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Discussion paper on improving the Scientific Committee budget review process: proposal for a revised method of defining and adopting the SC budget and implications for the SC working methods

Fortuna, Kitakado, Donovan, Double, Holm, Jackson,
Rendell, Roel, Rojas-Bracho, Ritter, Vkingsson,
Walloe



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

DISCUSSION PAPER ON IMPROVING THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE BUDGET REVIEW PROCESS: PROPOSAL FOR A REVISED METHOD OF DEFINING AND ADOPTING THE SC BUDGET AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SC WORKING METHODS

Members of the WG: Fortuna, Kitakado, Donovan, Double, Holm, Jackson, Rendell, Roel, Rojas-Bracho, Ritter, Vikingsson, Walløe.

As agreed at the last meeting of the Scientific Committee in Bled (Slovenia, 2014) an intersessional working group was set up to look at potential ways to improve the Scientific Committee budget review process. These could include considerations on the following issues.

Matters of overarching nature, such as the linkage between the SC agenda, workplan, and budget requests and the potential need for prioritisation across sub-groups. These issues will be considered in a separate working document, in relation to Resolution 2014-4 on the Scientific Committee.

Matters of organisational nature, such as the following:

1. How to deal with unsolicited research proposals.
2. New template for SC project proposals (research, databases, catalogues, IWC-designed multinational long-term programmes), including the use of a scoring sheet to aid prioritisation.
3. How to handle possible 'conflicts of interest' (where flexibility or discretion is appropriate).
4. How to handle the two-year regime: e.g. planning and mid-term evaluation for over/under spends.
5. How to present the results of project selection and the SC budget proposal to the Commission.

ISSUE 1: How to deal with unsolicited projects.

The answer to this question is rather simple and it lies more on 'when' we deal with this type of proposal. In 2015 the WG developed a new template for unsolicited projects (see Appendix 1 and <https://iwc.int/guidelines-for-funding-research>).

The new posted material clearly explains that the "*Scientific Committee procedures require unsolicited projects (i.e. those which are not generated through the Committee's own work) to be submitted at least three calendar months prior to the annual Committee meeting where they will be considered*".

SOLUTION 1: The SC must comply with this rule. Any proposal received later than the 3 calendar month deadline will not be considered.

ISSUE 2: How to better handle the SC project proposals evaluation (research, databases, catalogues, IWC-designed multinational long-term programmes), including the use of a scoring sheet.

The SC budget must be used to progress the SC biennial work plan and all related running costs. Activities of the subcommittees/working groups include: various types of data analysis/modelling, data gathering, data quality control, intersessional meetings and workshops.

Convenors are responsible for facilitating the selection and prioritisation of activities within the sub-groups. Convenors shall ensure that research projects and/or activities proposed by the sub-groups/committees are relevant to progressing the aims and priorities of the Scientific Committee and not simply interesting science. Sub-group reports must contain clear indications of, and rationale for, priorities and recommendations for budget allocation.

There are at least 13 different sub-groups at present covering many aspects of the Committee's work. It is not sensible to simply divide available funds by the number of groups and allocate each the same given:

- (a) their different requirements and responsibilities;
- (b) varying contributions to particular biennial workplans.

As a general rule though, it would be sensible for the Convenors group to provide approximate guidelines with respect to the maximum total budget that individual sub-groups should not go beyond making recommendations for. The total for all combined projects/activities may be greater than the total available to the Committee, but this may prevent the situation where the total proposed budget requests to be considered by the Committee in plenary is vastly more than the money available. This course of action will assist the Committee in developing its final prioritised budget in the light of its and, of course, the Commission's workplan.

Some consideration should be given to transferring to the Secretariat budget of items that requires a long-term commitment, e.g. databases (including website developments), project coordinators (e.g. SORP coordinator), recognising that this may mean a reduction in the Committee's budget and a concomitant increase in the Secretariat's budget. This approach would need to be considered and decided upon by the Commission.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION 2: It is proposed that the template made for unsolicited projects (Appendix 1) and an evaluation/prioritisation sheet, be tested in 2015 by convenors/sub-groups (see Appendix 2) for the submission of all projects generated within the SC. Appendix 2 contains an example of how the scoring sheet helped the evaluation process of project proposals to be funded under the Small Cetaceans Voluntary Fund. The SM Review Group takes the final decision based upon the available funds. Please, note that not all projects with a good/sufficient score were funded nor the arithmetic ranking reflected in the final funding decision (see Table 1 in Appendix 2). The final decision was taken on the basis of a thorough and fair discussion beyond that of the simple scoring process. Therefore a strict use of arithmetic ranking should be avoided.

