



**COMMISSION  
EIGHTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**  
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**STATEMENT TO WCPFC18**

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**WCPFC18-2021-OP07  
10 November 2021**

**Submitted by Pew Charitable Trusts**



**The Pew Charitable Trusts  
Statement to the 18<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the  
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
December 1-7, 2021, online**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 18<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC18). We appreciate the work of the Chair, Members and Secretariat to again convene a virtual meeting due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. Given the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, we urge all members to consider how to hasten the introduction of new approaches to provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries, such as electronic monitoring and harvest strategies. Additionally, WCPFC must ensure the continuation of its compliance monitoring scheme (CMS), while committing to complete all the 'future work' tasks listed in the current CMS. In relation to the agenda before WCPFC18, we urge members to:

***Maintain existing objectives for the tropical tunas while developing harvest strategies and improving monitoring of these key stocks***

The renegotiation of the tropical tuna 'bridging measure' will be a significant focus of WCPFC18. Critical to the success of any future measure are sound objectives for management and tools to monitor whether the fishery is meeting those objectives.

- **WCPFC18 should agree to a multi-annual measure to succeed CMM 2020-01 that maintains bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks at their current objectives (at or above the average of 2012-2015 levels) and incorporates deadlines for the adoption of harvest strategies.** This would ensure management continues without major changes in fishing intensity and support the Commission's commitment to implement fully specified harvest strategies tested through Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) per CMM 2014-06. Alternative fishing scenarios would be better identified in MSE as part of the development of harvest strategies rather than the current, untested system of management.
- To provide data to monitor the performance of the tropical tuna measure, **WCPFC18 should adopt the proposal from members in the Forum Fisheries Agency for the Commission to adopt minimum standards for electronic monitoring in 2022 and establish a regional electronic monitoring program by 2023.** Electronic monitoring offers a cost-effective solution to scale up monitoring coverage. Low levels of observer coverage in the longline fishery limit the availability of independent catch and operational data, reducing the accuracy of stock assessments and effectiveness of conservation and management measures.
- As a step toward matching the 100% coverage in the purse seine fishery, **WCPFC18 should adopt the United States' proposal to increase longline coverage to 10%, up from the currently required 5%.** The longline fishery, which catches 10 to 13% of the total tonnage of tunas in the western and central Pacific but accounted for 28% of the

delivered value of the WCPFC's fisheries, a haul worth \$1.6 billion at the dock in 2019. The longline fishery should be monitored in a way that recognizes its value and impact.

- Lastly, requirements for the design of fish aggregating devices (FADs) should be strengthened. **WCPFC18 should prohibit the use of mesh in any part of the construction of FADs.** This would dramatically reduce the risk of FADs entangling marine animals and reduce their impacts on sensitive habitats should they become grounded, abandoned, lost, or discarded.

### *Improve the monitoring and reporting of at-sea transshipment activities*

The number of at-sea transshipments reported to WCPFC increased 166% from 2014 to 2019, and a majority of the vessels on the Record of Fishing Vessels are authorized to transship on the high seas. The scale of this activity and a lack of proper reporting provides opportunities for unscrupulous operators to launder Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) catch.

- Although Covid-19 has delayed its work, it is critical that **WCPFC provides the Transshipment Intersessional Working Group with the necessary funds and capacity to complete its objectives in the agreed Scope of Work in 2022.** The transshipment regulatory framework requires significant strengthening, standardization, and harmonization.
- **WCPFC18 should adopt minimum data standards for use by at-sea transshipment observers and clearly specify that these reports must be sent to the Secretariat.** This would increase the usefulness and timeliness of the information collected by observers monitoring at-sea transshipment activities, strengthening the ability of the Commission to independently verify such activities. WCPFC is lagging in its collection of this information; transshipment reports are sent to the secretariats of all other tuna RFMOs.
- Because WCPFC's waters overlap those of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), **WCPFC18 should agree to strengthen its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the IATTC and develop an MOU with the NPFC to share all transshipment-related information.** The different reporting and observer carrier requirements of the three RFMOs requires information to be shared to ensure proper reporting of species and understand the rules and procedures applicable to a carrier vessel.

