



Letter to The Editor

Collaborative reassessment resolves concerns about IUCN Red List assessments of Southern Ocean icefish species

6 May 2026

Dear Editor,

Re: Collins, M.A., Belchier, M., Brickle, P., Cleeland, J.B., Everson, I., Hill, S.L., Hollyman, P.R., Hughes, K.A., James, H.W., Jones, C.D., Jones, T., Morley, S.A., Parker, S.J., Peck, L.S., Queirós, J.P., Reid, W.D.K., and Cavanagh, R.D. (2026). Recent IUCN Red List assessments of two species of icefish (Channichthyidae) reveal concerns about the Red List process and opportunities for improvement. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 67, e04184.

We write on behalf of the IUCN SSC Marine Fishes Red List Authority (RLA) to respond to [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#), which raised concerns about the IUCN Red List assessments of the South Georgia icefish (*Pseudochaenichthys georgianus*) and the Scotia Sea icefish (*Chaenocephalus aceratus*), and made recommendations in relation to the Red List process. We welcome the opportunity to respond, and we are pleased to report that, in the period between the initial submission of [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) and its publication, the concerns raised have been resolved through close and productive collaboration between the authors and the RLA. We believe this outcome itself exemplifies the kind of constructive engagement that strengthens the Red List process.

1. The assessments: an honest gap, addressed

[Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) correctly identified that the 2024 Red List assessments of both icefish species did not incorporate the long-term scientific trawl survey data held by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). We wish to be clear that this omission was not intentional. At the time of assessment, the RLA was not aware that these datasets existed. CCAMLR data related to these species are not discoverable through standard web-based searches, and the extent of the RLA's network with institutions conducting fish research in the Antarctic was, at that time, limited. Indeed, only 25% of the fish fauna of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean had been assessed for the Red List, the lowest proportion of any major marine regional fauna globally. Until 2025, the RLA had not secured the necessary support to undertake a comprehensive region-level assessment initiative.

When the authors first made the RLA aware of these data in August 2024, the RLA responded promptly: it agreed immediately that the data were important and should be incorporated into revised assessments and extended an invitation to the authors to contribute to the reassessment process. The Red List process requires assessors to draw on all available and accessible evidence; it cannot, by design, incorporate data whose existence is unknown to the assessor. This is why the kind of expert engagement championed by [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) is so valuable. The situation with these two species was one that the RLA agreed to remedy. A recommendation to resource management organisations like CCAMLR is to adopt Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable (FAIR) data principles ([Wilkinson et al., 2016](#)) to increase the awareness of important datasets.

2. Collaborative reassessment and resolution

In September 2025, the RLA was notified that the authors had compiled the relevant survey data into a working document for presentation at the annual CCAMLR meeting in Australia in October 2025. The RLA provided timely and constructive feedback on this document and attended a virtual meeting with the lead author. The RLA also extended an invitation for the authors to participate in a newly established Red List initiative to comprehensively assess all bony fishes of the Southern Ocean.

A five-day Red List assessment workshop was subsequently held in Puerto Varas, Chile, 16–20 March 2026. The workshop was attended by four co-authors of [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#), including the lead author, alongside twelve other Southern Ocean fish experts, several of whom are members of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research Action Group on Fish (SCARFISH). All attendance was fully supported through funding awarded to IUCN and the RLA for this assessment initiative. The workshop assessed approximately

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300 species, including both icefish species addressed by [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#). The assessments are currently undergoing post-workshop peer review in preparation for submission to the Red List Unit, ahead of publication on the IUCN Red List website.

It is worth noting that both species were therefore formally reassessed with direct participation from the authors of [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) prior to the publication of said paper and using the data they had compiled. We regret that the outcome was not reflected in the [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) article. We anticipate that the reassessments of both species will be published in 2027, taking account of the information provided in [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) and at the workshop.

3. Shared commitment to process improvement

The RLA gratefully addresses each constructive recommendation of [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) regarding improvements needed in turn.