The advantages and disadvantages of transferring some of the more generic running costs related to the SC (e.g. database related costs and long term coordinators) to the Secretariat budget should be considered, recognising that this is a matter for the Commission.

To avoid unwanted inquiries for the continuation of long-term commitments/projects, some consideration will need to be given on the adoption of general rules preventing the funding of projects lasting more than two years and re-funding projects for few years.

ISSUE 3: How to handle 'conflicts of interest'.

Caution should also be used for projects proposed by active members of the SC. The SC should have in place safeguards to ensure all proposals are subject to equal scrutiny and

challenge. This will maintain the integrity of the SC by ensuring necessary transparency in the handling of possible conflicts of interest.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION 3: The use of the scoring/prioritisation sheet will help ensure this. There is also the possibility of the convenor, in consultation with the sub-group/committee, requesting the process completed anonymously by all members of the groups in particularly controversial cases. Prior to submission of a project with a budget exceeding £20,000 the proponent should consult with the Chair, Vice-chair and Head of Science to receive guidance, for example, on the relevance of the project to the SC, the appropriateness of the budget, the likelihood of success.

ISSUE 4: How to handle the two-years regime: e.g. planning and mid-term evaluation for over/under spends

The new regime of biennial commission meetings introduced a change in the practical management of the SC work plan and budget. At SC65b a work plan and budget was agreed on a 2-years basis for the first time. However, more clarity is required on how to assess progress, in particular with regards managing under- or over- expenditure and re-allocating funds as necessary.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION 4: A mid-term (i.e. after one year) and a final revaluation of the budget is necessary. In the mid-term, the Chair, Vice-Chair, Head of Science and Secretary will present the actual situation of the completed activities and will provide to the SC a simple plan for covering the over expenditure and reallocation of any unspent funds. The transfer of funds from one activity to another should be made in a way which maintains generally their original intent (e.g. workshop/meetings, research projects, modelling, databases, preparation of technical material for the website, etc.). For example, unspent funds previously assigned to the organization of a workshop can be transferred to the organization of another workshop during the same year or the year after. Where small sums are involved (e.g. £1-2,000) there may be more flexibility in changing categories to ensure an overall balanced budget.

In case of some foreseen activity that did or will not take place (e.g. modelling no longer useful or no longer possible due to the lack of appropriate experts), the Chair, Vice-Chair, and the Head of Science, in consultation with the Secretary will propose alternate funding options taking into account the SC priorities and projects which were previously identified by the SC but not selected for funding. These options will be presented to the SC for agreement.

ISSUE 5: How to present the results of project selection and the SC budget proposal to the Commission.

Currently the SC report contains a substantive section describing all submitted project/activity proposals. Since last year additional information on the rationale for selection or the funding proportion (when not fully funded) is also given.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION 5: We propose to keep improving the explanatory text of the report on the rationale for funding, partially funding, or not funding. Should the scoring sheets prove effective, additional information will be given on key steps of this process clarifying the final decision.

Appendix 1 – PRO FORMA FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS



135 Station Road, Impington, Cambridge, UK, CB24 9NP;
Tel: +44 1223 233397 - Fax: +44 1223 232876
E-mail: secretariat@iwc.int

PROJECT PROPOSAL REQUEST

1. PROPOSAL TITLE

Please provide the title of the project or the name of the workshop/meeting.

2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL AND ITS EXPECTED OUTCOME

Give a very brief overview (max 150 words) on your proposal and its expected outcomes. Use bullet point to list outcomes. Be succinct and clear as this may be used to summarise your project for the report.

3. RELEVANT IWC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE GROUPS OR SUB-GROUPS

List all the IWC Scientific Committee groups or sub-groups that the outcomes of this work would be relevant to and provide a brief (1-2 lines) explanation of how it would contribute more widely to their ongoing programmes of work. Where possible, do not simply list only the sub-committee within which or for which the project proposal was generated.

