

The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
11th Regular Session of the Northern Committee
31 August - 3 September 2015 - Sapporo, Japan

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 11th Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC11) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) as an observer. Further conservation and management action is urgently needed for Pacific bluefin tuna, and the decisions made at this year's meeting will be vital in guiding and ensuring the recovery and long term health of this population. Pew looks forward to engaging with the Committee as it works to agree on urgently needed rebuilding measures for this highly depleted species.

The dire status of the Pacific bluefin tuna population is well known but unfortunately, under-addressed. The latest stock assessment conducted by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) found that the stock has decreased by 96% from its historic size and recent catch of juvenile fish constitute nearly 98% of the total catch. The ISC Pacific Bluefin Working Group also determined that recruitment in 2014 had fallen below 2012 levels, and may now be at historically low levels¹. Worryingly, a new analysis has found that the current management measures will likely lead to a continued decline in the population through 2019, and that over the next decade, there is a significant chance that the population will fall to the lowest level ever recorded². To allow this without taking further preventative action would be irresponsible. Clearly, more effective management, including protection of reproductive adults, is still needed for the species.

Without immediate action to further reduce fishing pressure at this year's Northern Committee meeting, the status and future of Pacific bluefin tuna will continue to worsen. The members of the Northern Committee have a responsibility to act to help reverse the decline of the Pacific bluefin population and set the species on the path to recovery. Without sufficient measures, including agreement on a long term recovery plan, the credibility of the Northern Committee, as well as the entire Commission, will be threatened. Further steps, such as an international trade ban, may need to be taken in other international fora to ensure sufficient conservation and management of this species.

Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2014-04 states that "the Northern Committee shall consider and develop reference points and harvest control rules for the long-term management of Pacific bluefin tuna at its meetings in 2015 and 2016." CMM 2014-06 also tasks the NC with

¹ ISC. Report of the Pacific Bluefin Tuna Working Group intersessional workshop. April, 2015.

² Fukuda, H. et al. Updates of recruitment and harvesting scenario for the future projection of Pacific bluefin tuna. April 2015. http://isc.ac.affrc.go.jp/pdf/PBF/ISC_2015_PBF_1/ISC_15-1_PBFWG_10_Fukuda.pdf

recommending a “workplan and indicative timeframes to adopt or refine harvest strategies” for Pacific bluefin by 2015. According to the CMM, this plan shall include agreement on management objectives, target and limit reference points, acceptable levels of risk, a monitoring strategy, harvest control rules and a management strategy evaluation.

Given the latest information and analysis, in order to protect the population, satisfy the requirements of CMM 2014-04 and CMM 2014-06, and help the Pacific bluefin population recover to healthy levels, the Northern Committee should:

- Recommend that the limit on adult catch be reduced by 50% from 2002-2004 average levels to immediately help protect the spawning stock.
- Agree on an additional rebuilding target of B_{MSY} , or an appropriate proxy of B_{MSY} , to be reached by 2030.
- Recommend a timeline for development of a harvest strategy for Pacific bluefin tuna, which would include the six steps prescribed in CMM 2014-06 and result in adoption of a comprehensive harvest strategy no later than WCPFC15 in 2017.
- Agree on a set of management objectives, including returning the Pacific bluefin population to the target reference point by 2030 and then maintaining the population above that point thereafter. Additional objectives should be to reduce variability in year-to-year quotas and maintain a healthy, Pacific-wide fishery into the future.
- Agree on limit reference points for Pacific bluefin of F_{MSY} and $0.6B_{MSY}$, or an appropriate proxy for F_{MSY} and $0.6B_{MSY}$ (e.g., 24% $SSB_{current, F=0}$). Limit reference points should be defined as the points at which once the fishery is rebuilt, if breached, the fishery will be suspended and scientific monitoring will be instituted until the fishery and population return to the limits.
- Agree on target reference points for Pacific bluefin of $0.8F_{MSY}$ and B_{MSY} , or appropriate proxies (e.g., 40% $SSB_{current, F=0}$), which would provide an appropriate buffer to breaching the limit reference point.
- Agree that measures adopted should lead to a less than 5% chance of breaching the limit reference point, and have a 90% or greater chance of achieving the target reference point.
- Request that as part of the 2016 assessment the ISC analyze a range of catch scenarios and associated management measures and assess their effectiveness in relation to the above elements.
- By no later than 2016, based on the results of the ISC analysis, recommend a harvest control rule that contains the above elements and is most likely to achieve the management objectives.

The NC, WCPFC, and ISC have recognized the need for a long term plan for the recovery and management of Pacific bluefin. We look forward to working with the members of the NC and urge them to implement effective and precautionary management measures that rebuild and maintain a healthy bluefin population and fishery across the Pacific Ocean.