Pew

The Pew Charitable Trusts' Opening Statement
to Panel 4 of the 25th Special Meeting of the ICCAT Commission
November 2026

The Pew Charitable Trusts appreciates this opportunity to address Panel 4. As members work to strengthen the conservation and management of sharks and billfishes, Panel 4 should act on the best available scientific advice and take a precautionary approach where uncertainty remains. In particular, Panel 4 should prioritize: advancing the blue shark management strategy evaluation (MSE) process; maintaining the Northern shortfin mako retention ban; ensuring that the blue marlin limit accounts for both landings and dead discards and agreeing to land sharks with their fins naturally attached.

1. **Advance the Blue shark MSE process –** At last year's Commission meeting, many CPCs reiterated support for the SCRS to prioritize the blue shark MSE. This year, the SCRS recommended that "*the Commission provide management objectives for the North and South Atlantic blue shark stocks*". To that end, we encourage adoption of proposal **PA4-812** from the EU - on operational management objectives for Atlantic blue shark. These management objectives will guide the SCRS technical team as they begin development of candidate management procedures in 2027.

2. **Maintain the Northern Shortfin Mako retention ban –** Shortfin mako sharks are one of the most vulnerable species to overexploitation, due to their slow growth, late sexual maturity, and low reproductive rates. Last year, SCRS faced issues with the Northern shortfin mako stock assessment, which was finally completed this year. The assessment projections used only one productivity scenario, and many concerns were raised at SCRS on the uncertainties of the stock assessment. Considering the results deemed the stock overfished and that a more comprehensive age validation study will be presented at SCRS next year, any effort to change the current measures on makos would be premature. Panel 4 should maintain the current measure - Recommendation 21-09 - at least until 2027, and ICCAT should explore ways to reduce overall mortality, including discards, to sustainable levels.

3. **Marlin -** The current 1,670 t and 355 t limits for blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish, respectively, are key to preventing overfishing. These limits should be set as total allowable catches (TACs) rather than landings limits to ensure they cover both landings and

dead discards. This would not only be consistent with ICCAT practice, but it is necessary to ensure that the mortality does not breach sustainable levels as provided by the SCRS in its report. Blue and white marlin have been designated overfished for over 30 years, and the rebuilding plan adopted for both species in 2000 has shown limited success. Panel 4 should not approve increased landings until there is relative certainty that the combination of landings and dead discards does not threaten the recovery. Additionally, Panel 4 should endorse the use of circle hooks, noting that in its 2024 annual report, SCRS noted, "*that experimental research has demonstrated that in longline fisheries the use of circle hooks resulted in a reduction of marlin catch rates and haulback mortality*".

4. **Fins Naturally Attached** – ICCAT's current rules permit fins weighing up to 5 percent of a shark's weight to be landed, even though most species' fins make up far less than 5 percent of the carcass. Such high ratios allow many more sharks to be finned and undermines effective species data collection. Most ICCAT members recognize that requiring sharks to be landed with their fins naturally attached is the most effective way to prevent finning, and it also simplifies enforcement and shark identification. For almost 2 decades, a "fins naturally attached" proposal has drawn widespread support at ICCAT, building to a historic high of 42 co-sponsors (roughly 80% of all ICCAT member parties) in 2025. This year, members should negotiate an agreement on the proposed alternatives to fins naturally attached, with clear sunset clause text leading to full implementation of landing sharks with their fins naturally attached in 2028.

We look forward to constructive engagement with members of Panel 4 and stand ready to support the advancement of these items.