



The Pew Charitable Trusts' Statement to Plenary on Panel 2 December 2020

This year, despite months of negotiations and strong leadership from the Chair in the virtual setting, Panel 2 was not successful in forwarding to Plenary a science-based proposal to manage western bluefin in 2021. Instead, the Chair's most recent letter (PA2_639) indicates that consensus has been reached on a TAC with a 94% chance of overfishing and essentially an abandonment of the $F_{0.1}$ strategy that was only adopted in 2017. If the Plenary were to adopt this recommendation of Panel 2, ICCAT's western bluefin measure would be in clear violation of Rec. 11-13. As a result, The Pew Charitable Trusts urges the Plenary to intervene and reject that proposal (PA2_608(c)) in favor of PA2_608, the first and only science-based western bluefin proposal put to Panel 2 for consideration.

This recommendation by Panel 2 is yet another data point in a concerning trend in ICCAT's management of western bluefin—where managers change strategies when the science indicates hard choices are needed. Nearly 30 years after scientists first formally identified western bluefin as overfished, there is still a concerning lack of commitment to achieving a sustainable fishery. ICCAT adopted a 20-year rebuilding program in 1998 but abandoned the plan in favor of $F_{0.1}$ -based management in 2017, despite the program not being achieved. This decision allowed for a short-term quota increase but would require TAC decreases starting in 2020. This year, the stock assessment confirmed scientists' projection that TAC cuts are needed to end overfishing, though the cuts are more significant than expected. Instead of coming to consensus on a plan to take the necessary cuts, Panel 2 is proposing to now abandon the $F_{0.1}$ strategy adopted just three years ago and recommending rollover of the 2020 TAC to 2021, buying into the argument that longstanding stock assessment indices need to be revised and that cuts should once again be delayed until there is new science. This decision is being made despite best available science indicating that this approach will almost guarantee overfishing in 2021 and will require sharper TAC cuts in the future. ICCAT must stop questioning its own science and walking away from its management approaches for this stock every time a TAC reduction is required.

Management procedures offer a more transparent, predictable, and ultimately profitable, path forward. Instead of spending many weeks negotiating an annual catch limit for western bluefin, managers should have immediately agreed to adopt the Chair's science-based proposal and focused their remaining time on advancing the management procedure to improve their own effectiveness and efficiency moving forward. Instead, the only language in PA2_608(c) that concerns long-term management of western bluefin fisheries calls for a transition to a management procedure "at the latest in 2022." But in light of Panel 2's track record for honoring commitments on western bluefin management, Pew has serious concerns about this timeline and the likelihood that Panel 2 would recommend implementing TACs suggested by the management procedure, if the MP indicated they should be lowered. Management procedures are a long-term strategy that must be fully implemented to be successful. Furthermore, this proposal specifically highlights Panel 2's commitment to only a 50% probability of not overfishing, which

contradicts the recommendations of the Commission's second independent performance review and which Panel 2 previously discounted as insufficient in March 2019.

As pointed out by some member governments, the proposal forwarded to you by Panel 2 jeopardizes ICCAT as a whole. Several CPCs – including Canada, UK, France, and Norway – have posted statements voicing serious concerns that the proposal forwarded to Plenary does not meet ICCAT's commitment to science-based management and expressing discontent with the position of having to choose between an unregulated fishery and a poorly managed one. This should be of particular concern to ICCAT at a time when the global community is paying close attention to the role of RFMOs and their ability, or lack thereof, to fulfill their mandates to protect public resources. Once again, Pew strongly urges the Plenary to block passage of PA2_608(c) in favor of the Panel 2 Chair's original science-based proposal, PA2_608, in order to protect ICCAT's credibility and the future of this population.