

FOR INFORMATION

Working Group on Operational Effectiveness Update

Background

In 2016, the IWC agreed to a comprehensive, independent review of institutional and governance arrangements within the IWC, under Resolution 2016-1. A report of this review, including a number of recommendations for reform, was presented at IWC67 in 2018 (IWC67/18). Resolution 2018-1 directed the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE) to develop a plan to implement reforms that will improve the institutional and governance arrangements of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, to be presented at the 68th meeting of the Commission.

In July 2019, the WGOE held a workshop in London to consider and discuss the recommendations contained in IWC68/18 as well as input from subsidiary bodies, contracting governments and accredited observers. The workshop participants developed four papers to summarize and present potential proposals for the Commission to consider at IWC68.

1. Potential Reforms to Commission Meeting Structure and Meeting Operations
2. Potential “low-hanging fruit” items
3. IWC Strategic Principles and Terms of Reference for a Working Group on Strategic Plan
4. Budget reform strategy

Drafts of these four papers were provided to Commission members for review and comment in February 2020, with the intention of submitting these for consideration at IWC68 in September 2020. With the delay of IWC68, the WGOE met virtually in September 2020 to consider and discuss comments received. The WGOE noted that given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic it was likely that many Commission members may not have been able to consider the proposals. The WGOE encouraged the co-chairs to reach out to those who had not yet engaged. With the assistance of the Chair of the IWC and the Secretariat, the WGOE Co-Chair met with regional groups of members to draw attention to the draft proposals and encourage them to provide comments to the WGOE. Updated papers were circulated in February 2021. Following the decisions to postpone IWC68 again, to 2022, the WGOE met in July 2021 to discuss the next steps in developing and finalising proposals for IWC68.

Summary of proposals

The WGOE Co-Chairs want to ensure that any reform of the Commission and its procedures are reflective of all members of the Commission. As outlined above, the drafts of these proposals have undergone several updates following different rounds of comments within the WGOE and from the wider Commission. It should be noted that consensus on all elements of these proposals has not yet been achieved within the WGOE. All four papers (three documents) can be found on the [IWC Archive](#).

Papers 1&2: Potential Reforms to Commission Meeting Structure and Meeting operations and Potential “low-hanging fruit”

The WGOE decided to combine papers 1&2 so this document includes reforms to the Commission structure and meeting operations and “Low hanging fruit” items (i.e. issues that can be fairly easily addressed), including those relating to the Rules of Procedure.

The draft proposal outlines a potential new structure for the Commission, such that the Commission would be composed of four committees:

- Finance and Administration Committee
- Scientific Committee
- Conservation Committee
- Management Committee

The proposal also includes a potential revision to existing Commission meetings to a more streamlined 2-3-2 meeting sequence i.e. 2 days of plenary, followed by 3 days of committee meetings, finishing with 2 further days of plenary.

In addition, some of the low-hanging fruit covered in this includes recommendations to implement staggered membership for the Bureau; to make the Bureau agenda, report and other documents to available in three languages; and some potential revisions to the Rules of Procedure and Rules of Debate.

Paper 3: Developing strategic principles

This proposal focuses on the consideration of the need to develop a strategic and/or work plan for the Commission. The Commission is being asked to decide between the possible future development of a strategic plan and/or the preparation of a work plan.

Paper 4: Budget reform strategy

This work is being led by the Budgetary Sub-Committee and is essential to addressing the budgeting challenges the Commission is currently facing. It outlines a set of key budgeting and financial principles to be embedded within financial regulations and Commission working practices. These are:

- Balanced budgets (using the ‘zero-based budget’ method) - an approach that looks at what the Commission needs to deliver its work programme rather than just rolling forward prior year spending
- Inflation included in the budget as a default
- Four-year budget planning cycles

Next steps

The WGOE is seeking further comment from all members, particularly from those who have not yet engaged on the draft proposals, by the **30 November 2021**. The WGOE will then refine the proposals and provide clear and concise proposals to the Commission by the **31 March 2022**.

Provided COVID circumstances will allow, the WGOE intends to hold in-person meeting in the margins of the Scientific Committee in **May 2022**. Any final changes to the Commission proposals will be made based on discussions at this meeting and will be submitted 60 days prior to IWC68 for discussion and decision by Contracting Parties in **October 2022**.