On capacity-building and coordinated assessment: [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) call for a coordinated approach to species selection and a stronger role for taxon-specific expert groups such as SCARFISH. We fully support this vision. The group leading an assessment, often an RLA, identifies and invites potential assessors that have expertise in the biology of the species for assessment based on resources within their network. Assessors may also be identified from publicly available literature that is reviewed during the drafting stage of the assessment. At this stage in the process for the two icefish assessments, which were undertaken outside a regional or taxonomic group level initiative, the RLA regrettably was not aware of the experts on these species. The Southern Ocean fish assessment initiative, of which the Red List assessment workshop was the central element, reflects a geographically focused, expert-led effort that brought together the relevant scientific communities from the outset. IUCN should continue to prioritise and resource initiatives like the Southern Ocean project because they expand the assessor network that the RLA can draw upon and facilitates an opportunity to increase the capacity of new assessors to learn and practice the Red List methodology. Such initiatives are efficient in mobilising expertise needed to inform data-limited conditions that commonly occur during the assessment process of marine species (e.g., [Finucci et al., 2026](#)).

On consultation with fisheries management authorities: [Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) recommend that relevant fisheries management bodies (FMBs) be consulted before Red List assessments are finalised. We recognize that FMBs hold valuable data on exploited species and whilst improved discoverability and accessibility of such FMB data would benefit the Red List process, we recognise that changing data access rules in such organisations can take time. Given the uncertainty about the discoverability of FMB data, a mechanism for consulting FMBs (e.g., virtual or in-person workshops) during the assessment process should enable such data to be considered in assessments, helping to ensure assessments are scientifically robust.

It has been standard practice of RLAs to consult with and invite fisheries biologists to contribute to the Red List process. In the case of these two icefish species, recent stock assessments or other analyses of population trend and life history were either not conducted or not publicly available, so evidence of potential population recovery after the CCAMLR fishing regulations that were put in place in 1990 was not known until BAS scientists made the RLA aware of fishery-independent datasets. We therefore recommend that CCAMLR and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) follow FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable; go-fair.org) data principles similar to what is often expected of taxpayer funded research programs ([Wilkinson et al., 2016](#)).

On peer review and taxonomic expertise: The RLA is committed to facilitating assessments of marine fish, especially those for commercially important or data-rich species. These assessments are subject to review by regional species experts prior to submission and to continue to follow the Red List guidelines. Such practice increases the chance that key datasets will be identified and incorporated into the pre-publication assessment process.

4. On the implications for the Red List more broadly

[Collins et al. \(2026\)](#) suggest that their findings about these two icefish assessments may raise wider questions about the Red List process. We appreciate the importance of this concern, and we take it seriously. At the same time, we offer a note of caution against drawing systemic conclusions from two assessments conducted under particular circumstances. The existing Red List process provides an appropriate transparency mechanism whereby assessments are made publicly available ([Collen et al., 2016](#); [Akçakaya et al., 2026](#)). The Red List has a formal and functioning process for petitioning and correcting assessments; in this case, that process was triggered and responded to.

The parallel between these cases and some previous instances of Red List assessments with incomplete data (e.g. [Godfrey and Godley, 2008](#)) is noted. The lesson we draw from such examples and the present situation is that sustained investment in expert networks, compliance with FAIR data principles from management bodies ([Wilkinson et al., 2016](#)), and inclusive consultation processes increases conservation assessment impact. The steps now underway for assessing the Southern Ocean fish fauna represent a meaningful contribution towards increasing the coverage of marine species on the Red List by adding new assessments as well as supporting efforts to update published assessments with newly available data.

5. Conclusion

We thank the authors for bringing these issues to our attention and for their willingness to engage directly and collaboratively with the RLA in resolving them. The partnership that has developed is precisely the kind of relationship a successful Red List process depends upon. We look forward to continued collaboration with the authors, with SCARFISH, and with the broader Southern Ocean scientific community as we work to ensure that the IUCN Red List provides the most accurate and scientifically robust assessments possible for the fishes of this exceptional and important ecosystem.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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