

AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM
48th MEETING OF THE PARTIES

Panama, Panama
27 August 2024

REPORT OF THE MEETING REV

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The 48th Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP) was held in Panama City, Panama, on 27 August 2024.

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened by Dr. Alvin Delgado, in his capacity as Chair of the AIDCP meetings.

Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Venezuela participated in person in the meeting.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was approved with the addition of two items: one on dolphin research studies as item 3, and another one on observer safety under “Other business”.

3. Recent dolphin studies

The IATTC Coordinator of Scientific Research, Dr. Alexandre Aires-da-Silva, presented document

[AIDCP-48-02 - Unfunded Research Projects](#). He noted that the document contained two research proposals that would strengthen what IATTC staff considers to be high priority tasks for scientific research on dolphins in the ETP: (1) to continue research on dolphin cow-calf separation during purse-seine operations, and (2) to resume monitoring the status of dolphin populations in the eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP). The first proposal is to expand the IATTC's ongoing research on dolphin cow-calf separation to Phase 3, which would increase the sample size and spatial coverage of the study. The second proposal arose from discussions during the 2nd IATTC Workshop on Monitoring the Status of ETP Dolphin Populations (WSDEL-02-RPT) and aims to investigate the feasibility of close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) to monitor abundance for dolphin populations in the ETP.

Based on the above, he expressed the need to fund the two projects as follows:

1.	Cow-calf separation – Phase 3	US\$ 220,000
2.	Close-kin mark-recapture – Phases 1 and 2	US\$ 305,000
	Total	US\$ 525,000

The Director also reported that the AIDCP Scientific Advisory Board had met the previous day, with the participation of its 10 Members, and had been presented with the latest information on the status of both projects and, in general, had received comments from most of them to ensure the continuity of this work.

In this regard, Mexico clarified that consensus is not required in the Board, but that the Board is only responsible for making recommendations to the Director, and that the majority had agreed the previous day to support the continuation of the abundance survey project. Mexico insisted that, as it has said since 2018, the AIDCP surplus should be used to support these two projects (cow-calf separation and monitoring abundance), stressing that the cost of resuming ship-based line-transect dolphin abundance surveys would be too high compared to some of the proposed alternative modern approaches if shown feasible (e.g. CKMR).

Nicaragua noted that the cost of the assessment in terms of ship-based transect work was significant. It asked if the alternative CKMR approach would provide the information needed. Dr Aires-da-Silva noted that the proposed project (CKMR phases 1 and 2) would focus on feasibility aspects and would have an answer as to whether the technology would work and, from then on, they would be able to move forward with routine assessments. The proposed CKMR project would not provide a stock assessment yet, but at the end of the project a proposed workplan at lower costs than conventional ship-based surveys will be ready if CKMR is shown feasible for dolphin populations in the ETP.

The Parties recognized that the continuation of these studies was very important, but that the budgetary issue should be considered very carefully. The United States delegation stated that it was difficult to talk about new research projects until the AIDCP's expenses were organized. They also pointed out that the skin swabbing technique on dolphins was risky because of the possibility of sample contamination. For these reasons, they could not support the proposal at this time, stressing that the main concern was the reduction of the AIDCP surplus that would result from funding projects with this resource. Dr. Aires-da-Silva clarified that the proposed CKMR project was planned to evaluate feasibility aspects, including whether sample contamination will be an issue with skin swabbing.

Ecuador and Panama indicated that they were very interested in the work, but that it would be important to carry out a cost-benefit analysis and carefully evaluate the methodology to be used.

The Director raised the possibility of approving research without specifying where the money would come from, which might open other doors to other funding (e.g. external sources). Many delegations pointed out that this was a very good idea. It was therefore **agreed to proceed with the research and to leave the**

door open to seek other sources of funding.

4. AIDCP Budget

Before beginning the discussion of the budget, the President made a summary of what he considers was the current situation with the AIDCP budget. (annex 5).

