



**COMMISSION  
SEVENTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**  
Electronic Meeting  
8 – 15 December 2020

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**WCPFC17 POSITION STATEMENT**

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**WCPFC17-2020-OP03  
16 November 2020**

**Submitted by the Pew Charitable Trusts**

**The Pew Charitable Trusts  
Statement to the 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the  
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
December 9-15, 2020, online**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC17). We appreciate the work of the Secretariat, Chair, and members to convene a virtual meeting due to the extraordinary situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global health crisis has highlighted the importance of having healthy and resilient fisheries that are well equipped to handle shocks to the system. As the effects of the pandemic are likely to persist during 2021 and possibly beyond, RFMOs should be shifting from enacting reactive measures to developing procedures and standards that will help them legally and sustainably manage fish stocks in the new normal. Additionally, while there will always be a place for in-person meetings, a shift to virtual gatherings should be seen by RFMOs as an opportunity to increase participation in decision-making and improve transparency, rather than restricting it. This year and moving forward, it is imperative that WCPFC maintain its commitment to transparent discussions, including by ensuring observer organizations and other stakeholders are included in the process at least at the same level as afforded during in person meetings.

While the agenda before WCPFC this year is necessarily limited, there remains opportunity for progress. We therefore urge members to hasten the introduction of new approaches that provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries, including to:

**Advance the development of harvest strategies to achieve sustainable and productive fisheries**

WCPFC has made a commitment to modernize its management of key stocks through the adoption of harvest strategies. Considerable progress has been made in recent years, but more remains to be done. To continue this progress, the Commission should:

- With CMM 2018-01 on tropical tunas expiring in February, ensure management of those three stocks continues without interruption and supports the goal of implementing fully-specified harvest strategies, including by maintaining bigeye and yellowfin populations at or above 2012-

2015 levels, until target reference points are adopted, and without increasing the risk of breaching the limit reference point;

- Create the Science Management Dialogue Working Group to accelerate development of harvest strategies;
- Maintain existing catch limits for Pacific bluefin tuna by accepting the Northern Committee's recommendation for the stock but re-emphasize the commitment to start the management strategy evaluation (MSE) process and present initial results to WCPFC in 2021; and
- Adopt a new Conservation and Management Measure to rebuild north Pacific striped marlin to 20%SSB<sub>F=0</sub> by 2034, in accordance with the agreed rebuilding plan, as a first step to maintaining it at a healthy level and require the strategy be tested by MSE.

### **Improve oversight of longline and transshipment vessels**

Stronger oversight of longline vessels and transshipment operations is necessary to ensure their activities are monitored appropriately to provide data for science and compliance and they do not act as a conduit for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This year, WCPFC should:

- Prioritize the work of the Transshipment Intersessional Working Group by ensuring the necessary funds and capacity are available to carry out objectives in the Scope of Work;
- Modify the Regional Observer Program Standards and Guidelines document to require that observers submit all transshipment observer reports directly to the Secretariat;
- Agree to strengthen the information sharing agreements with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and North Pacific Fisheries Commission to require sharing of all transshipment-related information; and
- Request the Electronic Reporting & Electronic Monitoring Working Group meet at least once to finalize the EM standards and EM Conservation and Management Measure in 2021.

Lastly, WCPFC17 should take the necessary actions to ensure progress is made in 2021 on other priorities that need urgent attention, which include adopting a skipjack harvest strategy, adopting measures to reduce impacts on bycatch species, including rebuilding the oceanic whitetip shark population, reviewing the port State minimum standards measure with a view to strengthening it, and progressing the remaining 'Future Work' items in CMM 2019-06, such as finalizing audit points for assessing compliance and developing the risk-based framework, penalties for non-compliance and guidelines to enable participation of observers in the closed discussions on the compliance monitoring reports.