

**Report of the First Meeting of the Virtual Working Group
on Review of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission (VWG-RRP)**
(Online, 4 June 2024)

1. Opening of the Meeting

Mr Ernesto Penas, Commission Chair, opened the first meeting of the Virtual Working Group on review of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission (VWG-RRP) (the Group) on 4 June 2024, which was held online from 11 a.m. to 15:30 p.m. The meeting was attended by 35 delegates from 18 CPCs. The participants' list is attached as **Appendix 2**.

2. Nomination of Rapporteur

The ICCAT Secretariat served as Rapporteur.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

In his opening remarks, the Chair welcomed the participants and began by recalling the context resulting from the November 2023 Commission meeting, where it was suggested that the need to develop clear and transparent guidelines with a formal written process for the election of Officers before the next annual meeting in 2025 became evident.

The Chair also recalled the last conclusions of the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on review of Rules of Procedure of the Commission (VWG-RRP), held in 2022, as regards the process for the election of the Commission Chair and Vice Chairs. Furthermore, he also reported that the Group should make progress in clarifying the nomination and election procedure of Commission Officers, including consideration of whether the election of Panel Chairs should be on a CPC-based or on a personal basis (*intuitu personae*), and the possibility of electing Vice Chairs for subsidiary bodies.

Following this introduction, some CPCs requested further clarification as to whether the points to be discussed would only relate to the Commission Chair and Vice Chairs, or whether they should be extended to all Commission Officer positions. These CPCs stated that the Commission should follow the same procedures and criteria for the election of all Officer positions. The Chair stated that he was willing to extend the discussions to all Officers and the Agenda (attached as **Appendix 1**) was adopted with that understanding.

4. Procedure for election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair (Rule 6) and consideration of the possibility of electing Vice Chairs for subsidiary bodies (Rules 12 and 13)

The election of the Chair and Vice Chairs, as well as the possibility of electing Vice Chairs at the subsidiary body level, were subject to extensive discussions at the same time.

As a first question for discussion, the Chair asked whether the Rules of Procedure and usual practices for the election of the Chair and Vice Chair were satisfactory to date and, if not, what should be changed. This point was discussed extensively. Members of the Group expressed a number of views, noting that the current criteria for elections were very generic, hence the need to make them more specific through an inclusive and transparent process, also taking into account geographical and gender balance and candidates' experience.

In the same search for clarity, some CPCs insisted that there should be a process that is carried out in writing so as to avoid problems of interpretation of the Rules of Procedure. In addition to personal merit, the importance of fair and balanced representation for both large and small delegations was also stressed.

The Group maintained a long discussion took place on how to gain experience in order to have access to the position of Chair or Vice Chair. Some CPCs shared their views that a possibility could be to start as a Rapporteur, which would help to gain experience in order to be eligible for the position of Vice Chair and later the position of Chair, as long as geographical and gender balance, among other factors, were respected. Other CPCs, indicated however, that experience as a Rapporteur should not be binding as different expertise are acquired.

While recalling the financial implications for nationals of developing countries, some participants underlined that the consideration of Vice Chairs in the different subsidiary bodies would extend the possibilities to better address the issues of geographical and gender balance, as well as the basis of experience. Furthermore, recognising the value of rotation in Officer positions, it was reiterated that succession should not be seen as a condition, but as a mechanism to foster and gain experience.

Most of the Group agreed that both experience and the criteria of balance and fairness were required for the election of Chairs and Vice Chairs.

Some members pointed out that establishing Vice Chairs for all subsidiary bodies could lead to very long election times at the annual meeting.

Some members also sought clarification on the role of Vice Chairs, in particular for those subsidiary bodies for which they had been elected, even suggesting that this role could include a certain level of task-sharing under the supervision of the Chair as part of a joint working arrangement.

After several discussions, the Group was of the opinion that the election of the Vice Chairs of subsidiary bodies should be left to the discretion of each body, unless otherwise decided by the Commission. This option would allow individuals to gain experience and increase the number of candidates for the position of Chair.

The issue of a CPC not being represented in more than one body was raised, however this point was not discussed further.

5. Determination of Panel Chairs – Contracting Party versus personal nomination (Rule 12.3)

Several opinions were given regarding discussions on the election of representatives on the basis of CPCs or on a personal basis (*intuitu personae*), but the personal basis option seemed to prevail. Some CPCs indicated that they could accept both options.

