



February 22, 2021

TO: Secretariats of the:

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

FROM:

Dear Secretariats:

As leading organizations committed to the conservation of global tuna stocks and their ecosystems, we actively follow and engage with each of your Commissions. Therefore, we are aware of the difficult circumstances RFMOs faced in the past year due to the global pandemic.

The necessarily swift transition from regular operations to virtual meetings and offline processes was indeed a challenge and we commend your efforts in such difficult circumstances.

Given the reasonable expectation that at least some, if not all, RFMO meetings in 2021 will take place virtually, there is an opportunity to learn from the experiences of the past year to better optimize how to use virtual tools and processes to more effectively address critical tuna issues this year. Further, we understand that your Commissions have been seeking feedback on how to improve these processes in 2021, now that time allows for better planning.

With this in mind, the groups represented in this letter offer a number of suggestions below for your consideration. These suggestions are based on our experiences in participating in virtual RFMO meetings, discussions with member delegations, and on our own challenges in managing virtual meetings and processes across our own organizations.

We hope these ideas can be helpful to you. We commit to remaining actively engaged in virtual RFMO meetings and discussions in 2021.

Sincerely,



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SUGGESTIONS FOR MORE EFFICIENT & EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL RFMO MEETINGS

Communicating Expectations and Meeting Outcomes

1. Publish clear procedures for conduct of virtual meetings to improve clarity and predictability.
2. Clarify the consequences for parties failing to reach consensus.
3. Publish detailed meeting reports shortly after the conclusion of each meeting and announce impactful decisions publicly in order to promote transparency and understanding.

Addressing Complexity

1. Set up small working groups with clear mandates to address specific issues that can meet multiple times per year.
2. Existing subsidiary bodies could hold short meetings each year to discuss & make recommendations.
3. Establish ad-hoc rule of procedure to govern these small working groups.
4. Ensure Scientific & Technical WG meetings are scheduled in timely manner.
5. Establish pre-meeting online forums to ensure important discussions are introduced into workflow.
6. If allowed, organize several, shorter Commission meetings to address & take binding decisions on specific topics.
7. Offer breakout groups during Commission breaks with topics & chairs pre-identified.
8. Provide the Chair authority to propose strawman text to improve efficiency and maximize the likelihood of reaching consensus during shortened meetings.

Managing Time Restrictions

1. Make signup for meetings easy for all participants by circulating registration information in advance.
2. When possible, complete the majority of work prior to official meetings (with observers able to participate) through solutions outlined in previous section.
3. Annotate virtual agendas with relevant supporting documents, proposals & recommendations, and clearly identify the decision/s that are needed on each item.
4. To make room on abbreviated meeting agendas for key negotiations, reports & proposals could be submitted and reviewed in advance, instead of being presented at meetings. Pre-recorded presentations can be used to communicate scientific and/or background papers.

5. Questions on reports and proposals could be submitted in advance as well to all members & observers and addressed by short presentations during the meetings.
6. Limit the time allowed for individual interventions.
7. Members should support the Chair in maintaining agenda times and structure to improve predictability and efficiency of all member engagement.
8. Discuss significant agenda items using shorter time blocks over successive days to provide space for bilateral and member delegation discussions.

Addressing Cross-Time Zone Limitations

1. Explore setting time zones for meeting subjects based on where the majority of participants are located.
2. When time zones are widely divergent, consider alternating between morning & evening schedules to share the impact of late-night and very early-morning meeting times. Alternatively, consider information-sharing meetings that are repeated in different time zones to introduce specific issues and encourage dialogue among delegation prior to official meetings.

Addressing Connectivity Challenges

1. If a virtual meeting format is necessary, commit to that format as soon as possible to allow for adequate time for Secretariat and members to select and test IT systems.
2. Explore consistency in platform across RFMOs. For example, the NEAFC online system could perhaps be used across tuna RFMOs.
3. Make use of formal emails groups or IT systems that increase opportunities for scheduling and hosting side meetings, as desired by meeting participants.