

**Report of the meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a
Sustainable Financial position for ICCAT (VWG-SF)**
(online, 26 June 2024)

1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Administration (STACFAD), Ms. Deirdre Warner-Kramer, opened the Meeting of the Virtual Working Group on a Sustainable Financial Position for ICCAT (VWG-SF) (the “Group”) which was held online, on 26 June 2024, from 12:00 to 17:00. The meeting was attended by 26 members from 15 CPCs.

2. Introduction of participants

The Chair of STACFAD welcomed all the participants. She briefly explained how to use the online meeting platform, the meeting schedule and the location of the documents. The Agenda was adopted without any changes and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The List of participants is attached as **Appendix 2**.

3. Discussion of options and proposals for key issues

The VWG-SF took up each of the issues the Commission had referred to it, guided by the Chair’s paper containing additional background and discussions questions (**Appendix 3**).

a) Format and content of the annual budget presentation

Participants discussed what additional budgetary information or changes to the budget presentation and explanatory statements that CPCs would like to see.

One CPC raised the need for the budget to reflect the strategic priorities of the organization. They also commented that an annual budget must include all the inflows and outflows of funds of the organisation. They gave the example of the overall research budget and commented that funding for its activities was allocated from both the regular budget and other funds, which prevents understanding about what was actually spent on these activities. The CPC also explained that it would be good to have an overview of how these funds have evolved over the years for greater transparency. As regards the budget presentation, the CPC indicated that in the case of the most significant increases, the explanatory notes must provide more detail and be linked to the decision that supports these increases. They further commented that for all other items, it may not be appropriate to simply apply an across-the-board percentage increase, such as 5%, which does not reflect information on actual projected costs and in some cases would lead to overspending. They also suggested that in the long term, the Commission should consider moving to adopt an annual budget, rather than biennial.

Other CPCs noted that in general they had no major concerns on the budget presentation, finding it satisfactory overall, but agreed that the level of detail presented on certain items could be improved. In particular, the VWG requested more detail in the explanatory notes for items that were significantly higher or lower than previous budgets. The VWG also requested more transparency in the research budget line and noted the importance of the SCRS providing their priority request for research activities earlier in advance of the annual meeting along with a more detailed estimate of actual costs involved. The VWG agreed that more information on research activities. They also considered that a contingency fund could be developed due to arrears - which remain an important issue and concern for the Commission - but with detailed information on how it will be used.

In addition, the Chair indicated that although the Convention mandates the adoption of a biennial budget at each Regular Meeting, the Commission can determine the timing of this process as appropriate, for instance at each Regular Meeting adopting the first year of the biennial budget and only provisionally adopting the second year, which would need to be reviewed and formally adopted at each successive Special Meeting.

b) Annual meeting costs

Participants considered options to reduce the cost of holding annual meetings borne by both the Commission and the hosting CPC, including possibilities to identify additional sources of funding for these meetings.

CPCs were open to options that could reduce the size of the meeting room needed, which could lower the venue costs for the annual meeting. Options discussed included reducing the number of participants per delegation at the Commission meeting, or at least having a limited number per delegation in the Plenary room and allowing additional participants to listen from a second room. For the second option, some CPCs noted that the requirement to have two meeting rooms might not result in much cost savings. CPCs were also open to options to restructure the seating arrangements to enable fitting the meeting into a smaller room, including reducing the number of seats at the main table per delegation from three to two, or arranging tables “school style” rather than in ICCAT’s customary “U” shape.

Delegations noted that shorter meetings would likely save costs, but there was no consensus on how that could be achieved. CPCs did not support holding some subsidiary body sessions in parallel during the annual meeting, as that would disrupt the smooth running of that meeting and would be quite difficult for small delegations. At the same time, CPCs were open to options for some subsidiary bodies such as STACFAD or the Compliance Committee to do some of their work in advance via correspondence, which could help reduce the time needed at the annual meeting.

There was no consensus to eliminate the practice of providing lunch during the annual meeting, but some members proposed to have lighter lunches, taking into account that in some places, there are not many eating options.

The VWG supported looking into other sources of financing, such as seeking sponsors, raising the participation fee for observers attending in person, or establishing a voluntary contribution fund to support annual meetings.