4. TYPE OF PROJECT (PLEASE TICK)

Research project	
Modelling	
Workshop/meeting	
Database creation/maintenance	
Compilation work/editing (e.g. on whalewatching regulations, SOCER, etc.)	
Other (please specify below)	

5. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL AND ITS CONNECTION WITH SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS (DO NOT EXCEED 1500 WORDS)

(A) BACKGROUND, RATIONALE, AND RELEVANCE TO THE PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY THE IWC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE:

Provide a clear explanation of the background and rationale for the proposal and its relevance to Scientific Committee identified priorities. Clearly identify the most relevant and recent Scientific Committee recommendations.

(B) SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OR TOR AND DELIVERABLES/OUTCOMES:

Provide the specific objectives and the expected deliverables. In the case of workshops and meetings, include the Terms of Reference (ToR) and expected outcomes.

(C) METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH/WORK PLAN/ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Specify the methods to be applied (novel methods require more explanation than standard ones) and the broad workplan – the detailed timetable appears under Item 5 below.

In the case of workshops and meetings, include the broad work plan including any pre-requisites for the workshop/meeting to take place (apart from funding, e.g. completed analyses, papers etc.) and administrative details (e.g. location, dates, number of participants).

(D) SUGGESTIONS FOR OUTREACH

Please, note that successful proponents will be requested to produce ad hoc material that will be used by the IWC Secretariat for dissemination and outreach.

6. TIMETABLE FOR ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Specify the timetable for project activities and expected out puts separately. For projects with multiple distinct elements please indicate interim goals and timeframes. Add as many rows as you need to the tables below. If publications are an expected output please note whether you will submit the manuscript to the IWC’s Journal of Cetacean Research and Management.

Activity to be undertaken	Key person(s)	Start(mm/yy)	Finish (mm/yy)

Expected outputs	Completion date (mm/yy)

7. RESEARCHERS' (OR STEERING GROUP) NAME(S) AND AFFILIATION

Please, also specify if the project team has any direct connection (e.g. same research group or institute, collaborator on common project) with people involved or likely to be involved in taking the funding decision (e.g. IWC SC heads of delegations, SC convenors, etc.). Add as many rows as you need to the table below.

Name	Affiliation	Connection with decision

8. TOTAL BUDGET

Breakdown into: (1) salaries/wages (include name/position of each individual and breakdown of time and duties i; (2) travel/subsistence expenses (breakdown by person and justification) unless for IPs for workshops where a total estimate based on an average for the total number of IPs is acceptable; (3) services (e.g. aircraft/vessel time, consultancy fees, ARGOS fees, etc.); (4) reusable capital equipment (e.g. reusable equipment such as a hydrophone, cameras, etc. Note that this equipment will have to be registered at the IWC Secretariat and will remain property of the IWC at the end of the project), (5) expendable capital equipment (e.g. consumables, tags, stationery), (6) shipping costs, (7) insurance costs, (8) in kind co-funding (specify whether other funding is available for personnel/name, equipment, venues, etc.). Note that "Overheads" are not admissible. Add as many rows as you need to the table below.

Type	Detailed description	Cost in GB pounds
(1) Salaries (by person)		
(2) Travel/subsistence (by person or est. total for IPs)		
(3) Services (by item)		
(4) Reusable equipment		
(5) Consumables		
(6) Shipping (by Item)		
(7) Insurance (by item)		
(8) Co-funding		
(9) Other		
Total		

9. DATA ARCHIVING/SHARING

Please state your plans for data archiving and sharing. Note that data collected primarily under IWC grants are considered publicly available after an agreed period of time for publication of papers, usually about two years. The work of the IWC depends on the voluntary contribution of data to the various databases and catalogues IWC supports. Please consult the Secretariat (secretariat@iwc.int).

10. PERMITS (PLEASE TICK)

Do you have the necessary permits to carry out the field work and have animal welfare considerations been appropriately considered?	
Do you have the appropriate permits (e.g. CITES) for the import/export of any samples?	

If 'Yes' please provide further details and enclose copies where appropriate:

Appendix 2 – DRAFT SCORING SHEET

If a project presents multiple primary objectives which are achieved using sub-projects, a sheet should be used to evaluate each single sub-project. Note that not all criteria are equally applicable depending on the nature of the project (e.g. field work versus workshops).

