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**The Pew Charitable Trusts**  
**Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission**  
**Joint Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna and**  
**16th Regular Session of the Northern Committee**  
**October 6-8, 2020, online**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the upcoming Joint Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific bluefin tuna and the 16<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC16) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). We appreciate the work of the Secretariats, chairs, and members to convene these meetings virtually due to the extraordinary situation stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge all members to consider how to hasten the introduction of new approaches, including harvest strategies, to cope with such challenges by making management of the region's fisheries more resilient and stable. In relation to the limited agenda of NC16, we urge members to:

**Recommend maintaining the existing catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna and formalize the commitment to developing a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the species.**

Although the 2020 assessment showed a slight increase, the stock remains severely depleted at just 4.5%SSB<sub>F=0</sub>. The WCPFC Scientific Committee recommended a precautionary approach be taken to management until the stock rebuilds to greater levels of biomass. The rebuilding trajectories rely heavily on a highly uncertain assumption that recruitment will increase when the first rebuilding target is achieved. The last two recruitment estimates, of 2017 and 2018, were the lowest since the early 1990s, and future recruitments may remain low until there is a greater increase in spawning biomass. Any increases in catch will likely worsen overfishing and cause delays in reaching the interim and second rebuilding targets. Japan's proposal (WCPFC-NC14-DP-15) to increase catch limits by 20% is based on hope for an unpredicted recovery rather than the current best available science and should be strongly opposed.

Rather than considering increased quotas only three years into a rebuilding plan for a stock that is overfished and still undergoing overfishing, NC16 should prioritize development of a comprehensive harvest strategy for Pacific bluefin. The Northern Committee committed to developing an MSE in 2017. Last year, it adopted a terms of reference to guide the process and recommended candidate reference points and harvest control rules for testing. Yet there has been little progress. This year's agenda for the joint working group and NC16 specifically omits MSE, despite the fact that MSE is critical for managers to adopt scientifically-tested, long-term targets and harvest control rules to modernize management of this important fishery and ensure its sustainability into the future. The current "harvest strategy" does not qualify as a harvest strategy. NC16 should ensure funding and political support are committed to the ISC's MSE process, formally directing the ISC to present initial results in 2021 for feedback and endorsement, along with a detailed MSE workplan to enable a harvest strategy to be adopted by 2024.

**Provide advice to continue developing the MSE for north Pacific albacore.** We commend the ISC Albacore Working Group's progress on the MSE and urge NC16 to support their recommendation to convene the 5<sup>th</sup> ISC ALB MSE Workshop in early 2021. NC16 should provide feedback on the progress of the MSE and ways to ensure stakeholder input is appropriately considered in the MSE in order for a fully specified harvest strategy to be adopted in 2021.