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The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
12th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
3-11 August 2016, Bali, Indonesia

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 12th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC12) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Pew urges SC12 to:

- Provide recommendations to develop harvest strategies for tropical tunas and south Pacific albacore, including a timeline to rebuild Pacific bigeye to its limit reference point in the shortest time feasible;
- Provide recommendations on options for long-term reference points for Pacific bluefin to return the population to a healthy level, and opportunities to increase the required likelihood of achieving that target;
- Provide recommendations to improve the management of the Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) purse seine fishery, including information to inform the progress of the FAD Working Group;
- Recommend precautionary measures from outcomes of stock assessments that safeguard South Pacific blue shark and Pacific-wide bigeye thresher shark from overfishing;
- Develop clear guidelines on management plans for targeted shark fisheries;
- Provide recommendations to enable the Commission to increase the scientific data collected from the longline fleet.

Harvest strategies

The Commission last year adopted a workplan for developing harvest strategies for tuna species in accordance with CMM 2014-06, a significant step toward using modern management tools to restore depleted fisheries and ensure that others remain healthy and profitable. Pew strongly supports the development of harvest strategies for each tuna species managed by the WCPFC. Harvest strategies include pre-agreed frameworks for making fisheries management decisions, allowing managers to avoid time-consuming negotiations in response to each stock status update, and ensuring stability and predictability for industry. Each harvest strategy should include agreed-upon management objectives, limit and target reference points, a quantified level of risk of breaching the limit reference point, and harvest control rules that are tested for their performance against the management objectives through management strategy evaluation (MSE). Recognizing that CCMs made a commitment of goodwill in agreeing to the timetable in the workplan for proceeding with the development of harvest strategies, SC12 should support the process by providing recommendations on each of the items slated to be decided and/or discussed by the Commission in 2016, including the following:

- **Recommend that the Commission specify measurable management objectives for each tuna species, including that the target reference points be met with 80 percent or greater likelihood;**
- **Recommend the adoption of acceptable levels of risk for breaching limit reference points that should not exceed 10 percent[1] – and in the case of a depleted species like bigeye that warrants additional caution, 5 percent** – which would establish a safe buffer between limit and target reference points;
- **Recommend that Pacific bigeye be rebuilt to its limit reference point in the shortest time feasible, as determined by the stock's biological characteristics**,[2] and specify this as an interim step to rebuilding the stock to a target reference point that is scheduled to be agreed-upon in 2017;
- **Provide advice that would enable the Commission to adopt a precautionary target reference point for south Pacific albacore**, even if only on an interim basis, similar to the adoption in 2015 of an interim target reference point for skipjack, and recognizing that SC previously recommended that longline fishing mortality of south Pacific albacore be reduced to avoid further decline in the vulnerable biomass so that economically viable catch rates can be maintained;
- **Consider the implications of effort creep in the design and evaluation of harvest control rules for skipjack; and**
- **Review the draft MSE design framework and recommend that the Commission support MSE for all tuna species with clear timetables that are consistent with the timelines laid out in CMM 2014-06 and with an appropriate budget.**

<u>Pacific bluefin tuna rebuilding and harvest strategy</u>

The latest stock assessment in 2016 for Pacific bluefin tuna conducted by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) found that the stock remains at historically low levels and continued overfishing has reduced the population to just 2.6 percent of its historic, unfished size. Projections showed that under current management and low and highly variable recruitment conditions, there is less than a 1 percent chance that the population will return to healthy levels within the next 20 years. Recognizing the need for a more effective and comprehensive recovery plan, and that the Pacific bluefin stock is caught in both the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and WCPFC have agreed to hold a joint meeting at the end of August to discuss the development of a long-term, ocean-wide management framework. However, managers will need scientific input and advice on appropriate reference points that will lead to recovery and maintenance of the population at healthy levels. To support the objectives of the joint WCPFC/IATTC meeting on Pacific bluefin management, the SC should:

- **Review the results of the 2016 ISC Pacific bluefin stock assessment and projections;**
- **Review the current WCPFC multi-annual rebuilding plan and initial rebuilding target for Pacific bluefin as outlined in CMM 2015-04;**
- **Recommend appropriate options for long-term target and limit reference points for Pacific bluefin tuna that will return and maintain the stock at healthy levels, and increase the required likelihood of achieving that target; and**
- **Recommend that the ISC increase transparency by opening its meetings to observers and making its documents publicly available in a timely fashion.**

