

The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
19th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
16-24 August 2023, Koror, Palau

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 19th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC19) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. We appreciate the work of the Secretariat, scientific services provider, SC chair and theme conveners, and all members to convene the first in-person SC since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We again urge all members to consider how to accelerate the introduction of new technologies and approaches, such as electronic monitoring and harvest strategies, which, once implemented, would provide greater resilience and stability to the management of the region's fisheries, and help 'shock proof' management to the disruptions caused by situations such as COVID-19.

The skipjack management procedure adopted in December was groundbreaking for WCPFC and the successful running of the MP ([SC19-MI-WP-01](#)), which recommends maintaining fishing conditions at status quo levels, with no grounds for triggering exceptional circumstances, should see this MP fully implemented via the tropical tuna measure without delay.

Regarding other specific items on SC19's agenda, we urge members to:

- Provide clear recommendations for the current undecided operational aspects of the south Pacific albacore management procedure (MP) development as noted in papers [SC19-MI-WP-05](#) and [-06](#). We commend the scientific services provider for the tremendous progress on the MSE and are encouraged to see that the work is on track for MP adoption in 2024. Elements such as geographical extent, fisheries to be included, and accounting for eastern Pacific catches are critical for the MP to be effective. In addition, [SC19-MI-WP-04](#) highlights the need for guidance on uncertainty to build into the operating model. Ideally, management procedures should be robust to as much uncertainty as possible. As such, SC19 should recommend how to incorporate outstanding areas of uncertainty into the SPA operating model.
- Recommend adoption of target reference points for both bigeye and yellowfin tunas, which would enhance the progress toward developing the multi-species modelling framework and candidate management procedures, as discussed in paper [SC19-MI-WP-07](#).
- Recommend development of a long-term harvest strategy for striped marlin, tested by management strategy evaluation, which can investigate the impact of uncertainties, such as historical catch and recruitment. Striped marlin remains overfished with overfishing occurring, despite a rebuilding plan adopted in 2019. A fully tested MP is the most robust way to both recover the stock to sustainable levels and maintain it there. In the short-term, given the significant uncertainties in the assessment, SC19 should recommend a precautionary approach to reducing mortality to allow the stock to begin rebuilding.

- Many CCMs have expressed that 2024 should focus on further development of harvest strategies. To facilitate this, SC19 should provide clear requests to managers to convene a second science-management dialogue (SMD) where their guidance is needed to progress MSE testing and identification of preferred candidate management procedures. Requests should also include necessary timing of SMDs to enable WCPFC to meet its harvest strategy workplan timeframes.
- Recommend that the Electronic Monitoring (EM) working group finalize EM minimum standards to be adopted at the Commission meeting this year. Paucity of independent data across fisheries, particularly in the longline sector, has been an acknowledged issue for many years and results in higher levels of stock uncertainty. This can be improved via an EM program, and this would in turn improve the robustness of the science underpinning WCPFC management.
- Recommend to the Commission to finalize the MOU with NPFC and to renew the MOU with SPRFMO as per [SC19-GN-WP-04](#) and [-05](#). Both of these RFMOs have a significant geographical overlap with WCPFC and as such, consultation, cooperation and collaboration between them and WCPFC is essential for the development of robust scientific management advice.