AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

53ª MEETING OF THE PARTIES

Lisbon, Portugal

August 24, 2026

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM (AIDCP)

Overview of the 2025–2026 Period and Follow-up on Pending Matters from Previous Meetings of the Parties to the AIDCP

As the two-year period (2025–2026) comes to a close, I consider it timely to present to the Parties a summary of the main issues addressed during this period, the progress achieved, and the matters that continue to require follow-up, with the aim of contributing to the continuity of the AIDCP's work, facilitating the monitoring of decisions adopted, and promoting an orderly review of matters that remain under consideration.

Likewise, in preparation for the upcoming Meeting of the Parties, it is considered appropriate to draw attention to various matters that have been presented or considered at previous meetings and whose follow-up may require review.

1. General Overview of 2025

The AIDCP agenda during the 2025–2026 period was marked primarily by the need to address the budgetary and financial situation of the AIDCP, including the review of the distribution of costs associated with the Observer Program, and to strengthen coordination between the AIDCP and the IATTC in order to promote short- and long-term solutions to ensure the sustainability of the Program.

During the 50th Meeting of the Parties, held in March 2025, on an extraordinary basis, the tasks carried out by on-board observers were analyzed, as was the percentage of time devoted by Secretariat staff to AIDCP-related tasks, and the distribution of costs between the IATTC and the AIDCP.

The analyses presented showed that a significant portion of the tasks carried out by observers generates information and addresses requirements linked to the functions of the IATTC. On this basis, the appropriateness of the historical cost-sharing arrangement was discussed, as was the possibility of moving toward a more balanced distribution.

As a result, the adjusted budget for 2025 was approved (Res. A 25-01) and a technical basis was established to continue the discussion on a more balanced distribution of costs between the AIDCP and the IATTC.

During the 51st Meeting, held in August 2025, financial and budgetary matters continued to be addressed; the progress of the Ad Hoc Working Group on AIDCP Financial Strengthening was examined in relation to the planned consultancy to evaluate AIDCP budgetary and financial instruments, rules, tools, and practices; the 2026 budget was reviewed; and the results of the consideration of the adjusted budget before the IATTC Committee on Administration and Finance were discussed.

During the budget discussion, it became clear that differences persisted regarding the portion of Observer Program costs to be borne by the IATTC and the AIDCP. As a result, it was not possible to complete the approval of the full 2026 budget. It was also acknowledged that the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group needed to continue through the end of its mandate and the presentation of results and technical recommendations.

Given the direct relationship between the budgetary decisions of both organizations and the difficulty in reaching agreement on the distribution of Observer Program costs, during the 103rd Meeting of the Commission, held in September 2025, a joint meeting between the IATTC and the AIDCP was proposed.

The meeting allowed for an exchange of views on the direct and indirect costs of the Observer Program, the historical distribution of those costs, the results of the analyses of observer workload, the possibility of moving toward a more balanced distribution scheme, the budgetary impact of various alternatives, the exceptional use of the AIDCP surplus, and the need for a long-term structural solution.

The discussions revealed different positions regarding cost distribution. Nevertheless, there was a general acknowledgment of the need to maintain the Program's operational capacity and continue working toward a joint solution.

The 51st Meeting was resumed in October 2025, with the primary purpose of concluding the pending budgetary matters. During this session, the approval of the 2026 budget was examined, and, within the framework of the agreements reached between the AIDCP and the IATTC, the exceptional use of the accumulated AIDCP surplus, the increase in per-vessel contributions, and the adjustment aimed at improving the pay of on-board observers were considered.

As a result, the 2026 budget was approved and Resolution A-25-02 was adopted, replacing Resolution A-18-01 on vessel quotas and financing. The solution reached was essentially transitional in nature, addressing the Program's immediate needs through a combination of contributions, available resources, and use of the surplus.

During the 52nd Meeting, held in October 2025, the consideration of operational, financial, technical, and regulatory matters continued. Among the main topics addressed were options for implementing electronic systems—partial, full, or combined—for data collection by on-board observers; approval of Res. 25-03 related to the financing of research projects “Close-Kin Mark-Recapture to Assess the Abundance of Dolphin Populations in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean”; proposal AIDCP 522 A-1 submitted by Venezuela concerning the facilitation of observer embarkation and disembarkation; and the Chairperson’s proposal to amend provisions of Annex VIII of the AIDCP “Use of floodlights with a light output equal to or greater than 140,000 lumens”.

2. Continuation of work during 2026

The 1st Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on AIDCP Financial Strengthening, held virtually from January 21 to 23, 2026, examined the results of the consultancy on AIDCP accounting, financial, and budgetary instruments, rules, tools, and practices.