IWC SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE PROPOSALS FOR FUNDING - REVIEW CRITERIA - TEST				
TITLE OF THE PROJECT/sub-projects:				
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:				
Key criteria	Explanation of scoring	Score	Supporting Remarks	
<i>Relevance to Scientific Committee priorities</i>				
1	How well aligned are the scientific outcomes of the project/activity with the current SC priority areas?	1 - Not aligned/poorly aligned (e.g. too vague or generic reference to general SC priorities) 2 - Reasonably aligned (e.g. some aspects may be vague or links are not clear) 3 - Well aligned (e.g. outcomes clearly deliver in the most part on priority areas, may also address longer term or potential future issues). 4 - Closely aligned (e.g. of interest for multiple sub-groups or delivers on specific SC high priority topics/recommendations in the immediate or short term).		
2	To what extent will the outcomes of the project/activity contribute to improvements in the conservation and management of cetaceans?	1 - Not at all 2 - Poorly 3 - Reasonably or over the longer term 4 - Well or over the medium term 5 - Excellently or to almost immediate effect		
Note: if in each of the two above key criteria under this section the project does not score singularly at least 2 points, do not proceed in further evaluation. Of course, proposals within a sub-group would only be developed if in their estimation scores were of 4 or above.				
<i>Approach and methodology</i>				
3	What degree of scientific merit/value is there in carrying out the work?	1 - Not demonstrated or of low scientific value 2 - Useful/basic scientific value 3 - Very good scientific value 4 - Excellent/innovative scientific value		

4	Is the proposed methodology scientifically sound and feasible in terms of field and analytical methods?	1 - Feasibility unrealistic & poor methodology or not properly addressed 2 - Feasibility & methodology acceptable but would benefit from some substantial amendments 3 - Feasibility & methodology good, some small changes beneficial 4 - Feasibility & methodology excellent or a highly promising innovative approach to an important question facing the Committee		
5	What is the likelihood of success based on the proposed overall approach and methodology?	1 - No chance of success 2 - Low chance of success/better approaches available 3 - Medium chance of success/some changes to the approach necessary 4 - High chance of success/little or no changes to the approach necessary		
5a	Are objectives of the research likely to be achieved within the proposed time-frame?	1 - No or unlikely 2 - Partially or potentially ambitious 3 - Yes with some minor suggestions 4 - Yes		
5b	Are any proposed intermediary targets timely and achievable?	1 - No or unlikely 2 - Partially 3 - Probably 4 - Yes		
5c	Is the proposed time-frame/work necessary (e.g. can the project produce results in a shorter time period)?	1 - No or unlikely 2 - Partially 3 - Probably 4 - Yes		
5d	Is the sample size adequate to achieve the stated objectives?	1 - Not demonstrated/not properly addressed 2 - No or unlikely (too low/too high) 3 - Probably (additional analysis needed) 4 - Yes		
6	Is the project likely to affect adversely the population(s) involved?	1 - Not properly addressed/ unknown 2 - Yes severely 3 - Possibly at a low level 4 - No		
6a	IF YES , are analyses provided on simulations of the effects using different time-frames for the project if applicable?	1 - No 2 - Partially 3 - Yes		

Note: if in each of the above key criteria under this section the project does not score singularly at least 2 points, do not proceed in further evaluation. Of course, proposals within a sub-group would only be developed if in their estimation scores were of 3 or above.				
Project team and Project management				
7	To what extent does the team have the relevant expertise, experience, and balance?	1 – Poor or not demonstrated 2 – Sufficient 3 - Very good 4 - Excellent		
8	Contingency plan: To what extent have potential problems/risks been considered and appropriate mitigation proposed?	1 – Poor or not demonstrated 2 – Sufficient but could be improved 3 - Fully or requiring only minor suggestions or not applicable		
Value for Money				
10	Does the project represent good value for money?	1 – No or significant amendments would be needed 2 – Yes but with some minor amendments 3 – Yes		
11	Have sufficient links been made to the wider research community/other organisations/capacity building.	1 – No 2 – Some but significant amendments needed 3 – Yes but with some minor additions 4 – Yes or not applicable		

Note on the scoring process.

In general, it is NOT the intention to add up the totals for each criteria and arrive at an overall total and then ‘winner’ among all proposed projects. Some criteria should warrant more weight than others. If ranking is done by individual assessors then systematic variability among assessors will need to be considered. Failure to receive at least a good mark on some key criteria will result in rejection irrespective of scores on other criteria.

