

The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
14th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
8-16 August 2017, Busan, Republic of Korea

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 14th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC14) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Pew urges SC14 to:

- Provide recommendations to develop harvest strategies for the tropical tunas and south Pacific albacore;
- Provide advice to ensure that current measures for Pacific bluefin are maintained, the rebuilding plan is successfully carried out, and that overfishing is ended;
- Provide advice to ensure management of bigeye tuna maintains the stock above the limit reference point and minimizes the risk of breaching the limit reference point; and
- Provide advice to improve the management of the Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) associated purse seine fishery.

Harvest Strategies

The Commission has made some progress in defining elements that support the development of harvest strategies for tuna stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) in accordance with CMM 2014-06. Pew strongly supports developing harvest strategies for each tuna species. Each strategy should include: agreed-upon management objectives measured by performance indicators; 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). SC14 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 2018, including the following:

- **Provide advice to enable the Commission to adopt target reference points (TRPs) for bigeye and yellowfin tunas in 2019, at the latest, in accordance with the harvest strategy workplan.** In doing so, SC14 should comment on the suitability of a range of potential TRPs, including those that imply a 5% risk of breaching the limit reference point, as that level of risk would be in keeping with the limit reference point-related principle of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. SC14 should also recommend the Commission examine socio-economic factors such as CPUE and catch stability to inform its decision, pending analysis of additional performance indicators through MSE at a later date;
- **Provide advice to enable the Commission to adopt a TRP for south Pacific albacore this year, as well as advise on the technical aspects of a south Pacific albacore harvest strategy.** SC14 has previously advised that longline fishing mortality on south Pacific albacore should be reduced to avoid further decline in the vulnerable biomass so that economically viable catch rates can be maintained;

- **Recommend the Commission adopt the terms of reference for a Science and Management Dialogue meeting**, noting the number of decisions that would benefit from the close interactions of scientists, managers and other stakeholders, and specify that the meeting should occur annually starting in 2019;
- **Provide advice on the progress of designing an MSE for skipjack and other tunas and recommend steps as appropriate to ensure the work proceeds as quickly as possible and receives the appropriate Commission resources; 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

The latest stock assessment for Pacific bluefin tuna conducted by the ISC confirms that the population remains severely depleted, at just 3.3% of its unfished stock size, and that overfishing is still occurring, relative to all commonly used reference points. While the terminal recruitment estimate is higher than recent values, it is only based on one observational source, and therefore subject to high levels of uncertainty. Importantly, that estimate is the main driver of the predicted future stock recovery under several of the examined projection scenarios. The precautionary approach would dictate that this recruitment estimate should be confirmed by future observations before management is modified. SC14 should review the updated Pacific bluefin stock assessment and:

- **Note that while the population is not declining at this time, it is still severely depleted and overfishing is still occurring; and**
- **Recommend that the current catch limits should be maintained until the next full assessment is completed** due to the current status of the population, the uncertainty of the recent recruitment estimate, the large impact of that estimation on the trajectory of the future projections, and the need for precaution in the early years of the recently adopted rebuilding plan.

Bigeve Tuna

Following the 2017 stock assessment of bigeye tuna that included models with a more optimistic view of the stock status, additional data were collected and analyzed to inform an update of that assessment, which will be presented to SC14. Meanwhile, the Commission in 2017 also adopted a new measure, CMM 2017-01, with an objective to ensure the spawning biomass depletion ratio of bigeye can be maintained at or above the average $SB/SB_{F=0}$ for 2012-2015. An evaluation of the long-term effectiveness of the measure will be presented to SC14. Although SC13 noted that juvenile bigeye are experiencing particularly high fishing mortality in four regions, CMM 2017-01 established a three-month FAD closure in EEZs, one month fewer than before. SC14 should therefore assess all of the updated information to:

- **Provide advice on whether CMM 2017-01 will achieve its objective of maintaining the spawning biomass depletion ratio of bigeye at or above the average $SB/SB_{F=0}$ for 2012-2015, and the likelihood of success;**

- **Recommend the Commission improve the management of juvenile bigeye tuna through alternative management strategies, such as limits to the number of sets on FADs.**

Fish Aggregating Devices

FADs are a critical gear in the WCPO. This year, based on advice from the FAD Working Group, the Commission will consider the adoption of measures relating to the use of non-entangling and/or biodegradable material on FADs, and review the appropriateness of the number of FADs vessels can have deployed at sea at any one time with activated instrumented buoys, currently limited to 350 per vessel (CMM 2017-01.) An analysis of data from FAD buoys estimated at least 5% of buoys beach on coastal resources, such as coral reefs, and an estimated 26% could be considered lost, drifting out of the main purse seine zone and likely becoming marine pollution. Nearly all FADs deployed in the WCPO use some synthetic materials in their construction, with a significant share wholly artificial, and use of non-entangling designs to avoid impacts to sharks and turtles is low. Meanwhile, an analysis of FAD deployments found few/no vessels would have more than 350 active FADs in the water at any one time and FAD density appears to influence CPUE, with a slight decrease of total tuna CPUE with increasing FAD density, although more investigation is needed. To inform these discussions, SC14 should:

- **Recommend that entanglement of marine life in FADs should be minimized, necessitating use of lowest risk non-entangling FAD designs, which are available and used in other regions without impacting catch of targeted tunas;**
- **Recommend that use of synthetic and plastic material in the design of FADs be limited, noting the types of biodegradable materials tried or tested for FAD rafts and appendages, and recommend additional research to replace non-biodegradable materials on FADs;**
- **Recommend that a science-based limit on FAD deployments replace the existing language in 2017-01 on the maximum number of buoys vessels can monitor in the water at any one time.**
- **Recommend the Commission consider measures to recover FADs and provide coastal States with coordinates of FADs that are drifting toward shore to aid in their recovery; and**
- **Recommend the Commission task the FAD Working Group with identifying additional steps to improve data collection on FADs and develop a comprehensive approach to FAD management, which should include additional ways to reduce the catch of bigeye and yellowfin tunas on FADs.**