Discussions focused on the need to strengthen the transparency, efficiency, and sustainability of financial management, including the separation of the accounting systems and accounts of the AIDCP and the IATTC, the possible adoption of a mixed accounting approach based on international frameworks, the automation of processes and reports, the development of accounting manuals and policies, the strengthening of internal controls, and the assessment of the costs and resources needed to implement these improvements. It was also recognized that the distribution of Observer Program costs is a central element yet to be defined, and that its analysis must continue within the technical framework of the AIDCP Working Group and the IATTC Committee on Administration and Finance.

As a result, the Working Group approved recommendations for consideration by the Meeting of the Parties, including the preparation of a single Action Plan with priorities, risks, responsible parties, timelines, and estimated costs; the development of accounting manuals and risk management and control policies; the establishment of periodic financial reports; the evaluation of a more complete accounting separation between the AIDCP and the IATTC; the modernization and automation of processes; and the periodic rotation of independent audit firms.

Additionally, considering the cyber incidents that affected the functioning of the Secretariat, it was recommended to prepare written information on their impacts, mitigation measures, continuity, and recovery, as well as to conduct a robust assessment of digital vulnerabilities. Finally, a quarterly progress report on the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Meeting of the Parties was requested.

Continuing the process initiated during 2025, a consultative meeting between the IATTC Committee on Administration and Finance and the AIDCP Ad Hoc Working Group was also held in January 2026. This meeting allowed IATTC members who are not necessarily Parties to the AIDCP to be incorporated into the analysis and facilitated a common understanding of the financial background.

During the meeting, the results of the 50th, 51st, and 52nd Meetings of the AIDCP were examined; the costs of the Observer Program; the distribution of tasks between functions related to the IATTC and the AIDCP; workload analyses; the comparison of data collection rules and requirements; and the information needs to support decisions regarding 2027. The results of the Ad Hoc Working Group meeting on AIDCP financial strengthening were also presented.

Given the consultative and informal nature of the meeting, no binding decisions were adopted. Information requests and elements that needed to be further examined before formulating definitive recommendations were identified.

3. Follow-up on matters from previous meetings (2021–2025)

Since 2021, several issues related to the functioning of the on-board observer program have been the subject of proposals, discussions, or follow-up initiatives. Some of these matters have been revisited at subsequent meetings, while others may require an update on their status.

Among the issues raised during this period are matters related to facilitating the embarkation and disembarkation of observers and the conditions and procedures applicable to their work on board; the maintenance of the list of qualified captains; as well as proposals to amend provisions of the AIDCP, including the amendment of paragraph 2 of Annex VIII concerning the use of high-intensity reflectors and procedural rules for exemptions from carrying an observer on transit voyages.

The issue of facilitating observer embarkation and disembarkation was first raised in 2021 at the 43rd Meeting, revisited in 2022, at the 45th Meeting, and raised again in 2025, for the 52nd Meeting based on a proposal submitted by Venezuela. Additionally, the 45th Meeting addressed the guidelines on working conditions and procedures for on-board observers.

In 2023, during the 47th Meeting, matters related to the rules for transit exemptions, the maintenance of the list of qualified captains, and the proposed amendment to paragraph 2 of Annex VIII of the AIDCP were also considered, *"use of LED lamps of at least 500 watts*". This last issue was subsequently raised again at the 52nd Meeting in 2025.

This background highlights the importance of maintaining follow-up on matters examined by the Parties, particularly when these have remained open or have been revisited at successive meetings.

4. Considerations at the close of the period for the Chair

The AIDCP agenda for the 2025–2026 period was marked by a sustained effort to address a complex financial situation and strengthen institutional coordination with the IATTC. Nevertheless, there remain matters that require attention and institutional continuity. Among the main pending issues identified are:

- agreeing on a mechanism for the distribution of the portion of Observer Program costs between the IATTC and the AIDCP;
- concluding the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on financial strengthening and integrating the results of the consultancy;
- following up on the information requests from the consultative meeting of the AIDCP Ad Hoc Working Group and the IATTC Committee on Administration and Finance;
- reviewing the status of pending proposals from previous meetings.

In this context, I consider it appropriate, without prejudging the position of any Party, to urge them to review the pending matters from previous meetings, with the purpose of determining their current status and enabling the Parties to identify those issues that continue to require consideration, as well as those that need to be updated or resubmitted in accordance with the applicable Rules of Procedure.

The foregoing is based on the consideration that this work would contribute to strengthening institutional continuity, facilitating the monitoring of decisions adopted, and improving the efficiency of the Parties' work.

Yarkelia Vergara
Chairperson of the AIDCP