



**TO ALL COMMISSION MEMBERS, COOPERATING NON-MEMBERS,
PARTICIPATING TERRITORIES AND OBSERVERS**

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WCPFC Online Heads of Delegation Meeting 15 July 2020: Chair's Statement

Dear Colleagues,

First let me thank you all for your participation in the online Heads of Delegation Meeting which took place on 15 July 2020. I acknowledge the challenges of online meetings and appreciate your flexibility and the quality of the discussion that took place. I also thank the Secretariat for the smooth arrangements for the online meeting.

At our meeting I undertook to circulate a Chair's Statement which summarises the outcomes of the Heads of Delegation meeting. This is attached. As I noted at the online meeting, the HOD meeting is not a decision-making forum and any necessary decisions, such as formally deciding to convene online Commission-related meetings, will be the subject of separate processes. It follows that the extension until 31 October 2020 of the WCPFC decisions relating to purse seine observer coverage, at-sea transshipment for purse seine vessels, and at-sea transshipment observers is the subject of a separate circular which will put the Chair's proposal through the expedited Commission decision-making process for COVID-19-related issues.

Thank you again for your commitment to ensuring WCPFC continues its functions to the extent feasible during this pandemic and for your active participation in these efforts.

Keep well and stay safe.

Best Regards,

Ms Jung-re Riley Kim
WCPFC CHAIR

WCPFC Online Heads of Delegation Meeting Held on 15 July, 2020

CHAIR'S STATEMENT

This statement records the key guidance that was provided by the WCPFC Heads of Delegation (HOD) on the meeting arrangements to be used for online Commission-related meetings in 2020.

As was noted at the HOD online meeting, the WCPFC Rules of Procedure do not provide for online meetings and therefore there will need to be an intersessional decision to this effect, as was the case with respect to SC16, as well as the FAD Management Options IWG and the South Pacific Albacore Roadmap IWG. It was also noted that the Chair's proposal to extend the three COVID-19-related decisions which otherwise expire on 31 July 2020 would be put through the expedited intersessional decision-making process. This will be the subject of a separate Circular.

1. **Guidance on the Scope of the Agendas for Online Commission-related Meetings**

There was broad understanding among HODs of the limitations of online meetings and the constraints they placed on the participation of CCMs, especially as a result of connectivity issues. There was also acceptance that scientific advice may raise sustainability issues which would need to be addressed by the Commission. There was some appetite among some HODs to try to make progress on difficult issues, including the review and revision of CMM 2018-01, while ensuring the effective participation of all CCMs. However, it is expected that these issues will require further consideration.

HODs from FFA Member countries highlighted the difficulty of engaging in online negotiations on matters of substance and the constraints that connectivity placed on their effective participation. Some HODs supported a pared down agenda, based on Attachment 3 of the Secretariat Reference Paper. Others were of the view that the Commission should make its best efforts to discuss substantive issues and were not comfortable with simply rolling over existing measures without discussion, given the importance of the impacts of those measures on their interests.

With respect to the meetings of the subsidiary bodies, HODs appreciated that the subsidiary bodies would be limited in their ability to discuss complex issues and some scaling down of agendas would be necessary. However, there were different views expressed by HODs on scope of the respective agendas, and the scope of agendas for the Commission regular session would need to be set first to further guide what should be included in the agendas for the subsidiary bodies. While it was noted that subsidiary body Chairs should be guided by Commission requirements in drawing up their respective agendas, it was also suggested that there should be a balance struck between the scale of the agendas of the subsidiary bodies and the expected ambition of the Commission for decision-making. HODs agreed that the respective Chair of the meetings concerned and the Executive Director should take into account the various perspectives when drawing up meeting agendas.

2. Guidance on the Format and Structure of Online Commission-related Meetings

a. *Choice of the online platform*

HODs agreed to use Zoom as the online platform for WCPFC meetings. The issue was raised of perhaps placing a limit on the number of connections to ensure better connectivity for all. However, concerns were also expressed that this might compromise the participation of stakeholders, whose level of participation is difficult to anticipate before agenda items have been agreed by the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

b. *Timing (hours) and length of the online meeting*

There was sympathy and appreciation expressed for the difficult start time for the EU participants in the HOD meeting. The EU suggested that in future the sacrifice could be shared among participants. Other HODs noted the importance of meeting during working hours in the western Pacific.

It was suggested by some HODs that meetings be limited to 3 hours in duration. Alternatively, it was suggested that meetings be in two 2-hour sessions per day with an hour's break in between. It was agreed that the Chairs and Secretariat would consider these suggestions in setting the future timing for the meetings. One HOD suggested that online meetings should not be longer than 5 days.

c. *Use of an online discussion forum*

There was general support among HODs for an online discussion forum as a platform for the exchange of views before decisions were taken. The Executive Director clarified that the online discussion forum was intended to take place prior to the formal meeting, not simultaneously with it, and it would not be a substitute for formal decision-making by the Commission or its subsidiary bodies. It was acknowledged that the Scientific Committee's use of the online discussion forum would be a useful test of its effectiveness and would provide valuable input to further consideration of this online tool. Some HODs expressed reservations over the use of the online discussion forum, particularly concerning the status of the outcome of any discussions, its treatment in the records, and the potential for it to be overly complicated and too cumbersome in practice.

3. Guidance for the Meeting Protocols for the Online Commission-related meetings

There was general support for the meetings protocols suggested by the Secretariat, with the addition of a protocol to deal with the situation of a CCM who drops out of the meeting when a decision is taken. It was also suggested that the facility of having side discussions could also be a useful tool to advance discussions. It was agreed that the Secretariat would take into account the views expressed by HODs in developing the meeting protocols for online Commission-related meetings in 2020.

4. Preliminary discussion on the status of the three interim Commission decisions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

HODs generally supported the extension of the three Commissions decisions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic until 31 October 2020. The EU proposed additional language which would be circulated as part of the Chair's proposal. Some HODs emphasised the importance of sharing information on COVID-19 restrictions to assist future decision-making, including on protocols to enable observers to return to fishing vessels. In response to a question regarding the impact of the three interim Commission decisions on data and science-related aspects, the Scientific Services Provider noted that the collection of observer data was a key component of its work and while modelling approaches could be used to fill gaps in data in some cases, the lack of observer data would over time increase uncertainty in its assessments. A particular concern was over the future loss of experienced observers who sought other employment. The Chair encouraged that CCMs share as much information as possible that are relevant to the three interim decisions through the dedicated webpage established by the Secretariat and any other means to assist the Commission in reviewing the interim decision in the future.

5. Other matters

The Executive Director raised the issue of the work of the Intersessional Working Groups, particularly those, such as the South Pacific Albacore Roadmap IWG, and the FAD Management Options IWG which were to have face-to-face meetings at SC16. It was agreed that the Secretariat would reach out to the Chairs of the IWG on how their work could be progressed intersessionally.