



**NORTHERN COMMITTEE
NINTH REGULAR SESSION**

2-5 September 2013
Fukuoka, Japan

Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

PEW¹

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The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
9th Regular Session of the Northern Committee
2 September 2013 - 5 September 2013 - Fukuoka, Japan

The Pew Charitable Trusts is pleased to participate in the 9th Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC9) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) as an observer. Pew looks forward to engaging with this Committee's important work as it recommends conservation and management measures for the species under its purview. Given the recent scientific assessments and advice, and recommendations by NC members for precautionary catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF), it is critical that at this meeting the NC recommend the following measures for adoption at WCPFC10:

- A comprehensive rebuilding plan that includes WCPFC-wide catch limits for PBF that will increase the population to 20%SSB₀ within 10 years;
- A limit reference point of 20%SSB₀ for PBF and a recommendation of an appropriate, precautionary target reference point;
- A 20 kg minimum size limit for PBF, with a 25% tolerance for undersized fish;
- No exemptions or special provisions from any PBF management measure for any CCM;
- Precautionary catch limits for blue sharks while improved data is collected on the state of the north Pacific stock.

Pacific Bluefin

The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) recently completed the final version of its 2012 stock assessment for PBF and it paints a disturbing picture for Pacific bluefin. According to the assessment, the population has declined by 96.4 percent, with a 73 percent decline over the past 15 years, bringing it to just 3.6% of unfished levels. Juvenile mortality is over 90 percent, a rate which threatens the future viability of the population. The ISC stock assessment states that:

'The current (2010) PBF biomass level is near historical low levels and experiencing high exploitation rates above all biological reference points (BRP's) commonly used by fishery managers. Based on projection results, extending the status quo (2007-2009) fishing levels is unlikely to improve stock status... Further reduction of fishing mortality, especially for juvenile fish, is needed to reduce the risk of SSB falling below its historically low levels.'

In short, the stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring. Given the severely depleted status of the stock and the ISC's recommendations, the NC has a responsibility to act without delay to increase protections for this heavily over-exploited population. If PBF fishing countries are not willing to adopt and implement appropriate management measures, then fishing of Pacific bluefin tuna should be suspended until precautionary, science based measures are put in place.

Since bluefin migrate across the Pacific Ocean, it is critical that they are managed in a coordinated, precautionary, and consistent manner in both the eastern and western Pacific. Earlier this year, the IATTC adopted a catch limit for the bluefin fishery in the eastern Pacific in recognition of the severely depleted status of the population and the need for strong action. Further, the IATTC noted the need for appropriate and effective action for the species across the Pacific basin. However, the WCPFC has not taken complementary actions, leaving the western Pacific fishery as the only bluefin fishery in the world without a region-wide limit on catch. As a large majority of the total PBF catch is caught within WCPFC waters, this is a critical issue that must be rectified. While Japan has adopted limited domestic regulations to reduce effort and catch and called for a small reduction in juvenile catch, these efforts do not negate the need for RFMO wide action, as they do not limit the overall bluefin mortality in the western Pacific or adequately protect the smallest of the bluefin. Further, these domestic measures must be closely monitored and strengthened to ensure they are effective.

At this year's meeting, the NC has the responsibility to recommend that CMM 2012-06, the conservation and management measure for Pacific bluefin tuna, be significantly strengthened by mandating a 10-year rebuilding plan for the species, incorporating science-based catch limits to reach that rebuilding target, a minimum size limit to protect juveniles, and an elimination of the exemptions currently found in the measure. As fishing mortality is the driving factor in the severe population decline of PBF, these changes would reverse the precipitous decline in the population.

Without strong management actions applied consistently and in concert with those in the eastern Pacific to rebuild the bluefin population, international trade restrictions may be considered and/or applied through other international fora.

Sharks

The Northern Committee will consider the scientific advice now available through both the ISC and SPC assessments of the north Pacific blue shark stock. All of the stock assessment work on this species notes high uncertainty in the status of the stock. While some of the results indicate that current harvest levels could be sustainable, several model runs in both assessments indicate that this heavily exploited stock could be in an overfished state.

Given the high level of uncertainty in these assessments, along with the high catch rate of around 40,000 mt annually over the last decade, the Northern Committee should recommend precautionary blue shark catch limits. In addition, collection of all data of blue shark catch should be mandated, so that a more comprehensive stock assessment can be conducted in the near future.

Pew wishes the Northern Committee the best for a productive meeting and again emphasizes the NC's critical role in the WCPFC process.