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**The Pew Charitable Trusts’  
Statement to Panel 4 of the 26<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of ICCAT  
18 November 2019**

This year, Panel 4 has a full agenda that will require members to work collaboratively and efficiently to address each of several priority issues, including the adoption of recovery plans for shortfin makos and blue and white marlin and advancement of harvest strategy development for north Atlantic swordfish.

New evidence from the SCRS indicates that the situation for north Atlantic shortfin mako population is dire. Even if no makos are caught in ICCAT fisheries, the population will continue to decline until at least 2035, and probabilities for recovery on 50-year timelines are very low. As a result of these findings, the SCRS has recommended that ICCAT prohibit retention of north Atlantic makos, dead or alive, “without exception,” in order to give the population the best chance of recovering. To align with this advice and to ensure that the southern stock does not experience the same fate, Pew strongly urges Panel 4 to take precautionary action and immediately prohibit retention of mako sharks in all Atlantic fisheries. The proposal from Senegal, The Gambia, and Canada (PA4-805A) implements this policy for the north Atlantic stock and should be supported by Panel 4. Proposals from the EU (PA4-811) and the USA (PA4-814) do not sufficiently implement the SCRS advice and do not address the south Atlantic stock at all.

Despite clear advice from the SCRS, the 2018 annual meeting ended without consensus on a new blue marlin recovery plan. The stock cannot afford another year of inaction after nearly two decades of a failing rebuilding plan. The SCRS has once again recommended that the TAC should be lowered and that measures must be taken to ensure that it is not exceeded, as happens regularly. As proposed in PA4-813, Panel 4 should adopt a blue marlin TAC of 1500 t, the level that has a 60 percent chance of rebuilding the stock by 2028 and allocate the TAC in such a way that it is no longer breached by CPCs.

The new 2019 stock assessment for white marlin confirms that the stock continues to be overfished. Catches have exceeded the TAC in every year since its adoption. If catches continue at this level, stock rebuilding may proceed more slowly or even reverse. Therefore, Pew urges Panel 4 to find ways to ensure that the TAC is no longer breached.

Finally, the north Atlantic swordfish is one of ICCAT’s priority species for harvest strategy development, as mandated in Rec. 15-07. Significant progress has been made in developing a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for this stock. Despite delays to the bluefin MSE, Panel 4 should continue to support the transition to a full harvest strategy for north Atlantic swordfish by adopting conceptual management objectives this year to help guide the MSE process.