CPCs strongly supported identifying the venue earlier in advance, e.g. two years in advance, in order to save as much as possible on the budget in terms of possibility to negotiate better prices and to give countries sufficient time to prepare. In this regard, it was intended to compile a list of countries offering to host the meeting, and the terms of reference for organisation of the meeting would be shared with CPCs so that they would know what was involved in hosting. There was general support for lowering the rank of meeting venue while providing the necessary facilities.

The Group expressed interest in knowing the costs of recent annual meetings to better understand which items are most expensive and see where there are possibilities of cost reduction, and the level of coverage by the host country. This information is attached as **Appendix 4**.

c) Intersessional meetings

The VWG agreed that the number of intersessional meetings is a concern, as they increase the workload on the Secretariat and on the CPCs, as well as the meeting costs.

CPCs requested additional information on the cost of intersessional meetings in order to look into potential adjustments to reduce costs, including the expenses associated with in person, hybrid, and online meetings. This information is attached as **Appendix 4**.

The VWG agreed that there should be a multi-year plan set out for intersessional meetings and generally supported a limit for total number of days (or meetings, or total costs) for intersessional meetings each year, though some CPCs noted that developing a multi-year workplan prioritizing certain panels or activities would be more useful than setting a firm cap on meeting days. CPCs noted the benefit of learning from good practices in other organisations, including identifying specific windows spread throughout the year to hold intersessional meetings and working to hold meetings back-to-back where possible.

The VWG also noted that it was essential that the intersessional meeting schedule for the following year be circulated earlier at the annual meeting or even in advance, and that any proposal for intersessional work include a clear justification with specific goals and outputs. CPCs noted the current practice of reviewing this schedule only at the very end of the annual meeting was not effective. There was also a view that the timing of the intersessional meetings could be spread out as most meetings are in the spring or fall, which addresses the workload in a specific season. The VWG-SF also noted the view of fixing the time zone at Madrid time as a middle point, rather than rotating it.

d) Special Meeting Participation Fund

The Chair reminded members that the Secretariat had submitted a document suggesting guidelines to resolve a number of recurring problems in the processing of funding requests through the Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) (**Appendix 5**). CPCs discussed a number of other possible improvements to the MPF procedures based on practical experience.

On this point, one CPC suggested that funded participants be given the flexibility to leave from locations other than their home country, either because they are residing outside their home country due to academic or professional commitments or because they are attending another meeting in a different country prior to attending ICCAT meetings. It was also noted by several CPCs that the per diems should be disbursed at least fourteen days before the start date of the meeting in order to make bookings and arrange the logistics for attendance. Another CPC added that the idea that per diems could be paid into bank accounts other than in the country of origin should be considered.

One CPC asked whether it would be possible to increase the funded participation to two delegates per developing Contracting Party. There was also a question on how the trust funds that some CPCs have established with ICCAT work and how they were used to self-finance CPCs, and clarifications were given.

On repayment of per diems and ticket costs due cancellations for various reasons, one CPC expressed the view that in each and any event where a representative does not attend the relevant meeting and has received funds from ICCAT to cover per diems, it would be the obligation of the Contracting Party to repay the corresponding amount to ICCAT without delay. Regarding repayment to ICCAT of expenses incurred for the purchase of tickets that were not used by the designated person, a CPC considered that the airfare should be repaid to ICCAT except in cases of *force majeure*. The same CPC also raised the issue of cases where the member requesting funding for participation is unable to meet the nomination deadline, which prevents ICCAT from purchasing the travel tickets.

The Chair welcomed the discussion highlighting a number of technical points for procedural change. Several CPCs made proposals on the floor, that the Chair asked to send in writing. (**Appendix 6**)

e) Council

On this point, the Chair indicated that the VWG was tasked with looking at the financial implications of resumption of the Council; the broader decision on this matter needed to happen at the level of the Commission. CPCs noted that, if it could be possible to move to holding Commission meetings only every two years as originally set out in the Convention, reinstating the Council to facilitate the Commission's work in the intersessional period would likely result in significant cost savings. At the same time, CPCs also noted that if the Commission were to meet every two years, it may be necessary to extend the regular meeting to allow sufficient time for the subsidiary bodies. CPCs recognized that any cost savings from these actions would be in the longer term, and not likely to help the more immediate situation.

4. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed

The Chair informed that the discussions had been very useful and that she would make a summary and share it with the members. The Chair recalled that the Secretariat would provide additional information on the costs of meetings in recent years and the different implications of the various intersessional meetings. She requested VWG-SF members to submit in writing the proposals that had been discussed.

The Chair would work with the Group to consolidate these proposals into a summary document that will be submitted to the annual meeting. She informed that it would be useful to continue to compare the experiences of other RFMOs in organising meetings and presenting the budget.

Finally, in response to the Chair's question on the next steps, the Group agreed on a correspondence process for the consolidation of the document referred to above. As a result, there a was consensus to cancel the next meeting, which was originally scheduled for 15 July 2024.

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

Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Introduction of participants
3. Discussion of options and proposals for key issues
 - Format and content of the annual budget presentation
 - Annual meeting costs
 - Intersessional meetings
 - Special Meeting Participation Fund
 - Council
4. Next steps, including additional discussions as needed
5. Other matters
6. Conclusions and closure

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Additional background and discussion questions

This paper presents additional information related to each of the issues the Commission has referred to the VWG-SF for 2024. The questions and possible actions are provided to spark thought and discussion and are not intended to be exhaustive.

Reviewing the format and content of the presentation of the draft budget each year

The ICCAT Convention establishes that the Commission is to hold its “regular meeting” once every two years, and at that meeting adopt a budget “for the biennium following each regular meeting.” In practice, this means that we review and adopt a two-year budget at each regular meeting, but then consider any revisions or changes to the second year of that budget at each special meeting. The Secretariat prepares the draft budget, including a document detailing each chapter of the budget and any increases or decreases to the line items within, and circulates this to the CPCs at least 60 days prior to the start of the annual meeting.

- What additional budgetary information or changes to the presentation and explanatory statements would CPCs like to see?
 - Review examples and models from other RFMOs for the presentation of budget proposals.
 - Explore changes to format or readability of the information in the current explanatory statement.
 - Establish guidelines regarding where additional information or justification of changes are needed.
 - Consider possible changes to the financial regulations related to the timing or contents of the budget proposal.

Reducing the costs of the annual meeting for the Commission and for host CPCs

As was discussed at the last annual meeting, ICCAT’s annual meetings require an enormous amount of money. Total costs for in-person/hybrid Commission meetings have averaged between €800,000 and €1 million. This puts a significant burden on both the organization and on hosting CPCs, and it creates a barrier that prevents many CPCs from being able to serve as hosts. In addition, the size of the Commission and our traditional ways of organizing the plenary room mean that the Commission requires an unusually large meeting venue, which further limits options and increases costs. Alleviating this situation will require rethinking both the costs of meeting and the sources of funding.

- How can we reduce the overall costs of the annual meeting?
 - Expand the range of possible meeting venues by changing the arrangement of the meeting room or limiting the number of participants.
 - Lower food and beverage costs by setting guidelines for meeting locations including availability of local lunch options or reducing provided lunches.
 - Shorten the number of meeting days or have some sessions meet in parallel.
- Are there additional sources of funding to offset the costs?
 - Expand or adjust fees from participants.
 - Seek sponsorship or support from outside organizations.
- How can we lower the share of annual meeting costs that must be provided by the host CPC?
 - Regularize more of the meeting costs from the regular budget.
 - Establish a support fund from extrabudgetary contributions.
 - Allow more than one CPC to serve as host.

