Pew

The Pew Charitable Trusts' Opening Statement
to Panel 2 of the 25th Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission
November 2026

Pew appreciates this opportunity to weigh in on the Panel 2 discussions at ICCAT this year. Over the years, Panel 2 has led ICCAT's initiatives to translate science into forward-looking management decisions, and this year should be no different. As Panel 2 considers the progress on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for Atlantic bluefin tuna (Rec. 23-07) and North Atlantic albacore (Rec 21-04), we highlight the following:

Atlantic Bluefin tuna - The Commission's decision last year to set the western total allowable catch (TAC) 20% higher than prescribed by the adopted Management Procedure (MP) was disappointing and must not be a precedent for how ICCAT will set TACs in the future. An MP can only be effective if reductions in catch are applied when required, and this decision already risks the long-term sustainability of the western population and fisheries. This year, per the agreed workplan, a health check was conducted, and the MP review initiated to consider new data and ensure that the MSE reflects plausible, real-world conditions. This review provides an opportunity to include the western close-kin mark recapture results and other new stock mixing data in the MSE. We urge managers to actively engage in the MSE review and use the resulting MP for the third management cycle, beginning in 2029. We note that the eastern indices are trending downward, indicating that a decrease in the eastern TAC is likely to be considered then. It is vitally important that ICCAT adopt the TACs resulting from the MP, even if that means significant reductions in the eastern fisheries.

North Atlantic Albacore - While an MP was adopted for North Atlantic Albacore in 2021, the SCRS has since revised the current MSE to improve the modelling and to test additional MPs. This effort incorporates the most recent stock assessment, which was conducted in 2023. At its meeting earlier this month, Panel 2 recommended adopting one of the new MPs, with a preference for the "Updated MP," which is similar to the 2021 adopted MP but with improvements to the model that estimates stock status. Understanding that this Updated MP and other candidate MPs meet the agreed management objectives, we urge ICCAT to adopt the Updated MP, as proposed in PA2-612 submitted by the PA2 Chair. Since this is the third round of MSE conducted for northern albacore, Panel 2 should also encourage the SCRS to focus resources and attention on other species on the MSE roadmap rather than requesting additional MSE testing for the stock.