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The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
18th Regular Session of the Northern Committee
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The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 18th Regular Session of the Northern Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (NC18). We appreciate the work of the Chair, Members and Secretariat to again convene the Northern Committee virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the significant 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. In relation to the agenda before the Northern Committee, we urge NC18 to:

North Pacific Albacore

Recommend adoption of a fully specified harvest strategy for north Pacific albacore. The proposal from the NC chair (NC18-WP-03) would establish nearly all the key elements of a harvest strategy for north Pacific albacore. It specifies management objectives, target and limit reference points, acceptable levels of risk, and a monitoring strategy. It also is functionally the same as the measure adopted by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in August.

The proposal, however, falls short in one important aspect. NC18 has the opportunity to correct this shortfall and take the initiative in albacore management from the IATTC. The proposal contains only a conceptual diagram of a harvest control rule (HCR) rather than the HCR equation that would set fishing intensity at various levels of biomass. NC18 should add this remaining element to the proposal and recommend WCPFC adopt it at its annual meeting in November. The equation could be described simply based on the reference points and HCR form already included in the proposal, with the addition of a defined minimum fishing intensity that would be implemented if the limit reference point is breached. After many years of the ISC's efforts to develop management strategy evaluation (MSE) and dialogue with managers and stakeholders to develop a harvest strategy, North Pacific albacore could become WCPFC's first fully specified, MSE-tested harvest strategy. This would ensure continued productivity and health of the fishery for the long term, a significant win for the Commission at its first in-person meeting since 2019.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Ensure the Pacific bluefin MSE is completed as scheduled. Pew welcomes the NC's commitment to develop an MSE for this tuna. Now that two analysts have been dedicated to the bluefin MSE and it was agreed that the framework of the albacore MSE will be used as its basis, the ISC should be able to complete the MSE by the original 2024 deadline. However, the ISC in July agreed to prioritize completing the next assessment in 2024, which could delay work on the MSE. At a minimum, we urge NC18 to task the ISC with presenting final MSE results to the NC no later than 2025 and continue to use the Joint Working Group as a venue for dialogue on the process.

North Pacific Swordfish

We also support efforts to strengthen North Pacific swordfish management this year and urge NC18 to task the ISC with conducting an MSE for that species, ensuring a robust HCR can be developed as part of a fully specified harvest strategy.