Regarding the question of whether Panel Chairs should be elected at the Contracting Party level or at the personal level, the Group's general idea was that it should be done at the personal level, always taking into account geographical balance.

6. Consideration of limiting term of office for Chairs [and Vice-Chairs] of subsidiary bodies (Rules 12 and 13, considering Rule 6)

Regarding the option of limiting the term of office for Chairs and Vice Chairs, the majority of the members who spoke were in favour of maintaining the flexibility of the current rule for the duration of the term, but guaranteeing rotation. One CPC indicated that it is not necessary to limit the term of office for all positions, and expressed its opposition. However, this CPC offered flexibility by specifying that an exception would be necessary if it were decided to limit position terms, and that the choice would be left to the discretion of each body, unless the Commission decided otherwise.

Other CPCs were of the opinion that rotation would offer the possibility of changing positions after gaining a better understanding of the functioning of the Commission. Some CPCs indicated that they did not have a clear opinion at this stage, noting that they wanted to study the issue further.

Other CPCs pointed out that limiting the term of office could provide more opportunities to encourage new candidates and, consequently, rotation.

7. Other matters

The Group also addressed the problem of finding rapporteurs to cover ICCAT's needs and particularly for developing CPCs. It was proposed to address the issue by establishing alternatives that do not add additional costs to the budget or mobilise the ICCAT Secretariat's human resources. One CPC proposed using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to remedy the lack of volunteers to carry out this task. Regarding this point, the ICCAT Secretariat reported that it had already started testing the effectiveness of AI in the context of meetings, and that this work would continue. Another CPC noted the challenge faced by small delegations in developing countries in terms of financial support from the Meeting Participation fund (MPF), as well as the frequent changes in administrations. This challenge limits their ability to propose rapporteurs for meetings.

In relation to rapporteurs and their link to the Vice Chair, it was proposed that the group Vice Chairs could act as rapporteurs. However, there was no consensus on this issue and it was indicated that this should be discussed on another occasion.

8. Adjournment and adoption of Report

With a view to adopting clearer and more consensual rules at the next annual meeting, by way of a roadmap, the Group agreed that the Chair would present a working document based on the VWG-RRP elements presented to the Commission in 2022, with the suggestions made at this meeting, which will be circulated to members for their consideration.

In light of the comments on this document, the Chair indicated that if further work were required due to lack of consensus, these issues would be addressed at a future meeting to allow for the development of a consolidated proposal. In his final summary, the Chair indicated that he would develop a document for a mandate proposal to be submitted to STACFAD, trying to incorporate, as far as possible, the elements and suggestions made at this meeting regarding the methodology for the election of Chairs and Vice Chairs. He noted that the text would be reviewed at least 60 days before the annual meeting and presented to the Commission for consideration.

The Chair thanked all participants for their extremely useful and constructive contributions and closed the meeting.

It was agreed that the report would be adopted by correspondence.

Agenda

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2. Nomination of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda
4. Procedure for Election of Commission Chair and Vice-Chairs (Rule 6) and consideration of the possibility of electing Vice-Chairs for subsidiary bodies (Rules 12 and 13)
5. Determination of Panel Chairs – Contracting Party versus personal nomination (Rule 12.3)
6. Consideration of limiting term of office for Chairs [and Vice-Chairs] of subsidiary bodies (Rules 12 and 13, considering Rule 6)
7. Other matters
8. Adjournment and adoption of Report

List of Participants^{*1}

CONTRACTING PARTIES

ALGERIA

Ouchelli, Amar *

Sous-directeur de la Grande Pêche et de la Pêche Spécialisée, Ministère de la pêche et des productions halieutiques, Route des quatre canons, 16000 Alger
Tel: +213 550 386 938, Fax: +213 234 95597, E-Mail: amarouchelli.dz@gmail.com; amar.ouchelli@mpeche.gov.dz

BELIZE

Robinson, Robert

Deputy Director for High Seas Fisheries, Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize, Keystone Building, Suite 501, 304 Newtown Barracks, Belize City
Tel: +501 223 4918, Fax: +501 223 5087, E-Mail: deputydirector@bhsfu.gov.bz; robert.robinson@bhsfu.gov.bz

