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The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Ocean Foundation Position Statement to WCPFC21

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Submitted by The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Ocean Foundation

**Statement to the 21st Regular Session of the
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
November 28 to December 3, 2024
Suva, Fiji**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer to the 21st annual session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). We appreciate the work of the Chair, Members and Secretariat to convene a hybrid meeting and, along with The Ocean Foundation's International Fisheries Conservation Project, we encourage Members to hasten the adoption of approaches that would provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries. Specifically, we urge Members to:

Adopt EM standards to improve data collection in WCPFC fisheries

Electronic monitoring (EM) is key to improving the independent data collection and transparency of the fisheries the Commission oversees. After almost 10 years of discussion, a set of interim [EM standards](#) is before the Commission for adoption. **The Commission should aim to reach agreement on outstanding issues and adopt these EM standards, while ensuring that the standards remain robust and effective.** Specifically, the Commission should require that members seeking to use EM data to meet WCPFC reporting requirements confirm that their EM systems meet all of the 'MUST' requirements in the standards (Annex 4, interim reporting requirements, attestation), rather than just promising to do so in the future. **The Commission also should task the ERandEM Working Group to develop text for a measure detailing an operational EM program that can be adopted by the Commission in 2025.**

Improve the monitoring and reporting of at-sea transshipment activities

The gaps in the Commission's ability to monitor and verify at-sea transshipment activities must be closed. **The Commission should adopt a stronger measure on transshipment this year, bringing WCPFC up to the standard of the other tuna RFMOs.** The large number of transshipments occurring in the WCPFC area and lack of updated reporting requirements currently creates opportunities for laundering Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) catch. The stronger measure should include:

- Shortening the submission deadline for transshipment declarations;
- Requiring that IMO numbers be included on notification and declaration forms;
- Prohibiting vessels from acting as a receiving and offloading vessel on the same trip; and
- Requiring vessels to provide information on instances of non-fish supply and/or crew transfer activities.

Adopting a measure without these key elements would mean that seven years of negotiations would have failed to secure a meaningful outcome, leaving the WCPFC to continue to lag the rest of the world when it comes to managing transshipment activity.

Modernize management of the south Pacific albacore fishery

The south Pacific albacore fishery requires steps urgently to secure its future. After many years of discussion, WCPFC has the opportunity to take significant actions this year to improve the fishery for the people, industries, and communities that rely on it. As such, WCPFC should:

- **Adopt a management procedure (MP) for the south Pacific albacore fishery.** The South Pacific Group and Australia have proposed an interim MP ([DP-11](#)) that has been tested through management strategy evaluation. The Commission should adopt an MP that is estimated to maintain the fishery around the target reference point with a high degree of certainty.
- **Agree to develop a new conservation and management measure that implements the MP.** The South Pacific Group also has provided initial thoughts on the development of a new measure to implement the MP ([DP-12](#)). The Commission should agree to adopt a measure in 2025 that implements the output of the adopted MP across the entire Convention Area.
- **Agree to develop a joint south Pacific albacore working group with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).** The United States has submitted a discussion paper ([DP-14](#)) that identifies steps toward the establishment of a joint working group. The Commission should support establishing the group in 2025, noting the value of cooperation with the IATTC for future ongoing management of a stock that occurs across both Convention Areas. Signaling willingness to develop this effort at this meeting will also deliver a clear message that the IATTC should take up south Pacific albacore management as a priority.

Advance the review of port State measures

Effective port State measures (PSMs) are cost-effective ways to minimize the risk of illegally caught fish entering international markets. WCPFC's measure was adopted in 2017 and will be reviewed intersessionally for the first time in a process led by Fiji so it aligns with the minimum standards of the *United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA)*. This review should provide an opportunity for members to exchange information about their experiences implementing the CMM and barriers preventing implementation, to identify gaps in the current measure for targeted action to ensure the WCPFC region is meeting the required standards in the fight against IUU fishing. **The Commission should agree on the scope and workplan for the review, including allocating sufficient resources, to deliver a report to TCC in 2025.**

We also recognize the special requirements for developing States, especially small island developing States, and urge members to establish a fund to provide targeted assistance to ensure members can effectively implement a revised measure as soon as possible.

Advance management procedures for other stocks

Commission members, industry, and non-governmental organizations agree the development of management procedures are key to the future sustainability and profitability of the region's fish stocks. As such, WCPFC should:

- **Adopt target reference points for bigeye and yellowfin tunas and adopt a skipjack monitoring strategy.** Adoption of an MP for skipjack tuna was a major achievement for the Commission in 2022. Now it's time to adopt the strategy that will guide the periodic review of its elements and make progress on MPs for the other tropical tuna stocks.
- **Establish the Science Management Dialogue Group as a permanent body.** Meeting topics could be agreed by the Commission each year based upon which decisions are ripe for input.
- **Agree to the development of a South West Pacific swordfish MP.** Australia announced at SC20 its intention to develop an MP for SWP swordfish. The Commission should endorse this with development to begin following the 2025 stock assessment.

Lastly, we continue to express concern about significant increases in Pacific bluefin tuna catch limits based on stock assessments that do not consider a wide range of uncertainty and urge the Commission to ensure an MP for Pacific bluefin tuna is adopted in 2025 as planned.

Complete tasks remaining to improve the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS)

A robust CMS is essential to ensure Members are accountable for meeting their obligations, identifying capacity needs, highlighting where measures need to be amended, and supporting sustainable fisheries. **The Commission should approve a workplan for the Technical and Compliance Committee that sets 2025 as the year to develop corrective actions and guidelines for observer participation in the compliance process**, noting a set of [guidelines](#) is already available, including suggestions from non-governmental organizations.

Finally, we remain concerned by the decision to provide members with information reflecting only a sampled percentage of potential vessel-level infractions noticed in observer reports from the purse seine fishery. Inequities in the monitoring of fishing activity should be resolved by raising levels in the longline fishery and improving the compliance process for all parties.

Consider the impact of other international treaties

Recent international developments highlight potential interactions between resources managed by the Commission and the activities of other international management bodies. The Commission should support information exchange and cooperation with these other organizations, such as

the International Seabed Authority, given both the potential spatial overlap between tuna fisheries and areas of deep-sea mining with the potential for wider ecological impacts. Similarly, it should also keep abreast of developments with the High Seas Treaty as it moves closer to coming into force and consider how the World Trade Organization's Subsidies Agreement could interact with RFMOs. Maintaining a watching brief on these other fora with the potential to interact with WCPFC is essential for efficient future management and therefore should be considered as a standing agenda item for Commission meetings.