Ms. Nora Roa, Senior Administrator of the Secretariat, presented document [AIDCP-48-01 - AIDCP budget](#), recommending a budget of US\$ 3,766,609 for 2025 based on expected expenditures showing an anticipated deficit of US\$ 597,632. She also presented Table 3 in the document reflecting a deficit of US\$ 375,250 for 2023 and a year-to-date surplus of US\$ 2,194,101 as of 31 December 2023; and Table 4 showing 16 vessels with outstanding payments from 2012-2024 totaling US\$ 768,847 as of 31 July 2024.

This presentation prompted the following comments from the participants:

- Colombia requested information on the evolution of the total expenses for 2024, based on the expenses incurred in that year and reported in the monthly reports.
- Guatemala pointed out that the document should present a specific column showing changes and the budget implemented in 2023-2024. It stated that it is not possible to approve budgets based on deficits, nor is it possible to routinely cover funds from a future budget with a surplus. The idea is to adopt a budget that the Commission's expenditure is limited to.
- In response to a question from Mexico on whether the vessels with outstanding payments were not operating or were out of service, Venezuela clarified that in the case of Venezuelan vessels with debts to the AIDCP, such debts are from 2012 and 2014 and these were vessels that had never operated in the EPO and did not generate any costs for the AIDCP, also they were never taken into account during the calculations of expected budget contributions as a result they were not operating.
- The Guatemala delegation mentioned that it is not correct to have them on the register when they are not operating, and it is not appropriate to think or hope that they will pay one day. There was an extensive discussion on the vessel *Vicente*, which has been scrapped and therefore has not paid and will not pay. It was recalled that it is the responsibility of the Parties to collect contributions from vessels and send them to the Secretariat.

The Chair raised the need for a joint meeting of the AIDCP Parties and IATTC Members, as possible solutions to avoid further deficits in the AIDCP would have an impact on the IATTC budget and should be discussed jointly. Accordingly, a joint meeting was to be arranged for the following week. This meeting did not take place, so no decision was taken on the AIDCP budget, and its determination was left for the October 2024 meeting.

5. Report of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on the Financial Strengthening of the AIDCP

It was recalled that document [INF-A - Chairs Report on the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on The Financial Strengthening of the AIDCP](#) was part of the documents prepared for the meeting. In it, it was reported that the Group had met virtually on 22 and 23 July and again on 26 July. The following agreements were reached:

- Approve terms of reference for the engagement of a consultant to assist the Secretariat with recommendations resulting from a study to improve the accounting procedures related to the AIDCP Observer Program.
- Proceed with the hiring of the consultant, for which the Secretariat shall submit a list of at least 5 consultants who meet the requirements of the terms of reference, after selection by the Parties.
- Recommend to the Parties to the AIDCP to create an *Ad Hoc* Working Group of experts to assist the Commission staff in reassessing the work performed by the IATTC staff for the AIDCP; this

assessment should also include the work performed by observers for the IATTC.

6. Report of the 38th meeting of the Working Group to promote and publicize the AIDCP Dolphin Safe Tuna Certification System

The report of the Working Group to promote and publicize the AIDCP Dolphin Safe Tuna Certification System (Appendix 2) was presented by its Chair, Mr. Bernal Chavarría. He noted that the Group had agreed to recommend:

- a) Continuation by the Secretariat of the actions currently being developed on the IATTC website and social media, using the human and technological resources currently available.
- b) Recommend to the Meeting of the Parties the importance of investing US\$ 5,000 to update the tuna-dolphin relationship diorama exhibited at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York.
- c) Follow up and support the efforts made by some Parties, such as Venezuela, Mexico and Panama, in museums and aquariums to publicize the work and achievements of the AIDCP.
- d) To open a formal 30-day period after the Meeting of the Parties accepts this recommendation to allow the Parties to review the available audiovisual material and outreach posters prepared by the Secretariat, with a view to recommending: the clear definition of the target audience of the outreach tools, the adaptation of these tools to the purpose of reaching the target audience efficiently, the contribution of graphic or semantic design elements of the message and, in general, any contribution that will enhance these tools.

