

Development of a new SCRS Science Strategic Plan *(Discussion paper submitted by the United Kingdom)*

Introduction

2024 marks ten years since the adoption of the SCRS Science Strategic Plan for 2015–2020. The UK submits this paper to highlight the importance of work underway to develop a new Science Strategic Plan to guide the work of the SCRS for the next five years, and in particular to highlight the importance of dialogue between the SCRS and the Commission during the development of the Plan.

In our view, the 2024 Commission meeting presents the ideal opportunity for the Commission to engage with this work and provide any input, and for the Commission and the SCRS to agree appropriate timings and mechanisms for ongoing dialogue.

We have also made some further suggestions in this paper, which are, in summary:

- that prioritisation and efficiency should be crosscutting themes for the new Plan;
- that we may need to consider external support to aid the Plan's development; and
- that the new Plan should be subject to regular review against agreed objectives to monitor progress and, where necessary, make adjustments to the Plan and its implementation.

As we hope is clear from the above, we are not suggesting the Commission tell the SCRS how to conduct its scientific work, but clearly on issues of strategic focus, ways of working and resourcing/capacity, the Commission has relevant input and support to provide.

Finally, we express our appreciation to the SCRS Chair for the good progress already made on the development of the new Plan. This progress is outlined in the [2023 SCRS Meeting Report](#), [2024 SCRS Workshop Report](#) in March and most recently the SCRS Meeting in September 2024, where an updated SCRS Science Strategic Plan 2025-2030 was developed ([Report of the SCRS, Appendix 11](#)). The information contained in these Reports forms a good basis for SCRS-Commission dialogue.

SCRS-Commission dialogue on the new Science Strategic Plan

As noted above, ongoing dialogue between the SCRS and the Commission will be essential in developing the new Plan. The 2024 Commission meeting provides an ideal opportunity to resume that dialogue, and for the Commission to provide its views to help inform the next stages.

We note that at its Workshop in March 2024, the SCRS completed a very useful review of the 2015-2020 Plan, and on this basis has developed proposed changes/updates to include in the new Plan. We would suggest that the Commission's views on these elements, but also on any new elements to include (e.g., reflecting an increased focus on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) or Climate Change) could form an important part of the discussion. Equally, the Commission may wish to provide views on the proposed move to a 'living' document based around 6-year research plans for each SCRS Group and incorporating regular reviews and adjustments of the Plan. The UK would certainly welcome this sort of approach.

Finally, we note that 'Dialogue with the Commission' features in the roadmap as 'To be determined'. The SCRS and Commission should discuss this at the 24th Special Meeting of the Commission in 2024 to decide on the best approach to ongoing dialogue.

Potential crosscutting themes for the new Science Strategic Plan

The UK notes that the objectives that featured in the previous Science Strategic Plan will be updated and incorporated into the new Plan as appropriate. We would like to suggest two additional 'crosscutting' themes for the new Plan and would welcome discussion on these at the Commission meeting:

- Firstly, we suggest that efforts are made to better prioritise the work of the SCRS and its subsidiary bodies. The current workload of the SCRS is unsustainable and should be better balanced with available resource/capacity. At the same time, it is not clear to us that all work currently underway within the SCRS is sufficiently focussed on addressing priorities identified by the Commission. Our suggestion, therefore, would be for a comprehensive review, over the period of the Plan, of all live workstreams, Terms of Reference, and future priorities of the SCRS and its subsidiary groups/bodies, with input and support from the Commission.
- Secondly, we suggest that efforts are made to review ways of working and processes, with the aim of increasing efficiencies and reducing resource pressures. From our perspective, current processes for agreeing Commission requests to the SCRS and receiving SCRS responses can feel cumbersome and slow, which can in turn exacerbate the workload of the SCRS. To address this, the new Science Strategic Plan could include and evaluate novel ways for the SCRS to support the Commission, for example, more agile, iterative and responsive SCRS-Commission dialogue in responding to Commission requests or exploring how knowledge and expertise from the wider scientific community can more efficiently inform the formulation of SCRS advice to the Commission.

Resourcing the development of the new Science Strategic Plan

While development of the new Science Strategic Plan has been an objective over the past two years, we understand that little progress has been made, and yet the aim is to finalise and agree the Plan in 2025. The UK questions how feasible that is given the already-heavy SCRS workload. As such, it may be worth considering whether any other work could be delayed to prioritise the development of the Plan, whether an alternative schedule for its completion would be preferable, or whether we could benefit from utilising an external developer or facilitator, as was discussed by the SCRS in 2023.

Monitoring implementation of the new Science Strategic Plan

Whilst an ex-post review of the previous Science Strategic Plan has been carried out, the UK welcomes the more 'proactive' approach proposed by the SCRS Chair at the March 2024 SCRS Workshop. Namely, that elements of the new Plan could be 'living', subject to regular review against identified and measurable targets and objectives, and updated or adjusted as necessary to reflect changing priorities or circumstances that affect progress. As an additional suggestion, such targets and objectives could be agreed via SCRS-Commission dialogue and the Commission could play a role in their review.

Conclusion and next steps

The development of a new SCRS Science Strategic Plan is a priority for ICCAT and something the UK fully supports. In addition to its scientific content, we think it provides a real opportunity to focus on prioritisation and efficiency, to aid the SCRS in its work supporting the Commission, and hopefully agree a work programme more commensurate to available resource/capacity. In our view the Commission can play an important role in supporting the SCRS in developing the new Plan, but only if there is sufficient and timely dialogue and discussion. The 2024 Commission meeting is an ideal opportunity to pursue this dialogue. We hope that our suggestions are well received and look forward to contributing constructively to this important work.