

The Pew Charitable Trusts' Statement to Panel 1 November 2020

Now that Panel 1 has entered the second period of correspondence, The Pew Charitable Trusts would like to offer our thoughts on the current state of negotiations on the Panel's critical business.

Since the 2015 bigeye stock assessment, Pew has advocated for adoption of measures to prevent continued overharvest and rebuild the bigeye tuna stock by 2028 with at least 60% probability. In 2016, the Report of the Independent Performance Review of ICCAT echoed the concerns of scientists and the NGO community and recommended that "the sustainable management of the tropical tunas should be a key immediate management priority for ICCAT." Despite this, ICCAT has adopted TACs that allow for continued overfishing and has not put a rebuilding plan in place. Furthermore, incomplete or nonexistent allocation schemes continue to prevent adherence to TACs, leading to overages of 20% and 14% for yellowfin and bigeye, respectively, in 2019. In light of the cancellation of this year's intersessional and Commission meetings, Panel 1 will once again be unable to rectify this situation.

While it is not sufficient, as a minimum step forward, we support the Chair's proposal (PA1_503A) to prevent unintended expiration of any essential elements of Rec. 19-02. To ensure clarity, we strongly suggest that PA1_503A be revised to explicitly state that paragraph 3 of Rec. 19-02 remains valid and that the total allowable catch (TAC) for bigeye tuna will be lowered to 61,500 t in 2021, as adopted last year. During the 2019 Commission meeting, this provision was required by several CPCs to achieve consensus. Removing it now would not only potentially lose the support of those CPCs but also call into question the commitment to other Recommendations endorsed by Panel 1.

Addressing bigeye rebuilding and bigeye/yellowfin allocation should be the top priorities for 2021, so we are pleased to see that there are currently three proposed intersessional meetings on the calendar for next year (PLE_106). The three intersessional meetings must progress enough to enable smooth adoption at the 2021 annual meeting, even in the event that it cannot proceed as an in-person meeting. As such, bilateral and multilateral work will be required even before those meetings, and we recommend that the Panel 1 Chair follow the Panel 2 Chair's lead (PA2_618) in laying out specific and detailed instructions for how CPCs should prepare for those meetings. The Chair's proposed roadmap (PA1_511) is a good start but needs more detail, including deadlines for CPC submission of information and statements.

ICCAT's challenges with tropical tuna management underscore the urgent need to transition to management procedure (MP)-based regulation of these valuable stocks. Thankfully, the SCRS is poised to make considerable progress in the management strategy evaluation (MSE) processes over the coming year. Brazil is partnering on some MSE work for western skipjack that could result in an MP ready for Commission consideration as early as next year. The SCRS also has a week-long meeting scheduled for 2021 to advance MSE development for bigeye, yellowfin, and eastern skipjack, with a 2023 target for Commission adoption of an MP. Panel 1 should provide the necessary resources and support for this work – including sufficient financial resources – and stand by to review and comment on the MSE results as they become available. Initial input to the process is required in 2021 in the form of operational management objectives for the four stocks, against which the SCRS can begin to evaluate performance of candidate management procedures.