BRAZIL

Bispo Oliveira, André Luiz ¹

International Negotiations Coordinator, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture, International Advisory, 702974-00 Brasilia DF

CANADA

Cossette, Frédéric

Policy Advisor, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 200 Kent St., Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E6
Tel: +1 343 541 6921, E-Mail: frederic.cossette@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

EGYPT

Nasr, Marwa Abdelfatah

Tel: +20 111 500 1400, E-Mail: marwanasr899@gmail.com

Shawky, Doaa Hafez

International Agreements Specialist, Foreign Affairs Specialist, 210, area B - City, 5th District Road 90, 11311 New Cairo
Tel: +201 017 774 198, Fax: +202 281 117 007, E-Mail: doaahafezshawky@gmail.com; doaahafezshawky@yahoo.com; gafrd_eg@hotmail.com

EUROPEAN UNION

Billiet, Stijn *

Head of EU Unit, European Commission, DG Mare B 2, Rue Joseph II - 99, 1049 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 229 57641, E-Mail: stijn.billiet@ec.europa.eu

De Bleeker, Eva

DG MARE, Rue Joseph II, 99 - 03/003, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 299 97514, E-Mail: eva.de-bleeker@ec.europa.eu
Tel: +32 299 97514, E-Mail: eva.de-bleeker@ec.europa.eu

GUATEMALA

Martínez Valladares, Carlos Eduardo

Encargado del Departamento de Pesca Marítima, Kilómetro 22, Ruta al Pacifico, Edificio la Ceiba 3er Nivel, 01064 Bárcena, Villa Nueva
Tel: +502 452 50059, E-Mail: carlosmartinez41331@gmail.com

Chavarría Valverde, Bernal Alberto

Asesor en Gestión y Política pesquera Internacional, DIPESCA, Bárcena
Tel: +506 882 24709, Fax: +506 2232 4651, E-Mail: bchavarría@lsg-cr.com

JAPAN

Kawano, Masataka

Technical Official, Fisheries Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, International Affairs Division, Tokyo Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku 100-8907
Tel: +81 335 028 460, Fax: +81 335 042 649, E-Mail: masataka_kawano320@maff.go.jp

* Head Delegate.

¹ Some delegate contact details have not been included following their request for data protection.

Kawashima, Tetsuya

Counsellor, Resources Management Department, Fisheries Agency of Japan, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907
Tel: +81 335 028 460, E-Mail: tetsuya_kawashima610@maff.go.jp

MEXICO

Soler Benítez, Bertha Alicia ¹

Comisión Nacional de Acuacultura y pesca (CONAPESCA), 82100 Mazatlán, Sinaloa

MOROCCO

El Aroussi, Mohamed Yassine

Chef de la Division de la Coopération à la Direction de la Stratégie et de la Coopération, Ministère de l'Agriculture, de la Pêche Maritime, du Développement Rural et des Eaux et Forêts, P.O. Box 476 Quartier Administratif, Rabat, Agdal
Tel: +212 660 112 878, E-Mail: elaroussi@mpm.gov.ma

Haoujar, Bouchra

Cheffe de Service des Espèces Marines Migratrices et des Espaces Protégés, Département de la Pêche Maritime, Nouveau Quartier Administratif, BP 476, 10150 Haut Agdal, Rabat
Tel: +212 253 768 8115, Fax: +212 537 688 089, E-Mail: haoujar@mpm.gov.ma

Hassouni, Fatima Zohra

Chef de la Division de Durabilité et d'Aménagement des Ressources Halieutiques, Département de la Pêche maritime, Nouveau Quartier Administratif, B.P.: 476, 10150 Haut Agdal Rabat
Tel: +212 537 688 122/21, Fax: +212 537 688 089, E-Mail: hassouni@mpm.gov.ma

NICARAGUA

Guevara Quintana, Julio César

Comisionado CIAT - Biólogo, INPESCA, Reparto Villa Fontana, de semáforos de Club Terraza, 4 c. Oeste, 1 c. al Sur, 14174 Managua
Tel: +505 875 88114; +507 699 75100, E-Mail: juliocgq@hotmail.com; jguevara@inpesca.gob.ni

