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**The Pew Charitable Trusts’
Statement to Panel 1 of the 26th Regular Meeting of the Commission to ICCAT
18 November 2019**

This time last year, Panel 1 and ICCAT failed to reach consensus on a bigeye recovery plan that would end overfishing and allow the stock to recover from its depleted state of just 59% of SSB_{MSY} . The science was very clear, with the SCRS strongly advising ICCAT to immediately and significantly reduce catch levels and address the growing mortality of juveniles associated with fishing on FADs. Last year’s lack of consensus means that the stock is now 60 times more likely to collapse than to recover by 2033. The stock cannot afford another year of inaction and political gridlock that stifles any progress towards recovery. Therefore, Pew strongly encourages the Panel to limit catch of bigeye, from all sources, to 50,000 t, the level with a 50% probability of ending overfishing in 2020 and a 70% probability of recovering the stock by 2028. This should include lowering the trigger to enter the allocation table to 500 t and adopting new measures that specifically lower juvenile catch, as recommended by the SCRS, to improve the productivity of the stock and hasten recovery efforts.

Regarding yellowfin, the SCRS has concluded that the stock is in relatively good condition with a biomass that can support MSY. However, they also warned that current catch levels are far too high, potentially shifting the stock status from the green to the red quadrant of the Kobe plot in just a few years. ICCAT’s management of yellowfin tuna has proven ineffective at keeping the catch below or close to the TAC. In 2018, the catch was 23 percent above the TAC, with scientists estimating that catches have exceeded the TAC every year since 2015. Therefore, Pew recommends that Panel 1 address the lack of allocation for yellowfin this year, perhaps alongside the bigeye allocation exercise.

Skipjack catch in the East Atlantic set recordbreaking levels in 2018, exceeding the 2012-2013 levels by 28 percent. The expansion of skipjack fisheries is a driver of many of the bigeye and yellowfin issues outlined above. Therefore, Pew recognizes the likely need to set a cap on skipjack catch based on the SCRS advice.

The political deadlock and failure to follow the scientific advice concerning tropical tuna management is a strong indication that the Commission needs to move towards precautionary harvest strategies for these stocks, as mandated by Rec. 15-07. This effort would allow ICCAT managers to adopt rules that trigger actions that return the stocks to healthy levels and prevent them from becoming overfished again. To start, Panel 1 should identify clear management objectives for these stocks and the fisheries that target them.

Despite the lack of consensus last year, Pew remains hopeful that ICCAT will reach consensus here in Palma to address these issues. This year provides another opportunity for members to take measures that recover bigeye and ensure that yellowfin and skipjack fisheries remain sustainable for years to come. Some of the steps that will be required to lower catches and improve monitoring and control are highlighted in the Chair’s proposal (PA1-506), but Panel 1 must work to strengthen the package to reach the results that will be necessary to recover and/or sustain the tropical tunas in the Atlantic and must achieve consensus.