### *Accelerate development of harvest strategies*

Both the Commission and leading [market stakeholders](#) have stressed the importance of transitioning to harvest strategies.

- To move toward this outcome, **WCPFC18 should agree to create a scientist-manager dialogue working group and set its first meeting adjacent the Scientific Committee (SC) in August 2022.** For the fourth time in as many years, the SC strongly recommended creating this group, and WCPFC15 developed Terms of Reference for the group. An

August meeting, adjacent to the SC, would give all members sufficient time to review any recommendations from the group to the annual meeting. Key [stakeholders](#) see this type of dialogue group critical to the success of the harvest strategy approach already formed by/present in other tuna RFMOs.

- To facilitate testing via MSE, **WCPFC18 should adopt target reference points for bigeye and yellowfin tunas that promote their long-term sustainability.** It is critical for the Commission to put forward TRPs that can be part of the MSE analysis and update its workplan to commit itself to adopting a fully specified harvest strategy for bigeye in 2023.
- Lastly, with Pacific bluefin tuna estimated at less than 5% of its unfished biomass, and given the absence of new scientific advice, WCPFC18 should reject a recommendation of the Northern Committee that would increase catch limits for that species by up to 37% across the Pacific, when compared to 2020 landings. Instead, **WCPFC18 should recommend the Northern Committee accelerate development of MSE in line with its prior commitments to develop a long-term, MSE-tested harvest strategy for Pacific bluefin by 2024.**

*Adopt a multi-year Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) that ensures conservation and management measures are not undermined*

A robust Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) is essential to achieving sustainable fisheries.

- **WCPFC18 should adopt a multi-year Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) that supports the objectives of the Commission by ensuring flag States are accountable for meeting their obligations and provides assistance for members to improve their compliance.**
- **WCPFC18 should agree on clear steps to complete, as soon as possible, all the ‘future work’ tasks listed in the current CMS.** That includes developing the risk-based assessment framework, audit points to ensure clarity in obligations for assessment, responses to persistent or serious incidences of non-compliance, and guidelines to enable observers to participate in meetings reviewing compliance monitoring reports.

*Prohibit use of wire leader in the longline fishery to recover shark populations*

Given the status of the oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) and silky shark (*C. falciformis*) in the WCPO, additional mitigation measures are needed to help these populations recover. Both shark species were assessed as experiencing overfishing and oceanic whitetip was heavily depleted to less than 5% of its unfished population.

- To facilitate this, **WCPFC18 should adopt the proposal by the United States to revise the comprehensive shark measure (CMM- 2019-04) to prohibit both the use of wire leaders and shark lines within the Convention area.** A study presented to the Scientific Committee this year estimated that banning the use of wire leader would reduce fishing mortality by 28% for silky shark and 36% for oceanic whitetip shark.

*Adopt the proposal to share information on IUU-recognized vessels*

The cross listing of IUU Vessel Lists is important to minimize opportunities for recognized illegal fishers to move into the WCPO and reduce the administrative burden on members, especially small island developing States in the fight against IUU fishing.

- As such, **WCPFC18 should adopt the proposal from the European Union, Japan and Chinese Taipei to incorporate vessels named on the IUU Vessel Lists of other tuna RFMOS into a new annex of the WCPFC IUU Vessel List.**

*Looking toward an agenda for 2022*

In developing its priorities for 2022:

- WCPFC18 should ensure progress is made in the next year to allow for the adoption of harvest strategies for skipjack, south Pacific albacore and north Pacific albacore, which is critical for some fisheries to maintain Marine Stewardship Council eco-certifications, and a review of the port State minimum standards measure with a view to strengthening it.