

**JOINT IATTC AND WCPFC-NC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE
MANAGEMENT OF PACIFIC BLUEFIN TUNA
SIXTH SESSION (JWG-06)**

ELECTRONIC MEETING
8am-11am, Japan Standard Time
27-29 July 2021

**Statement to the 6th Joint IATTC-NC Working Group Meeting on
Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management**

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on Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management
July 27-29, 2021, online

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer to the Joint IATTC-NC Meeting on Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management. 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, such as harvest strategies, to make management more resilient and stable. In relation to the agenda of the joint working group, we urge members to:

Recommend maintaining the existing catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna. Increasing catch limits could threaten the small growth in population and delay achieving the second rebuilding target. The scientific advice does not support the proposal. The 2020 stock assessment found Pacific bluefin was still severely depleted (at just 4.5%SSB_{F=0}) and was overfished and experiencing overfishing. The WCPFC Scientific Committee, which has yet to meet this year, in 2020 recommended a precautionary approach be taken to management until the stock rebuilds to greater levels of biomass. Similarly, the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee this year recommended the current resolution be maintained. There is no new science that would suggest a change of course. Japan's proposal (JWG06-DP-13) to increase catch limits by 20% relies on a highly uncertain assumption that recruitment will be greater in the future than it has been. What's more, the proposal provides opportunities for members to reduce their catch of small fish to disproportionately increase their catch limit of large fish while carrying over to 2022 up to 17% of their uncaught initial limits from 2021. The full impact of these measures has not been analyzed but together could lead to a 70% increase in allowable catch. For these reasons, the proposal should be strongly opposed, as were similar proposals the last three years.

Accelerate work to develop the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). Developing an MSE would give managers the information needed to select a long-term, fully specified harvest strategy that accounts for uncertainties, including unreported catch and life history characteristics, such as recruitment. Progressing the MSE should be the focus of this year's joint working group, rather than yet another ad-hoc negotiation over catch limits for one year. The IATTC and NC recognized the importance of MSE in 2017 and requested the ISC to finalize its development by 2024, a request reiterated by the NC Chair last year. In 2019, the joint working group agreed to terms of reference for the MSE and candidate reference points and harvest control rules for testing. Despite this, little progress has been made. To accelerate the work, members should develop a workplan for the MSE, with clear tasks to its completion, and agree that the joint working group will hold stakeholder consultations in 2022 on more specific management objectives and associated performance metrics, among other tasks. Modernizing, science-based management of Pacific bluefin tuna is essential to the recovery and long-term profitability of Pacific bluefin fisheries.