



2005 Market Street, Suite 2800, Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077 P +1.215.575.9050 F +1.215.575.4939
901 E Street NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20004 P +1.202.552.2000 F +1.202.552.2299
Avenue des Arts 40, 1040 Brussels, Belgium P +32.2.274.1620 F +32.2.274.1630
The Grove, 248A Marylebone Road, London, NW1 6JZ P +44 (0) 20.7535.4000

The Pew Charitable Trusts
Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
17th Regular Session of the Northern Committee
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The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer at the 17th Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC17) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). We appreciate the work of the Chair, Members, and Secretariat to again convene NC virtually due to the continuing situation stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the ongoing effects of the pandemic, we urge all members to consider how to hasten the introduction of precautionary, science-based approaches that provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries, notably harvest strategies. Considering the limited agenda before NC17, we urge members to:

Reject the premature proposal from the joint working group to increase catches of Pacific bluefin tuna.

The Chair's proposal (NC17-WP-03) has been tabled without confirmation from the stock assessment that the fishery has met its first rebuilding target. When considered alongside the companion proposal in the eastern Pacific, catches of Pacific bluefin would be allowed to increase by up to 37% across the Pacific, when compared to 2020 landings. This increase would be extraordinarily risky for the most depleted tuna species in the world, which is still overfished and experiencing overfishing and last assessed at less than 5% of its unfished biomass. The scientific advice on bluefin management has not changed, and past bids to increase catches based on the same advice were rejected. NC17 must continue to act cautiously by rejecting these proposed catch increases.

Provide advice to accelerate work on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for Pacific bluefin. An MSE is necessary to give managers the information needed to select a long-term, fully-specified harvest strategy that accounts for uncertainties, including unreported and discarded catch, and life history characteristics, such as recruitment. Before moving forward with an MSE, however, the 2021 ISC plenary requested additional advice from the joint working group on measurable, operational management objectives and an anticipated management framework in the eastern and western Pacific, as well as support for two MSE analysts, one from each side of the Pacific. To avoid additional delays, NC17 must request that the joint working group hold a stakeholder meeting in early 2022 to gather views that would allow it to effectively respond to the ISC's request. NC17 members also should identify resources to support the MSE as a matter of priority. Implementing MSE-based management of Pacific bluefin tuna should not wait until the second rebuilding target is met as this effort will ensure a more certain recovery and contribute to the long-term profitability of Pacific bluefin fisheries, as has been demonstrated by experiences in management of southern bluefin tuna. As such, NC17 should recommend an amendment to the long-term management strategy of Pacific bluefin (NC17-WP-04) to require the MSE to evaluate harvest strategies for rebuilding to the second rebuilding target.

Request alternative recruitment scenarios be incorporated into Pacific bluefin projections. Noting the proposed request to the ISC from Chinese Taipei, Japan and the United States (NC17-DP-01), NC17 should clarify that a low recruitment scenario should be incorporated into the 2022 stock assessment's projections. That scenario should be developed by resampling from the relatively low recruitment period

of 1980-1989 or the recent recruitments of the last 10 years, whichever is lower, as has been done in assessments up until 2020.

Provide advice to enable adoption of a harvest strategy for north Pacific albacore in 2022. Following several workshops held since 2015 and one major revision based on feedback from managers, the MSE for north Pacific albacore has been completed and endorsed by the ISC. We commend the participants in the work and urge NC17 to seize the opportunity this year to recommend adoption of a fully specified harvest strategy that will ensure the stock's long-term sustainability and profitability. In so doing, NC17 would be securing WCPFC's first MSE-tested harvest strategy. At a minimum, NC17 should take necessary steps to ensure harvest strategy adoption no later than NC18, including by scheduling a workshop for early 2022 to facilitate the development of a consultative draft harvest strategy proposal.