NORWAY

Sørdahl, Elisabeth * ¹

Senior Adviser, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Department for Fisheries, 0032 Oslo

Mjorlund, Rune ¹

Senior Adviser, Directorate of Fisheries, Department of Coastal Management, Environment and Statistics, 5804 Bergen

Munch-Ellingsen, Sofie

Higher Executive Officer, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Department for Fisheries, Kongens gate 8, 0153, (P.O. Box 8090 Dep), 0032 Oslo
Tel: +47 950 05084, E-Mail: sofie.munch-ellingsen@nfd.dep.no

SENEGAL

Diouf, Ibrahima

Ingénieur des Pêches, Direction des Pêches Maritimes, Chef de la Division de la pêche industrielle, Diamniadio, Sphère ministérielle Ousmane Tanor DIENG, Immeuble D, 2e étage, BP 289 Dakar
Tel: +221 541 4764, Fax: +221 338 602 465, E-Mail: ivesdiouf@gmail.com

Kane Dème, Fatimata

Juriste, Direction des Pêches maritimes / Ministère des Pêches et de l'Economie maritime, Chef du Bureau Législation et Suivi des Accords, Diamniadio, Sphère ministérielle Ousmane Tanor DIENG, Immeuble D, 2e étage, BP 289 Dakar
Tel: +221 77 524 7232, Fax: +221 33 849 9883, E-Mail: fakanano@gmail.com; kanmetou@yahoo.fr

Sèye, Mamadou

Ingénieur des Pêches, Chef de la Division Gestion et Aménagement des Pêcheries de la Direction des Pêches maritimes, Sphère ministérielle de Diamniadio Bâtiment D., 1, Rue Joris, Place du Tirailleur, 289 Dakar
Tel: +221 77 841 83 94, Fax: +221 821 47 58, E-Mail: mdseye@gmail.com; mdseye1@gmail.com; mdouseye@yahoo.fr

Talla, Marième Diagne

Conseiller juridique du Ministère des Pêches et de l'Économie Maritime, Sphères Ministérielles Diamniadio Bâtiment D, Diamniadio, Sphère ministérielle Ousmane Tanor DIENG, Immeuble D, 2e étage, Dakar
Tel: +221 772 700 886, Fax: +221 338 498 440, E-Mail: masodiagne@yahoo.fr

TUNISIA

Cheikhsboui, Ali *

Directeur Général de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture - DGPA, Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Hydrauliques et de la Pêche, Direction Générale de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture, 30 Rue Alain Savary, 1002 Tunis
Tel: +216 71 892 253, E-Mail: bft@iresa.agrinet.tn

Jouini, Zied

Chef de service, Ministre de l'agriculture et des ressources hydrauliques et de la pêche, Direction Générale de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture, 32, Rue Alain Savary - Le Belvédère, 1004 Tunis
Tel: +216 21 221 180, E-Mail: zied_jouini@hotmail.fr

TÜRKIYE

Elekon, Hasan Alper

Senior Fisheries Officer, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Üniversiteler Mah. Dumlupınar Bulvarı, No: 161 / 1-3, 06800 Lodumlu, Ankara
Tel: +90 312 258 30 76, Fax: +90 312 258 30 75, E-Mail: hasanalper.elekon@tarimorman.gov.tr; hasanalper@gmail.com

Topçu, Burcu Bilgin

Senior Fisheries Officer, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Üniversiteler Mah. Dumlupınar Bulvarı, No: 161 / 1-6, 06800 Lodumlu, Ankara
Tel: +90 532 207 0632; +90 312 258 3077, Fax: +90 312 258 30 39, E-Mail: burcu.bilgin@tarimorman.gov.tr; bilginburcu@gmail.com

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Owen, Marc

Team Lead, International Fisheries, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra, First Floor, Seacole Wing, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF
Tel: +44 755 732 5524, E-Mail: marc.owen@defra.gov.uk

Peel, Michael

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - DEFRA, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF
Tel: +44 798 418 9608, E-Mail: michael.peel@defra.gov.uk

UNITED STATES

King, Melanie Diamond

Foreign Affairs Specialist, Office of International Affairs Trade, and Commerce (F/IATC), NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring Maryland 20910
Tel: +1 301 427 3087, E-Mail: melanie.king@noaa.gov