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

Bigeye tuna is overfished and overfishing has been occurring for many years. High levels of FAD use has contributed to record-high catches of skipjack. Bigeye in the purse seine fishery is taken almost exclusively on sets on floating objects. The objective of the tropical tuna conservation measure (CMM 2015-01) is to reduce fishing mortality on bigeye to the level that would support maximum sustainable yield by the end of 2017. The Commission has created a FAD working group to recommend a way forward to the Commission on the collection of FAD data and their use; monitoring, tracking, and control; and management options. Recognizing that a new Pacific bigeye stock assessment will be presented to the Scientific Committee in August 2017 and CMM 2015-01 expires at the end of 2017, SC12 should provide clear advice to enable the Commission next year to create a measure that will be effective in addressing current management needs as well as act as a bridge to the eventual implementation of harvest strategies for bigeye and the other tropical tuna species. Specifically, SC12 should:

- **Assist the FAD Working Group by recommending management needs related to FADs that should be considered as priorities;**
- **Recommend that the SPC provide an analysis of the number of FAD sets that would be associated with reductions in mortality from the purse seine fishery in combination with reductions in the longline fishery necessary to end bigeye overfishing;**
- **Recommend that the draft FAD Research Plan prioritize analyses of bigeye hotspots, FAD-related effort creep and changes in catchability of bigeye associated with FADs, and why certain vessels catch more bigeye than others**; **and**
- **Recommend adoption of a system of gathering data on FADs that would complement the pilot project in the waters of the members of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and would receive the same satellite tracking data already transmitted by FAD buoys to their owners.**

Sharks

As the SC12 review stock assessments for South Pacific blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) and Pacific-wide bigeye thresher shark (*Alopias superciliosus*), we urge the Committee to apply the precautionary principle in their recommendations. Assessments of shark species are often constrained by the quantity and quality of datasets. For stock assessments hindered by high levels of uncertainty, inadequate data, or inconclusive results, Pew urges SC12 to recommend precautionary measures that safeguard these key shark species from overfishing.

Longline mitigation measures to reduce fishing-related mortality on silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) and oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) must be strengthened. The current option within CMM 2014-05 to choose between wire trace and shark-lines diminishes the benefits to both shark species. By prohibiting the use of wire trace and shark-lines, fishing-related mortality can be reduced by 29% and 40% for silky and oceanic whitetip sharks respectively.[3]

Pew urges SC12 to develop guidelines for management plans in targeted shark fisheries that safeguard highly vulnerable stocks, and ensure an acceptable level of fishing mortality for all shark species caught. In addition, SC12 should include a timeline for the review of submitted plans and develop a clear definition for a targeted shark fishery.

Several sharks species caught in the convention area are characterized by low productivity making them highly vulnerable to overfishing. **Pew urges SC12 to apply the precautionary principle for all stock assessments, strengthen mitigation measures by prohibiting the use of wire trace and shark-lines, and develop clear guidelines on management plans for targeted shark fisheries.**

Provision of scientific data

The SC will receive a report on the status of operational data provided to the Commission and a report on the second meeting of the WCPFC Electronic Monitoring and Electronic Reporting Working Group. Noting the importance of operational data and observer coverage for scientific analyses, and the particular lack of such data from the longline fleet, SC12 should:

- **Identify gaps in operational data and scientific observer coverage of the fishing activities of longline fleets, how those deficiencies impact the provision of 'best practice' scientific advice to the Commission, and how those deficiencies can best be addressed;**
- **Recommend the minimum level needed for scientific observer coverage of longline vessels;**
- **Recommend that the Commission proceed to fill gaps in observer coverage onboard longline vessels with the use of electronic monitoring;**
- **Provide advice on the scientific data that should be collected as part of electronic monitoring as a matter of priority; and**
- **Consider the quality of the VMS data received for the purpose of its scientific assessments and advice, and recommend whether any changes should be made to the current 4-hour polling rate for longline vessels.**

[1] Both the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and WCPFC Convention recommend the risk of breaching a limit reference point be set "very low," particularly in cases of greater uncertainty. "Very low" has been defined as less than 10 percent probability in other international fora, such as the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Davies and Basson in a 2008 paper to the WCPFC (WCPFC-SC4-2008/GN-WP-10) recommended risk levels of 5 or 10 percent "at the most."

[2] Members of the UN General Assembly, in adopting the outcome document from the Rio Conference, "The Future We Want," in July 2012, committed to "urgently take measures necessary to maintain or restore all stocks at least to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield, with the aim of achieving these goals in the shortest time feasible, as determined by their biological characteristics."

[3] S. Harley and G. Pilling. 2016 Potential implications of the choice of longline mitigation approach allowed within CMM 2014-05. WCPFC-SC12-2016/EB-WP-06