

**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

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