Baker, Colleen

Foreign Affairs Officer, Office of Marine Conservation (OES/OMC), Department of State, Washington DC 20520
Tel: +1 609 206 9830; +1 202 538 1070, E-Mail: bakerca2@fan.gov

Campbell, Derek

Attorney-Advisor International Section, Office of General Counsel - International Law, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W. HCHB Room 48026, Washington, D.C. 20230
Tel: +1 202 482 0031, Fax: +1 202 371 0926, E-Mail: derek.campbell@noaa.gov

VENEZUELA

Leiva, Rony

Viceministro de Producción Primaria Pesquera y Acuícola, Analista de la Gerencia de Ordenación Pesquera
E-Mail: vicepropesca2@gmail.com; ronyleivamartinez@gmail.com

Padrón Vega, Johan Alejandro

Ministerio del Poder Popular de Pesca y Acuicultura, Dirección General de Pesca Industrial, Torre Este. Piso 17. Oficina de Integración y Asuntos Internacionales. Parque Central, 1040 Caracas
E-Mail: hawkergenius@gmail.com; dgpi.minpesca@gmail.com

OBSERVERS FROM COOPERATING NON-CONTRACTING PARTIES, ENTITIES, FISHING ENTITIES

BOLIVIA

Cortez Franco, Limbert Ismael

Jefe de Unidad, Unidad Boliviana de Pesca Marítima (UBPM), Calle 20 de Octubre 2502, esq. Pedro Salazar, La Paz
Tel: +591 6 700 9787, Fax: +591 2 291 4069, E-Mail: limbert.cortez@protonmail.ch; limbert.cortez@mindef.gob.bo;
licor779704@gmail.com

Alsina Lagos, Hugo Andrés

Asesor, Unidad Boliviana de Pesca Marítima (UBPM), Ministerio de Defensa, Calle 20 de octubre 2502, esq. Pedro Salazar, La Paz
Tel: +1 321 200 0069, Fax: +507 830 1708, E-Mail: hugo@alsina-et-al.org

CHINESE TAIPEI

Chou, Shih-Chin

Section Chief, Deep Sea Fisheries Division, Fisheries Agency, 8F, No. 100, Sec. 2, Heping W. Rd., Zhongzheng Dist., 10060
Tel: +886 2 2383 5915, Fax: +886 2 2332 7395, E-Mail: chou1967sc@gmail.com; shihcin@ms1.f.gov.tw

Kao, Shih-Ming

Professor, Graduate Institute of Marine Affairs, National Sun Yat-sen University, 70 Lien-Hai Road, 80424 Kaohsiung City
Tel: +886 7 525 2000 Ext. 5305, Fax: +886 7 525 6205, E-Mail: kaosm@mail.nsysu.edu.tw

Wang, Jane Pei-Chen

Acting Section Chief, Agriculture, Fisheries and Economic Organizations Section, Department of International Organizations, No.2 Ketagalan Blvd.
Tel: +886 2 2348 2526, Fax: +886 2 2361 7694, E-Mail: pcwang@mofa.gov.tw

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

COMMISSION CHAIRMAN

Penas Lado, Ernesto

ICCAT Chairman, Union européenne - D.G. Affaires Maritimes et de la Pêche, 200, Rue de la Loi - J-99 (3/44), B-1046 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +34 662 027 106, E-Mail: ernestopenas@gmail.com

STACFAD CHAIR

Warner-Kramer, Deirdre

Deputy Director, Office of Marine Conservation (OES/OMC), U.S. Department of State, 2201 C Street, NW (Room 2758), Washington, D.C. 20520-7878, United States
Tel: +1 202 647 2883, E-Mail: warner-kramerdm@fan.gov

ICCAT Secretariat

C/ Corazón de María 8 – 6th floor, 28002 Madrid – Spain
Tel: +34 91 416 56 00; Fax: +34 91 415 26 12; E-mail: info@iccat.int

Manel, Camille Jean Pierre

Bonacasa, María

Cheatle, Jenny

Mayor, Carlos

Martín, África

Martínez Guijarro, Ana Isabel

ICCAT INTERPRETERS

Baena Jiménez, Eva J.

Calmels, Ellie

Díez Pardo, Laura

Gelb Cohen, Beth

González, Fernando

Pinzon, Aurélie