Alleviating the burden of intersessional meetings on CPCs, the SCRS and the Secretariat

ICCAT's intersessional workload has grown dramatically in recent years. It has also become common for ICCAT to hold multiple meetings of working groups, Panels, and SCRS bodies each month from February to July. Although many of these meetings are held online only or hybrid, this schedule puts heavy burdens on both the Secretariat who must prepare for and staff the meetings, and on CPC delegations who must ensure that often limited staff can cover many meetings throughout the year. These meetings also add to the budget, as even an online meeting incurs costs for interpretation, technical support, and additional staff time. The SCRS intersessional workload has been even heavier in recent years. Some of this relates to the specifics of the MSE process that ICCAT is implementing for many stocks. Undertaking an MSE and developing a full Management Procedure involves many meetings of scientists, and managers – separately and together – in the initial steps, though the workload is generally much lighter in the subsequent years after the MP is finalized. We can expect the current workload will therefore ease some on its own as ICCAT more routinely implements MPs for its stocks. Of course, ICCAT is not alone in wrestling with this increase in intersessional workload, and we can learn from how other RFMOs may be addressing it.

- How can we rationalize the number of intersessional Commission meetings needed in a given year?
 - Develop workplans for the Commission/Panels, and revise the SCRS workplan, that set a multi-year schedule for ongoing work across all stocks.
 - Establish a cap on the number of Commission related intersessional meetings in any given year.
 - Create a process for the Commission and the SCRS to discuss and identify clear priorities for each year in advance of, and at, the annual meeting, for example by having the Chairs of the Commission, SCRS, Panels, and subsidiary bodies coordinate more actively together on agendas.

- How can we make the intersessional process more efficient and predictable to balance the burden on the Secretariat and CPCs?
 - Circulate the draft meeting schedule early in the annual meeting to allow CPCs to assess the implications of new proposals or calls for work as they are negotiated.
 - Establish set “windows” in certain weeks/months through the year to be used for meetings as needed, to enable CPCs to better plan participation and build in down-time for the Secretariat in between meetings.
 - Combine intersessional meetings and/or limit the number of days for each.
 - Explore ways to advance more work via correspondence or other collaborative tools outside of meetings.
 - In light of the wide time zone distribution of ICCAT CPCs, consider a rotation to vary the timing for virtual meetings to share the burden of meetings outside of normal work hours.

Undertaking a comprehensive review of the “Rules of Procedure for the Administration of the Special Meeting Participation Fund”

Based on the work of the VWG-SF, ICCAT adopted revised terms of reference for the Special Meeting Participation Fund (MPF) and its associated rules of procedure in 2020, as Rec. 20-09 and 20-10 respectively. Last year, the Commission adopted small changes to Rec. 20-09 to shorten the deadlines for applications under fund in order to allow SCRS to schedule meetings earlier in the year. The MPF has been instrumental in increasing the participation of a wider range of CPCs in ICCAT's processes. At the same time, it requires a significant workload for the Secretariat to review applications and manage travel through the fund, and some CPCs have identified challenges they have faced under the current terms of reference and rules of procedure. ICCAT has asked the VWG-SF to undertake an additional review of the MPF to identify proposals that would improve the efficiency, utility, and sustainability of the fund.

- What are the main challenges the Secretariat is facing related to the administration of the MPF?
- What are the main impediments CPCs face to access support through the fund?
- What other challenges are limiting the ability of CPCs to participate in ICCAT meetings, both under the Commission and the SCRS?

Commission and Intersessional meeting expenses

1. Commission meetings

Breakdown of expenses. The portion managed by ICCAT, and the portion borne by the host country.

The expenses of the last 4 in-person/hybrid Commission meetings are detailed below:

