

Recommendations to the 10th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

2-6 December, 2013, Cairns, Australia

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) aims to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fish stocks, including tuna and sharks, in the western and central Pacific Ocean. The WCPFC has a unique and important responsibility as custodian of the world's largest tuna fishery in an area covering 20 percent of the Earth's surface.

Sustaining healthy fisheries in this region requires strong conservation and management actions through joint commitments and strict compliance. Unfortunately, the Commission's Members, Cooperating Non-members, and Participating Territories, known collectively as CCMs, have been unable to take the actions needed to ensure the sustainability of highly migratory fish populations.

This year's Commission meeting is critical to the future of bigeye and Pacific bluefin tuna, as well as many shark species.

The Pew Charitable Trusts calls on governments involved in the WCPFC to agree to take the following critical actions:

- **End overfishing in tuna fisheries and strengthen management to ensure sustainability.**
- **Strengthen controls so as to end illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.**
- **Adopt conservation and management measures to protect sharks.**



Skipjack tuna.

Recommendations

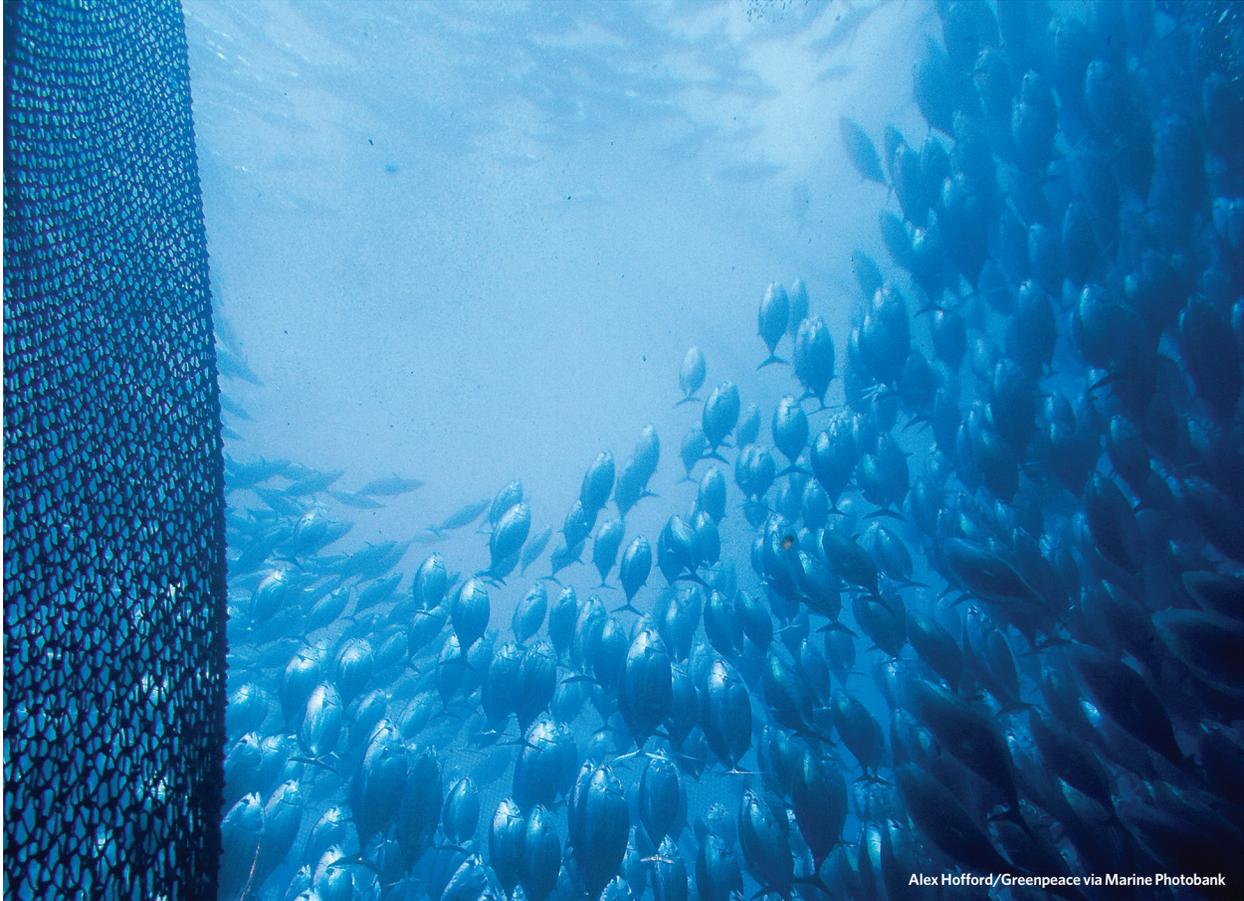
End overfishing in tuna fisheries and strengthen management to ensure sustainability

This year, the WCPFC must demonstrate that it can manage the world's largest tuna fishery responsibly by implementing precautionary reference points, acting to end overfishing of bigeye tuna, and moving to rebuild the severely depleted Pacific bluefin population.

