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**Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
15th Regular Session of the Northern Committee  
2-6 September 2019 – Portland, Oregon**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in both the upcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC15) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Joint Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific bluefin tuna. This week of meetings will be an opportunity for members to continue their commitment to the recovery of the severely depleted Pacific bluefin tuna population, as well as working towards a sustainable future for fisheries that catch bluefin, albacore, swordfish and striped marlin in the North Pacific by developing harvest strategies using management strategy evaluation (MSE).

The first priority must be in ensuring short-term management for Pacific bluefin tuna is based on the best available science. With the stock continuing to be at such a low level, and large uncertainty about the future trajectory of the population, **Pew strongly urges that both the Joint Working Group and NC15 recommend that the current management measure be maintained until a full benchmark stock assessment at least confirms the recent estimates of stock trajectory and recruitment levels. The Joint Working group and NC15 should instead focus their discussions during this meeting on the activities it agreed to in its workplan, including supporting the ISC MSE process for Pacific bluefin by identifying and adopting at least one candidate long-term target reference point, two candidate limit reference points, and candidate harvest control rules.**

In 2018, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) Pacific bluefin stock assessment update confirmed that the population remains at a critically low level, at just 3.3 percent of its historic, unfished size. Overfishing continues, with fishing rates more than twice as high as maximum sustainable levels. Future projections are heavily influenced by the most recent recruitment estimate, which the ISC has indicated is relatively uncertain. The predictions of successful long-term recovery of the species also depend on the assumption that recruitment will stay above levels that have not been consistently seen in over two decades. When recruitment is assumed to remain at lower levels, there is only a 3 percent chance that the rebuilding plan will be successful under current catch limits. Effective management does not rely on the hope that recruitment will increase and then remain at a high level, but instead is based on responsible, sustainable quota-setting that ends overfishing and takes into account uncertainty surrounding current and future conditions.

At NC14, based on this information, members rejected a proposal to increase the catch. Since that time, the ISC has not conducted another stock assessment, so the results of the 2018 assessment remain as the best available science. 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, current

management measures and catch limits must remain in place until a full benchmark stock assessment can be carried out in 2020.

Pew recognizes the tremendous progress made on the North Pacific albacore MSE as detailed in NC15-IP-05. **We recommend that NC15 allocate the resources to finalize the MSE in advance of the 5<sup>th</sup> ISC ALB MSE Workshop, which is slated for late 2020 and would allow the Commission to adopt a fully specified harvest strategy for North Pacific albacore at their meeting in December 2020.**

NC15 also has the opportunity to make progress on improving the management of two key billfish species – North Pacific swordfish and North Pacific striped marlin. North Pacific striped marlin is overfished and experiencing overfishing. **NC15 should adopt a rebuilding target for striped marlin of 20%SSB<sub>F=0</sub> and recommend that the Commission task the ISC and SC with recommending measures in 2020 to achieve that target by 2029 with a 60 percent or higher probability of success.** Those measures should then be adopted at NC16 as part of the rebuilding plan.

**NC15 should also recommend the Commission develop a harvest strategy for North Pacific swordfish using MSE, starting with dedicating the necessary funding and developing a workplan.** An effective harvest strategy must include specific and measurable management objectives, reference points, and pre-agreed harvest control rules. It should also be developed using MSE to ensure that the harvest strategy is predicted to achieve the management objectives, regardless of the uncertainty. A comprehensive harvest strategy for North Pacific swordfish would benefit the stock as well as the fishermen and industry that rely on it by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of management.

We look forward to working with all delegations to make progress in conserving and protecting these important North Pacific species and ensuring long-term sustainability for the fisheries that target them.