The contributions will allow the Secretariat to incorporate them into the outreach tools and to present an updated design incorporating these contributions for approval by the Parties at the next meeting in October this year. It was noted that Colombia and the United States had already submitted comments; it would be appreciated if they could resubmit them with the updates resulting from the discussions at this meeting.

- e) Endorse document DSP-38-02 and the recommendations of the staff:
 - i. That the *status quo* be maintained with regard to the use of resources, without prejudice to the Director's ability to determine the working conditions of his staff in order to ensure the most efficient fulfilment of the mandate of the Parties, within the limits of budgetary availability.
 - ii. That the social media outreach process be maintained, using the IATTC accounts.
 - iii. Deepen the analysis of the message contained in the outreach tools, according to the target audience, and promote the increase of followers and traffic of the messages, taking into account the non-commercial and non-political nature of the AIDCP.
 - iv. That this Promotion Group be responsible for the further development of analysis to improve the process of using social media.
- f) The establishment of a special fund for promoting and publicizing the AIDCP, into which the Parties, industry, international organizations or funds, civil society and, in general, any interested party in the AIDCP may contribute funds to the Secretariat to enable it, within the framework authorized by the Meeting of the Parties, to carry out promotion and publicizing actions more effectively for which additional financial resources are required.

The Meeting of the Parties took note of these recommendations and approved them.

7. Report of the 73rd meeting of the International Review Panel (IRP)

Mr. Enrique Espinosa, in his capacity as Presider of the IRP, reported that the Panel issued the following recommendations:

- a. Approve forwarding the following cases to the relevant Parties:
 - Two cases of vessels with DMLs without the required high-intensity floodlight.
 - A case of a vessel that departed without an AIDCP-qualified fishing captain. During the trip, the captain was added to the list.
 - Three cases of the same captain who made three trips without being on the AIDCP List of Qualified Captains. The request to add him to the list was made after the completion of these three trips.
 - A case of interference to the observer, as the observer was harassed with inappropriate comments and actions by some crew members.
- b. That the work of the AIDCP be recognized in light of the significant reduction in possible infractions and the reduction in incidental dolphin mortality.
- c. That, during the Meeting of the Parties to the AIDCP, a new Chair of the Working Group on Tuna Tracking be elected.

The Meeting of the Parties took note of these recommendations and approved them.

8. Other business

a) Safety conditions for observers on board

There was no time to discuss this issue.

9. Place and date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in person and virtually at the end of October 2024.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned on 6 September at 4 p.m.

Annex 5

Summary by the President on the AIDCP budget situation

- At the end of 2021, the Secretariat carried out an evaluation of the time that IATTC staff dedicate to the AIDCP, finding that part of the staff was not being taken into account in this distribution of work times and there were adjustments in said distribution.
- At the beginning of 2022, a salary increase was made for IATTC staff, this and the previous situation significantly affected the budget.
- At the 44th Meeting of the Parties in July 2022, in document AIDCP-44-01, these expenses were not included and were not contemplated in the possible closing of the budget for the year 2022.
- At the 45th Meeting of the Parties in October 2022, the same document AIDCP-44-01 was presented, which in the year 2022 would possibly end with a deficit of US\$ 35,308 (The budget for 2023 was approved).
- At the Ad Hoc Meeting for the use of the surplus in February 2023, the data from document AIDCP-44-01 were used, with a slight deficit for the year 2022.
- At the 46th Meeting in August 2023, in document 46-01, it was established that the actual budget for the year 2022 ended with a deficit of US\$ 275,679, and it was explained that it was due to some adjustments made, but for 2023 we would close with a slight deficit of US\$ 21,360.
- At the 47th Meeting of the Parties, in document AIDCP-47-01, a possibility of a deficit of US\$ 324,316 was observed now for 2023, and that is when the Director really explained what happened at the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022 and will affect the AIDCP budget.

It is important to highlight that not having this information at the right time led to the approval of the IATTC budgets for 2022 and 2023, affecting the AIDCP budget.