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The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement on Tuna to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
10th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
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The Pew Charitable Trusts thanks the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) for the opportunity to participate in the 10th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC10) as an observer. Pew urges SC10 to make progress on key areas of work by agreeing:

- Recommendations for urgent action to rebuild the population of Pacific bluefin tuna, considering the results of the 2014 assessment update;
- Scientific advice to end overfishing of bigeye tuna and rebuild the population, considering the results of the 2014 assessment;
- Scientific advice to ensure a sustainable skipjack fishery, noting record high catches in 2013;
- Recommendations for remotely gathering data on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) for use in science by setting up a system similar to the pilot project being conducted by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement; and
- Recommendations for specific target and limit reference points, harvest control rules, and acceptable risk levels for WCPFC tunas.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

We strongly urge SC10 to carefully review the 2014 Pacific bluefin tuna assessment update conducted by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC). The current Pacific bluefin tuna biomass is near historically low levels – at just 4 percent of its unfished biomass – and current management measures will not lead to an increase in spawning stock biomass if current levels of recruitment continue.

The ISC projected effects of seven different management scenarios and their likelihood of meeting candidate rebuilding targets under a 10- or 15-year program. Only one scenario (Scenario 6) was highlighted by the ISC as promoting growth in spawning stock biomass. That scenario requires a limit on juvenile catch in the WCPO of no more than 4,570 metric tons, which represents a 50 percent reduction from the 2002-2004 average catch, and total fishing mortality no greater than $F_{2002\text{-}04}$. However, even this most conservative scenario only has a 38% chance of rebuilding to 25% of SSB_0 within 10 years under the most optimistic recruitment forecast. In this light, **SC10 should recommend that the Northern Committee propose juvenile catch limits at or below the level included in Scenario 6, and provide advice on the development of a 10-year basin-wide recovery program for bluefin.**

Tropical Tunas

The 2014 assessment of bigeye tuna concluded that overfishing is occurring and there is a high probability that bigeye tuna is overfished when compared to standard reference points. The bigeye catch associated with the purse seine fishery was the highest on record in 2013, even with the extended FAD closure period. Meanwhile, the 2013 skipjack catch was also the highest on record, surpassing the prior record by 50,000 metric tons. The latest catches of skipjack slightly exceed the maximum sustainable yield, according to the 2014 assessment.

In considering these assessments, SC10 should provide clear advice on mechanisms to sustainably fish tropical tunas. Notably the following:

- **Prior SC recommendations on FAD set limits have been interpreted by the WCPFC Commission as being equivalent to FAD closures, which have not been effective. SC should clarify the FAD set limits required to achieve the needed reductions in bigeye tuna mortality.**
- **With respect to skipjack, SC10 should also consider the rapid development of the fishery to assess whether additional management measures are warranted to ensure the continued sustainability of the skipjack fishery.**

Fish Aggregating Devices

Given that both skipjack and juvenile bigeye are caught in the surface fishery, we urge SC10 to provide a clear recommendation on the scientific benefits of tracking and monitoring FADs through the transmission of data via satellite to the WCPFC Secretariat. As highlighted by Circular No. 2014/60, rapid changes in the operation of the surface fishery need to be further studied to discern their effects on tuna populations. This is of urgent priority given more purse seiners than ever before are operating in the Convention Area, a greater number of FADs are being deployed, and vessels are becoming more efficient at fishing with FADs through the use of sonar buoys.

One method to increase the quality and quantity of scientific data has been piloted by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA). The PNA fishery management system received via satellite the real-time data already transmitted from FAD buoys to fishing vessels. The data allow for an analysis of the numbers and locations of FADs and include measurements of biomass and oceanographic conditions. The data could improve stock assessments and determine the fate of FADs. With this in mind, **SC10 should support the PNA's project and urge the WCPFC to adopt a comparable system that provides scientific data from FADs via satellite to the WCPFC Secretariat.**

Reference Points

Pew strongly supports the continued development of reference points and harvest control rules for WCPFC fisheries, and sees these as critical tools to ensuring healthy oceans and profitable fisheries into the future. WCPFC has agreed to a limit reference point for bigeye tuna (20%$SB_{F=0}$) that likely has been crossed, and the fishing mortality of Pacific bluefin tuna exceeds all candidate reference points with the potential exception of F_{loss}. In order to rebuild bigeye and bluefin populations, and prevent other tuna fisheries from similar conditions, SC10 should recommend candidate limits that are biologically based and targets that are appropriately precautionary. Additionally, harvest control rules should be structured so that there is no more than a 5 to10 percent chance of exceeding limit reference points. This year, **SC10 should further endorse and support the adoption of explicit reference points and harvest control rules, even if only on an interim basis, for albacore, bigeye, Pacific bluefin, skipjack, and yellowfin tuna.**