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The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
17th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee
11-19 August 2021, online

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 17th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC17) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. We appreciate the work of the Secretariat, scientific services provider, SC chair and theme conveners, and all members to again convene the SC virtually due to the continuing situation stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. We again urge all members to consider how to accelerate the introduction of new technologies and approaches, such as electronic monitoring and harvest strategies, which, once implemented, would provide greater resilience and stability to the management of the region's fisheries, and help 'shock proof' management to the disruptions caused by situations such as COVID-19.

Regarding specific items on SC17's agenda, we urge members to:

- Consider the results of the south Pacific albacore stock assessment and provide advice to the Commission on how to use the existing management strategy evaluation (MSE) framework to develop a pathway to achieve the interim target reference point (TRP) and associated CPUE as agreed at WCPFC15.
- Recommend adoption of target reference points for bigeye and yellowfin tunas, which would enhance the progress toward developing the multi-species modelling framework and candidate management procedures, as discussed in paper SC17-MI-WP-03.
- Reemphasize the prior recommendation for the Commission to facilitate harvest strategies-related discussions among managers, scientists and stakeholders. A dialogue process is needed to allow for the WCPFC to further clarify its management objectives, provide feedback on the preliminary MSE results, and eventually select the 'best performing' management procedure.
- Endorse the limit reference points (LRPs) for striped marlin and swordfish proposed in SC17-MI-WP-08 and recommend the continued development and adoption of LRPs for other species, including precautionary LRPs for elasmobranchs as outlined in SC17-MI-WP-07. LRPs are a critical management signpost, and establishing them is essential for improving management of these important non-tuna species.
- Recommend a ban on the use of shark line and wire leader, which is projected to reduce fishing mortality by approximately 31% for silky shark and 41% for oceanic whitetip shark, as estimated in paper SC17-EB-WP-01, and recommend a rebuilding target to recover oceanic whitetip shark.
- Recommend that the Electronic Monitoring (EM) working group finalize EM minimum standards to be adopted at the Commission meeting this year. In addition, the SC should recommend the

adoption of a conservation and management measure for a Regional Electronic Monitoring (EM) Programme and approve the use of accredited EM programs to collect necessary datasets. High levels of stock uncertainty resulting in part from low observer coverage as noted in SC17-SA-WP-03 for example, can be improved via an EM programme and this would in turn, improve the robustness of the science underpinning WCPFC management.

- Recommend maintaining the existing catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna. Any increase in catch limits could threaten the small recent growth in population and thereby delay rebuilding. SC16 recommended a precautionary approach, and there has been no change in the scientific advice over the last 12 months.