<i>Expenses</i> <i>Commission meeting</i>	2018	2019	2022	2023
Preparation of Regular meeting	€7,461.21	€23,518.44	€2,595.42	€21,018.61
Secretariat				
Travel	€21,150.23	€3,484.24	€3,802.91	€21,594.91
Hotel	€13,281.42	€30,224.26	€25,645.00	€47,530.86
Per diems	€22,294.75	€25,879.38	€23,283.00	€38,022.68
Travel expenses	€2,462.30	€1,720.30	€890.80	€1,401.82
Overtime	€21,766.80	€18,948.91	€15,840.13	€16,893.50
Interpreters				
Fees	€50,435.62	€54,548.31	€54,426.00	€63,802.50
Travel	€3,683.51	€908.13	€1,541.75	€2,802.81
Hotel	€3,913.27	€7,662.93	€6,900.00	€10,124.92
Per diems	€6,480.80	€5,865.63	€6,208.80	€8,283.30
Arabic interpreters				
Fees	€19,358.00	€18,703.45	€21,180.00	€21,258.00
Travel	€1,832.19	€867.41	€1,050.00	€1,754.27
Hotel	€1,600.88	€3,134.84	€3,105.00	€3,656.22
Per diems	€2,655.06	€2,415.51	€2,793.96	€2,991.19
Material dispatch	€5,072.55	€940.77	€4,480.50	€3,852.23
Hotel venues				
Meetings and work rooms	€8,800.00	€188,784.37	€133,689.64	
Simultaneous interpretation	€21,300.00	€37,631.00	€11,400.01	
Coffee breaks/lunches	€230,653.91	€269,280.00	€233,100.00	
Cocktail party	€22,654.87	€16,298.60	€21,500.00	
Gala dinner	€44,662.08	€50,773.80		
Other: water, masks, furniture, agency	€22,473.00	€6,724.31	€15,195.24	
Audio/sound	€44,602.81	€196,381.79	€148,527.50	
Photocopiers	€14,831.93	€29,929.35	€21,121.00	
Internet/Wi-Fi	€53,660.00	€42,368.15	€22,977.84	
Equipment: servers, PCs, printers	€22,060.00	€56,872.30	€8,852.53	€1,030.70
Security/hostesses/agency	€25,640.00	€49,839.90	€71,032.59	
Total	€694,787.19	€1,143,706.08	€861,139.62	€266,018.52

Financing	2018	2019	2022	2023
ICCAT budget	€138,510.74	€163,200.00	€233,010.66	€238,314.62
Working Capital Fund	€19,358.00	€310,506.08	€28,128.96	€27,703.90
Financing host country	€536,918.45 ¹	€670,000.00 ¹	€600,000.00 ¹	
Total	€694,787.19	€1,143,706.08	€861,139.62	€266,018.52

¹ European Union funding.

Intersessional meetings

For intersessional meetings, the difference in budget is mainly due to whether the meeting is held at or outside the ICCAT headquarters.

Some examples of intersessional meetings that were held in 2024 are detailed below:

<i>Expenses Intersessional meetings</i>	<i>Porto (EMS-CDS-IMM) 5 days</i>	<i>Natal (PA1) 3 days</i>	<i>SCRS Workshop (Headquarters) 3 days</i>	<i>Yellowfin DP (Headquarters) 5 days</i>	<i>Panel 2 (Headquarters) 4 days</i>
Meeting preparation	€1,277.70	€6,334.49			
Secretariat					
Travel	€2,136.99	€31,603.98			
Hotel	€9,620.00	€5,712.85			
Per diems	€5,624.00	€2,196.47			
Transport expenses	€655.12	€526.60			
Interpreters					
Fees	€20,250.00	€19,890.00	€12,474.00	€26,570.78	€16,632.00
Travel	€2,046.92	€23,425.53			
Hotel	€6,660.00	€3,768.05			
Per diems	€4,049.28	€1,548.82			
Hotel venues					
Meetings and work rooms	€23,045.25				
Simultaneous interpretation	€8,944.70		€4,691.78	€6,340.10	€9,607.40
Coffee breaks/lunches	€5,750.00		€1,140.00	€1,402.50	€3,069.00
Cocktail party	€4,350.00				€2,670.00
Other: water, masks, furniture, etc.	€748.00				
Audio/sound	€26,543.40				
Equipment: servers, PCs, printers	€3,918.45				
Security/hostesses/agency	€12,584.57				
TOTAL	€138,204.38	€95,006.79	18.305,78 €	€34,313.38	€31,978.40

<i>Financing</i>	<i>Porto (EMS-CDS-IMM) 5 days</i>	<i>Natal (PA1) 3 days</i>	<i>SCRS Workshop (Headquarters) 3 days</i>	<i>Yellowfin DP (Headquarters) 5 days</i>	<i>Panel 2 (Headquarters) 4 days</i>
Working Capital Fund	€28,663.04	€95,006.79			€10,986.88
ICCAT Budget			€18,305.78	€34,313.38	
Contract EU	€109,541.34				€20,991.52
TOTAL	€138,204.38	€95,006.79	€18,305.78	€34,313.38	€31,978.40

Notes on the operational issues related to the implementation of the MPF
(prepared by the Secretariat)

This table summarizes, from the Secretariat's point of view, some of the main operational issues related to the implementation of the MPF, as well as suggestions to be discussed to further optimize and clarify the use of the MPF, which will facilitate the task of applicants and the Secretariat.