An example on how to use the scoring sheet is give by the process used to select projects for funding under the Small Cetaceans Voluntary Fund. The practical evaluation process follows four steps:

1. each member of the Review Group scores each project (currently there are seven members in the SM Review Group);
2. the coordinator of the group collates all information for all projects (see Table 1 for a selection of different cases);
3. a discussion is held on the results of the scoring exercise, particularly the following general rules were applied:
 - a. projects with high mean score (upper band: 25-30), low standard deviation of the overall score (consistency among Reviewers) and means for all criteria over 2.5 and low SD were selected with **further discussion** (Project 1 in Tab. 1);
 - b. projects with medium mean score (medium band: 19-24), low standard deviation of the overall score (consistency among Reviewers) and means for all criteria over 2.5 and low SD were selected with **no further discussion** (Project 3 in the

- table);
- c. projects with medium mean score (medium band: 19-24), low standard deviation of the overall score (consistency among Reviewers) and either a low mean or a high SD for some of the six criteria were **briefly discussed** to double check for consistency among reviewers (Project 2, 4 and 5 in the table);
 - d. projects with low mean score (lower band: 18 and below) and high SD of some of the six criteria were **briefly discussed** to double check for consistency among reviewers (Project 6 and 7 in the table).
 - e. The SM Review Group takes the final decision based upon the available funds. Please, note that not all projects with a medium score (good/sufficient) were funded nor the arithmetic ranking reflected the final funding decision (e.g. compare Project 2, 3, 4 and 5). The final decision was taken on the basis of a thorough and fair discussion beyond that of the simple scoring process.

Table 1 - Example of the summary of the Small Cetaceans Voluntary Fund scoring process

Principal Investigator/Project	Single evaluator's scoring per criteria and overall (scale 0-5)																		Mean of each criteria						Overall scoring					
	Reviewer 1 – Overall score	1. Scientific Value	2. SM priorities	3. Methods	4. Particip & coop	5. Feasibility	6. PI	Reviewer 2 - Overall score	1. Scientific Value	2. SM priorities	3. Methods	4. Particip & coop	5. Feasibility	6. PI	Reviewer 3 - Overall score	1. Scientific Value	2. SM priorities	3. Methods	4. Particip & coop	5. Feasibility	6. PI	Scientific value Mean (SD)	SM priority Mean (SD)	Methods Mean (SD)	Partic & coop Mean (SD)	Feasibility Mean (SD)	PI Mean (SD)	TOTAL	MEAN (SD)	SELECTED FOR FUNDING
1.White	28	4	5	5	5	5	4	29	5	5	5	4	5	5	26	4	4	5	5	5	3	4.1 (0.5)	4.4 (0.5)	4.7 (0.5)	3.7 (1.8)	4.6 (0.5)	4.1 (0.5)	180	26 (2.9)	YES
2.Black	25	4	4	4	3	5	5	28	5	5	4	4	5	5	16	3	1	2	2	3	5	3.9 (0.7)	3.9 (1.7)	3.1 (0.9)	2.8 (0.8)	3.7 (1.2)	4.8 (1.2)	153	22 (4.5)	NO
3.Blue	22	4	3	3	3	5	4	27	4	4	4	5	5	5	17	3	3	2	3	2	4	3.6 (0.5)	3.7 (1.0)	3.3 (0.8)	3.0 (1.0)	3.9 (1.1)	4.1 (1.1)	151	22 (3.5)	YES
4.Red	20	5	3	5	0	4	3	20	3	2	5	0	5	5	20	4	3	5	1	3	4	4.0 (0.8)	3.4 (1.3)	4.7 (0.5)	0.4 (0.8)	4.1 (0.7)	4.4 (0.7)	148	21 (1.7)	NO
5.Yellow	17	3	3	2	5	2	2	29	5	5	4	5	5	5	14	3	3	2	2	3	1	3.6 (0.8)	4.1 (0.9)	3.1 (0.9)	4.1 (1.1)	3.3 (1.0)	2.9 (1.0)	148	21 (4.7)	YES
6.Gray	14	2	3	2	3	2	2	19	3	3	1	5	3	4	14	2	0	2	4	2	4	2.4 (0.5)	2.1 (1.1)	1.7 (1.0)	3.3 (1.6)	2.4 (0.8)	3.7 (0.8)	110	16 (2.7)	NO
7.Purple	15	3	3	2	2	3	2	19	3	3	3	3	4	3	9	2	1	1	1	2	2	2.6 (0.5)	2.6 (1.0)	2.1 (0.7)	2.4 (1.0)	3.0 (0.6)	2.6 (0.6)	107	15 (3.7)	NO