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The Pew Charitable Trusts'
Statement for Panel 1 of the 24th Regular Meeting of ICCAT
11 November 2015

This year, Panel 1 must take immediate action to improve bigeye fisheries management within the Convention Area. The most recent stock assessment indicated that the Atlantic stock of bigeye tuna is both overfished and experiencing overfishing. The maximum sustainable yield has been steadily decreasing in recent years, and the biomass necessary to produce that declining yield has increased. The SCRS has clearly stated that the combination of a growing reliance on fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the eastern Atlantic and the tendency for FAD fishing to disproportionately remove juvenile bigeye is a significant driver of the current state. In a response to ICCAT on the efficacy of the FAD area/time closure in the Gulf of Guinea, the SCRS reported – unequivocally – that it has not achieved its purpose of reducing juvenile bigeye catch.

The Pew Charitable Trusts urges the members of Panel 1 to:

1. Develop a multi-year recovery program for bigeye that initially involves a total allowable catch (TAC) of 50,000 tonnes per year. This is the maximum amount that gives a 60% likelihood of ending overfishing within one year and a 75% likelihood of recovering the stock by 2028. As part of the recovery program, the so-called “minor harvesters” should be included in the allocation key, to ensure that the TAC is not exceeded. Similarly, catch underages should no longer be rolled over from year to year. Reduced capacity and increased observer coverage also may be necessary to ensure that these parameters of the recovery program are successful.
2. Take the necessary steps to better manage FAD fishing, in order to prevent the unsustainable removal of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tunas. In its current form, the Gulf of Guinea area/time closure is ineffective, but with a better design, it would likely have a better chance at success. According to the SCRS, a more effective closure would be larger, farther offshore, and for a longer period of time. It should also be designed in such a way as to prevent redistribution of FAD-fishing effort. Furthermore, the closure should be one piece of a larger package of tools to reduce the mortality of juvenile tunas. Limits on the number of purse seine sets on FADs and controls on FAD deployment are two more tools that must be considered. ICCAT should direct the FAD working group and the SCRS to investigate the impact that FAD purse seine limits and FAD deployment limits would have on the mortality of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tunas.

A management strategy that combines these tools/measures would help solidify ICCAT's reputation as an organization committed to ending overfishing of the species under its management.



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