	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Proposed action</i>
1	Delays due to internal procedures at CP level for the authorization of CP participants.	The idea is to see how we can raise awareness among the concerned authorities, and if, for example, a general circular can be issued to draw their attention to the need to speed up authorizations.	Send a Circular to draw CPCs attention to the need to speed up authorizations.
2	Cancellation of travels by applicants after the tickets and per diem have been issued.	Applicants (CP?) to reimburse the flight ticket cost? Otherwise, it will be added to the CP's debt? Know the reason of the cancellation before? Specify in which case a reimbursement will not occur?	Reason(s) for cancellation shall always be provided to the Secretariat. Upon analysis by the Secretariat of the justifications, reimbursement to ICCAT of the ticket might not be requested. However, in all cases the per diem should be returned.
3	How long to wait for the completion of the final formalities (visa, internal authorization)?	Ref. 20-10 already establishes a deadline, however there are procedures that are not CP dependent (e.g., obtaining the visa). A second deadline to be set only for the visa?	We suggest countries hosting meetings to contact the visa sections of their Embassies to expedite the issuance of visas and/or for those individuals regularly applying to the MPF to request multi-entrance visas.
4	Transfer of per diem: some applicants have reported internal procedures with their bank that may delay the availability of funds transferred prior to travel.	The Secretariat to make the transfer of the per diem two weeks before the start of the meeting in those cases the whole process has been concluded, including obtaining the visa.	Once the ticket is issued, the Secretariat will proceed to prepare the per diem. However, if the trip is cancelled for any reason, the Secretariat shall be reimbursed for the per diem already transferred to the delegate's account. The reimbursement of the flight ticket is also considered.
5	Visa: a crucial issue for many participants. The Secretariat issues, upon request, an invitation, and a Note Verbale to facilitate the process. The rest of the procedure and its outcome do not depend on the Secretariat.	Ensure that CPs hosting meetings coordinate internally well in advance of the meeting with their Foreign Affairs authorities concerning visa issues. Continue to raise awareness among host countries of visa facilitation.	See status point 3 of this document.

6	Short validity of visas issued, which in some cases has generated problems, when it does not cover the period of back-to-back meetings.	Participants planning to attend more than one meeting should apply for financial support for these different meetings at the same time, so that the Secretariat can include these meetings in the Note Verbale and continue to raise awareness among the countries hosting these meetings.	Countries hosting meetings to contact the visa sections of their Embassies to expedite the issuance of visas and/or for those individuals regularly applying to the MPF to request multi-entrance visas.
7	Passports without enough months of validity	<p>Do not accept request from applicants whose passport validity is shorter than 6 months from the starting date of the meeting; remind this in the requirements/circulars.</p> <p>For Schengen, valid passport: original and photocopy of page(s) containing biometric data. The passport must be valid for at least three months after the date on which the applicant intends to leave the Schengen area and must contain at least two consecutive blank pages. Passports issued more than 10 years ago are not accepted.</p>	The Secretariat cannot proceed with the process until all documents required are provided by the applicant, with the exception of the visa (that is not controlled by the applicant). Therefore, renewing of passport that might be necessary shall be dealt with by the applicant well in advance of the deadline for requesting financial support.
8	Some bank accounts are not from the participants' country (this case is rare, but we have had similar requests some CPCs)	Applications will not to be accepted unless specifically authorized.	The bank details of the beneficiaries are generally received correctly. However, in some instances, the bank account provided does not belong to the beneficiary. Wire transfers to a country different from that of the applicant may only be authorized in exceptional and well-justified cases.
9	Repeated emails to send documents, generating delays and lack of timely responses from applicants resulting in an increasing number of e-mail exchanges requesting their replies.	Study and propose web-based tool to handle the applications. (that may generate some constraints at both levels (CP and Secretariat) that will need to be discussed)	The Secretariat proposes an economic itinerary (following the procedures) with the dates of the meeting. If a participant wishes to change the itinerary for any reason, they may purchase their own ticket. The Secretariat will reimburse the cost upon receipt of a copy of ticket and the corresponding invoice, up to a maximum value of the initial itinerary proposed by the Secretariat or deduct it from the per diem. If the ticket cost less than the initial proposal, only the actual ticket amount will be refunded.

