



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
EIGHTH REGULAR SESSION**

7-15 August 2012
Busan, Republic of Korea

Statement to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

PEW ENVIRONMENT GROUP

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The Pew Environment Group would like to thank the Scientific Committee (SC) for the opportunity to participate in SC 8 as an observer. Once again the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and others provided documents well before the meeting, which will allow for productive discussion while in Busan. This is Pew's second year attending this meeting, and overall we are impressed with the level of scientific integrity, transparency, and quality of advice that this body generates. We are also encouraged by the significant focus on science related to sharks and hope this leads to an improvement in shark conservation and management in the WCPFC convention area. However, we are disappointed that the Pacific bluefin tuna assessment will not be fully addressed at this meeting since the assessment has not been finalized according to schedule.

Despite ample time and extensive effort, including a week-long data preparatory meeting and a two-week long assessment, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) failed to reach consensus on the assessment model. This stalemate and resultant inability to provide updated scientific advice to the managers is especially concerning given that Pacific bluefin tuna are subject to overfishing and may even be overfished.

The ISC's lack of transparency, as evidenced by its refusal to share full assessments with the public or admit non-governmental observers to meetings, is not consistent with the high standards under which WCPFC operates. We urge the SC to issue a formal statement of concern to the ISC for not producing an updated assessment in accordance with their mandate. Additionally, the SC should consider whether it is wise to rely on the ISC to assess northern stocks going forward. Alternatives could be explored at this meeting.

The Pew Environment Group commends the SC for commissioning a peer review of the 2011 WCPO bigeye tuna assessment. This was a valuable undertaking given it provided independent validation of the assessment methodology and results and provides a comprehensive list of recommendations both for methods that should be examined for the next assessment and research that should be carried out to fill key data gaps. This process of stock assessment and peer review should serve as an example for other RFMOs, consistent with the Kobe process's identification of the importance of peer review.

The 2012 stock assessments for oceanic whitetip and silky sharks show that both species are overfished and overfishing is occurring in the in the Western and Central Pacific. WCPFC has already recognized the dire state of the oceanic whitetip shark and adopted a Conservation and Management measure (CMM 2011-04) which bans the retaining on board, transshipping, storing

and landing of oceanic whitetip sharks. It is not clear if this measure will be sufficient and therefore, as recommended in the assessment, the Pew Environment Group suggests an examination of existing observer data to see if further direct mitigation measures can be identified. Furthermore, the SC should recommend that WCPFC prohibit retention of silky sharks and consider further conservation measures for this species.

The practice of setting purse seines on whale sharks in the Western and Central Pacific is a significant concern. The observed interaction and mortality rates indicate total whale shark mortalities in the purse seine fishery of approximately 56 animals in 2009 and 19 animals in 2010. The Pew Environment Group believes that the whale shark meets the criteria for consideration as a key shark species. However, while designation as a key shark species and conducting a stock assessment would be a useful endeavor, we believe that immediate management action is needed to reduce whale shark mortality and request that the SC provide a recommendation that WCPFC prohibit the intentional setting of purse seine nets on whale sharks.

In closing, we wish the SC the best for a productive meeting and emphasize the SC's critical role in the WCPFC process. The SC must deliver to the Commission clear science-based advice on how to manage the many stocks under its purview. Of particular importance this year is guidance on how CMM 08-01 should be revised to end overfishing of bigeye tuna, a proposed way forward for setting reference points and harvest control rules for all stocks, clear advice resulting from the recently completed shark assessments and advice on how to mitigate the impacts of WCPFC fisheries on whale sharks.