

The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
13th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
9-17 August 2017, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 13th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC13) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Pew urges SC13 to:

- Provide recommendations to develop harvest strategies for tropical tunas and south Pacific albacore, including advice on a target reference point for south Pacific albacore and bigeye tuna, performance indicators for tuna species, and development of management strategy evaluation;
- Recommend appropriate elements of a long-term recovery plan for Pacific bluefin;
- Provide advice to ensure bigeye tuna is above the limit reference point and is not experiencing overfishing;
- Provide advice to improve the management of the Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) associated purse seine fishery; and
- Review options for increasing the provision of scientific and operational data through electronic collection and monitoring systems.

Harvest Strategies

The Commission last year made important progress in defining elements that support the development of harvest strategies for tuna stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. This year, it is essential for the Commission to continue making progress by following, whenever possible, the timelines for decision-making in the WCPFC harvest strategies workplan, which was developed in accordance with CMM 2014-06. Pew strongly supports developing harvest strategies for each tuna species. 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; a monitoring plan; and harvest control rules that are tested for their performance against the management objectives using management strategy evaluation (MSE). SC13 should continue to support the process by providing recommendations and advice on each of the items slated to be decided and/or discussed by the Commission in 2017, including the following:

- **Provide advice to 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 recalling that the SC had 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;
- **Provide advice on a future target reference point for bigeye and recommend the Commission prioritize its development;**

- **Provide advice on performance indicators to evaluate bigeye and yellowfin harvest control rules, and include a performance indicator for bigeye that measures the percentage of juvenile versus adult mortality, as a means of assessing the impact of harvest control rules on selectivity and maximum sustainable yield;**
- **Review the progress in designing a MSE for skipjack and south Pacific albacore;**
- **Provide advice on structuring the WCPFC processes to provide appropriate consultation on elements of harvest strategies; and**
- **Provide advice on adjusting the timelines in the harvest strategy workplan with the goal of ensuring harvest strategies are completed for all tuna species, with an appropriate budget.**

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

As noted by SC12, the Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) spawning stock biomass is depleted to 2.6% of the estimated unfished spawning stock biomass and that this depletion level is considerably below the biomass depletion-based limit reference point of $0.20SB_{\text{current, F=0}}$ set by the Commission for all other WCPFC key tuna stocks (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, south Pacific albacore and north Pacific albacore). SC12 also expressed the need for “urgent coordinated actions between WCPFC and IATTC in reviewing the current rebuilding plan” as well as “considering and developing reference points and HCRs for the long term management of PBF.” In light of the continued severely depleted status of PBF and recent reports of unauthorized and unregulated catch in the fishery, SC13 should:

- **Note the negative effects of illegal fishing and quota overages on the estimated success of the current rebuilding plan and on the ability for the population to recover, and recommend that the WCPFC members immediately put measures into place to avoid such overages in the future and reduce the 2018 quota to “payback” these overages;**
- **Review progress made on the elements outlined in the current WCPFC multi-annual rebuilding plan and initial rebuilding target for Pacific bluefin (CMM 2016-04);**
- **Recommend a secondary rebuilding target of at least 20% of unfished spawning stock biomass and 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**
- **Recommend that the ISC increase transparency by opening its meetings to observers and making its documents publicly available in a timely fashion.**

Bigeye Tuna

A new stock assessment of bigeye tuna includes a model with a new growth parameter and regional structure that results in a more optimistic view of bigeye than before. The Scientific Committee should assess the plausibility of the models described in the assessment and provide recommendations to ensure management of the stock results in bigeye being above the limit reference point with a high probability and not experiencing overfishing. Specifically, SC13 should:

- **If advice is formulated based scenarios using the new growth estimate/new regional structure, provide a clear recommendation to avoid increases in catch of adult**

bigeye and reduce fishing mortality on juvenile bigeye – which continue to be fished at a greater intensity – as a precautionary step;

- **Provide advice on a future target reference point for bigeye and recommend the Commission prioritize its development;**
- **Recommend a system of FAD set limits should be developed to achieve the desired level of fishing mortality in the purse seine fishery;**
- **Recommend a system of catch limits, encompassing all areas of significant bigeye mortality, would achieve the desired level of fishing mortality in the longline fishery; and**
- **Recommend the scientific services provider produce a sliding scale of combinations of longline and purse seine catch/effort for the 22-24 August intersessional meeting on a bridging measure on tropical tunas.**

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

The purse seine fishery catches bigeye tuna almost exclusively in sets on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). Compared to fishing on free schools, the use of FADs is also associated with greater levels of bycatch of certain non-target species, including some sharks, and contributes to marine debris. The Commission created a FAD Working Group to “recommend a way forward” on the collection of FAD data and their use; monitoring, tracking, and control; and management options. Although the working group has reviewed concepts to collect additional data on FADs, it has not recommended management options and no further meetings are scheduled. Separately, an independent FAD Science Symposium¹, which included participants familiar with the WCPFC, identified a number of best practices for FAD use consistent with the attributes of a well-managed purse seine fishery. Considering that FADs are a critical gear in the WCPO, SC13 should:

- **Recommend the Commission establish a clear process to develop a comprehensive approach to the management of FADs, taking into consideration examples of best practices identified by the FAD Science Symposium, including:**
 - **The importance of agreeing to management objectives for FAD use;**
 - **Shifting some effort to free school fishing, through market (e.g. certification schemes), policy (e.g. FAD set limits) or other incentives, positively impacts juvenile tunas and certain non-target species;**
 - **Such a shift requires a cap on the number of FADs in the water to avoid cherry-picking FADs, and reduces marine pollution, breaching or grounding of FADs; and**
 - **Use of non-entangling FADs avoids impacts on sharks, and some other non-target species.**
- **Recommend the Commission institute a scheme to physically mark FADs, which would complement the electronic data available to the scientific services provider through the PNA’s FAD tracking efforts, and allow scientists to follow the life history of a FAD; and**

¹ The Global FAD Science Symposium, held March 20-23, 2017, in Santa Monica, California, involved more than 30 experts who participated without affiliation.

- **Recommend additional steps to ensure the Commission can understand, at a minimum, the total number of FADs deployed, lost/abandoned, and estimate the effective level of FAD-associated effort**

Provision of Scientific and Operational Data

In light of the importance of operational data and observer coverage for scientific analyses, the particular lack of such data from the longline fleet, and the ongoing efforts to adopting electronic reporting and monitoring standards, SC13 should:

- **Identify gaps in operational data and scientific observer coverage of the fishing activities of longline fleets and how those deficiencies impact the provision of 'best practice' scientific advice to the Commission;**
- **Recommend the minimum level needed for scientific observer coverage of longline vessels; and**
- **Identify and recommend steps necessary to develop and implement effective electronic reporting and electronic monitoring capabilities in the longline fleet.**