard to interpreting the data.] The PWG may wish to consider the issue further.

In addition, it was agreed to proceed with development of a simplified Upload of excel file functionality (Ref. 2019-5) to facilitate the bulk load of catch data in the system rather than development of a full web service capability at this stage. The TWG noted that the requirement for connectivity and interoperability with CPC domestic systems was integral to the technical specifications of the original contract. Nonetheless, the TWG recognized that a number of different systems exist across CPCs each in accordance with their own requirements and built on varying structures/formats.   Given that, building a full web service functionality was not viewed as urgent although it was recognized as a potentially useful tool down the road.   The TWG discussed the original web service developed by TRASGA in 2017 but considered that it was inadequate in light of current needs.   In the future, a web service capacity could be developed within the eBCD system to allow various domestic data collection systems used by CPCs to seamlessly talk to the eBCD system for, among other things, the purpose of automatically creating catch events. Such a linkage would improve both the quality and timeliness of the information being entered into the eBCD system. It would also reduce costs for CPCs and the industry by eliminating manual data entry needs with respect to the eBCD system, which would, at the same time, eliminate the need to submit required data in multiple places.

The TWG, therefore, considered it timely for the PWG to consider the costs and benefits of as well as options for a more long-term approach for the eBCD system to interface with CPC domestic systems through a web service in addition to considering further interim options, if any.

Development of a white paper for the web service options available was suggested by the TWG as a means to facilitate future discussion. Such a document might include an overview of the current electronic domestic catch systems used by CPCs, options and benefits for web service integration—including data push and pull--and combined use of analytics.

- *Quota alerts for traps*

One TWG member noted that when the individual quota of a trap is modified, the eBCD generated previously still indicated the original individual trap quota value.   TRAGSA noted that a change to the system would be needed to address this as the system currently only displays the amended value in new eBCD sections in accordance with the change-log system requirements (and not in the 'catch information' section).

The TWG noted that it is currently not a requirement under Rec. [18-02] for traps to be assigned individual quotas. Nonetheless, the TWG felt the PWG could reflect on whether or not the system should be altered to reflect the current management practices of the trap CPC concerned and permit indicating the updated quotas of traps in relevant eBCDs.

- Other technical matters

The TWG again discussed the longstanding issue of building logic checks into the system regarding product transformations to help avoid data entry errors.   For instance, the system should not allow a bluefin tuna loin to transform back into a gilled and gutted fish or a frozen bluefin tuna product to become fresh.   The TWG agreed to review the current listing of plausible product transformations posted on the share point and provide feedback to the Secretariat so that revisions to the eBCD system can be undertaken.

4.   TRAGSA contractual state of play and financial aspects

The prioritization of development work throughout 2019 has facilitated new developments to the system in accordance with ICCAT conservation and management measures, available financial resources, and the procedures adopted by the Commission in the 2018 Annual Meeting.

It was the view of the group, that regardless of the decision of the Commission on the way forward in relation to the Secretariat's Draft eBCD Budget Proposal for 2020-2021 (Circular ≠6523/2019), the contract with TRAGSA will need to be extended from March 2020 to allow for smooth continuation of ongoing development work, system hosting, and user support.

It was noted that, apart from the financing options outlined in the draft budget, other approaches were available to the Commission if it wished to begin to bring eBCD system IT expertise in house and phase out reliance on TRAGSA such as by spreading out the hiring of IT experts over more than two years.   The Commission could also decide to continue to contract TRAGSA for only some rather than all of the services currently provided. These services could be broken down into user support, data base maintenance and data base development segments. Finally, the Commission could decide to continue the current arrangement with TRAGSA.

The TWG noted that consideration needs to be given to whether or not bringing IT expertise in house will result in adequate cost savings and other benefits over the long-term. The TWG discussed this issue with the Secretariat and suggested a cost/benefit analysis of bringing the needed IT capacity into the Secretariat.