10	<p>Delay/absence of responses from applicants at critical decision points to finalize the process; e.g., delay in confirming travel itinerary proposals (travel with the airlines and with the stopovers desired by the applicants).</p>	<p>Set deadlines for applicants to reply to the Secretariat's questions, including a very short deadline e.g., in cases linked to flight, train or bus itineraries (same day or maybe two days in case the person is not available for some reason).</p>	<p>See the previous point.</p>
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Proposed amendments from CPCs to the Meeting Participating Fund (MPF)

Comments from Guatemala

1. Regarding the return of wired per diem funds when the nominated participant does not attend to the meeting:

We support the idea that in any and all events when a representative does not attend the corresponding meeting and has received from ICCAT funds intended to cover per diem, it is the obligation of the CPC to return the corresponding amount to ICCAT without delay;

2. Regarding the reimbursement to ICCAT of expenses incurred in the purchase of tickets that were not used by the designated participant.

We also support the idea that, barring force majeure causes (beyond the reasonable control of CPC, such as health problems) that prevent the representative from participating and therefore traveling using the tickets purchased by ICCAT, CPC should refund ICCAT the value of the ticket. There may be reasonable circumstances where the reason for non-participation cannot be attributed to the responsibility of the traveller or the CPC and, in these cases, the risk of loss of money should be accepted by ICCAT. The ICCAT Secretariat may explore with the travel agency ways to address this risk, such as insurance coverage or others that should be consulted for discussion.

3. Regarding cases where the CPC requesting funding for participation is unable to meet the deadline for nomination which prevents ICCAT from purchasing tickets:

It is a fact, and cases have occurred when the authorization for a national official to travel abroad requires the completion of several time-consuming procedures. The Commission could consider adopting a rule whereby CPCs that have requested funding to participate in meetings and have communicated that they cannot guarantee meeting the deadlines for the final designation, the Commission could communicate the maximum amount that will be paid per air/train ticket, so that the CPC would be reimbursed if it attends. Of course, the CPC should pre-invest in the cost with the understanding that reimbursement cannot exceed the amount established by ICCAT and will occur in due course after the relevant meetings, following certification of the expenditure

Comments from South Africa

Flexibility in Travel Arrangements for Funded Participants

Departure Flexibility

Current Rule: Funded participants are required to depart directly from their country of origin.

Proposed Amendment: Funded participants shall be granted the flexibility to depart from locations other than their country of origin.

Rationale: This recognizes that delegates often attend multiple tuna RFMO meetings sequentially, necessitating direct travel from one meeting location to another. Additionally, it acknowledges that many delegates reside outside their country of origin due to academic or professional commitments. This flexibility is essential to avoid placing an undue and inequitable burden on developing CPCs, thereby ensuring fairness and justice.

Timing of Per Diem disbursement

Per Diem Disbursement Schedule

Current Rule: Per diems are disbursed seven days prior to the meeting start date.

Proposed Amendment: Per diems shall be disbursed at least fourteen days prior to the meeting start date.

Rationale: This change will enable funded participants to book accommodation early enough to take advantage of potential discounts and secure lodging closer to the meeting venue. Early booking will also alleviate logistical challenges, especially when meetings extend into late hours, ensuring participants can remain engaged and effective throughout the meeting.

Comments from UE

The EU requested that the funding through the MPF of participants to meetings be limited to nationals of the delegation they are representing. Moreover, the EU is not in favor to amend the rules related to the reimbursement of flights not originating in the country of origin of the CPC at stake.

We would like to thank you once again for the very fruitful meeting and are looking forward to working further in the Virtual Working Group on Sustainable Finance.