Reference points

The 2012 and 2013 Management Objectives Workshops provided CCMs with the information needed to implement the Convention requirement to determine appropriate reference points and conservation actions for these species of tuna.¹ This is an important step toward a more precautionary, science-based management system that will better protect the ecosystem and fisheries from future declines.

- **The WCPFC should adopt interim target and limit reference points for skipjack, albacore, yellowfin, bluefin, and bigeye tuna.**
- **CCMs also should continue discussions on harvest-control rules that ensure that limit reference points are not exceeded and that targets achieve the desired outcomes.**



A school of tuna swims in a purse-seine net in Papua New Guinea waters.

Tropical tuna measure: Ending overfishing of bigeye tuna

Negotiations on the new tropical tuna Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) have failed to adhere to the scientific advice, as each party to the talks worked to minimize the impact on its fishing operations. This has led to an overly complex measure that relies on management tools that have already proved ineffective for this fishery and would be difficult to enforce.

- **The Commission must commit to ending overfishing of bigeye tuna by 2018 by adopting a CMM for tropical tuna that freezes fishing capacity, caps longline catch, and limits the amount of fishing by purse-seiners on fish aggregating devices (FADs) to sustainable levels consistent with the advice from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).**
- **The CMM must be reviewed and updated next year based on the results of the 2014 stock assessments of bigeye and yellowfin tuna.**

The Commission must commit to ending overfishing of bigeye tuna by 2018.

In addition, **CCMs fishing with FADs should be required to submit management plans for these devices, which should include information on the numbers deployed, recovered, and lost, as well as FAD tracking data.** This data would give the Scientific Committee more information on the extent of FAD use, the potential effects on the ecosystem tied to their uncontrolled proliferation, and the scope of this fishery's contribution to marine debris. It also would provide greater insight into how FAD use contributes to IUU fishing.

To ensure that the effectiveness of the new CMM can be measured, all CCMs should provide all relevant data on their fisheries to the Commission. Without this, critical information on catch rates, spatial patterns, and the numbers of fishing vessels operating in the Convention Area cannot be confirmed. Observer coverage can provide such data, and all CCMs should endeavor to increase observer coverage to at least 20 percent. Given the high impact that large-scale freezer longliners have on target, associated, and dependent species, the WCPFC should mandate 100 percent observer coverage on these vessels.

Pacific bluefin tuna

Based on the International Scientific Committee's (ISC) latest stock assessment, the Pacific bluefin population is at just 3.6 percent of its original size, and both the ISC and the WCPFC Scientific Committee have recommended that fishing mortality be reduced from recent levels to limit the risk of further population declines. At its 2013 meeting, however, the Commission's Northern Committee recommended a measure that would allow overall catch to rise above levels seen in the last two years. In doing so, the Northern Committee has again agreed to management measures that are inadequate to protect this severely depleted species. **Therefore, the WCPFC should recommend that the Northern Committee develop a rebuilding plan for Pacific bluefin tuna for adoption by the 11th Regular Session of the WCPFC that includes catch limits that would return the population to 25 percent SSBrecent, F=0 (25 percent of the original population size) within the next 10 years.** If the WCPFC again fails to adopt and implement appropriate management measures, fishing for Pacific bluefin tuna should be suspended until such precautionary, science-based measures are put in place.

Strengthen controls against IUU fishing

IUU fishing remains a threat in the WCPFC Convention Area. To enhance compliance with CMMs, the Commission should require that vessels fishing in its waters have mandatory, unique, and permanent identification numbers. The WCPFC also should adopt a new measure on port State controls.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) number is an essential element of any system to ensure compliance with fisheries laws and to aid safety and security at sea.² **The WCPFC should improve the transparency of fishing vessels' activities by requiring that those licensed to fish in the Convention Area have an IMO number.**

The Commission also should:

- Require members to submit the IMO number of any vessel authorized to fish in the Convention Area that already has such a number, and mandate that the number be included in the Commission Record of Fishing Vessels.
- Require that all vessels³ authorized to fish in the WCPFC Convention Area have an IMO number by Jan. 1, 2015, and that this number be reported in all records and relevant communications involving these vessels. The number should be permanently marked in a visible place on the vessel's hull.



Vessel crew paints a new name on the hull at sea to avoid enforcement for illegal fishing crimes committed under prior name.

In addition, port State measures (PSMs) are cost-effective tools to prevent fish caught illegally from entering the market. WCPFC's Performance Review recommended adoption of PSMs, warning that the Commission is lagging behind other regional fisheries management organizations in doing so.⁴ **The WCPFC should initiate development of a regional scheme of PSMs, adopting at this meeting minimum standards for port inspections and providing adequate support to developing States for implementation.**

High seas transshipment continues to be used in the WCPFC Convention Area as a way to avoid proper catch reporting and to launder IUU catch. **The WCPFC should introduce a ban on high seas transshipment until it can be ensured that transshipment operations cannot assist IUU fishing.** This would require having a robust monitoring system in place that includes full transparency, requiring observers on board the offloading and receiving vessels and complete oversight by the Commission of all transshipment operations in the Convention Area.

The WCPFC should improve the transparency of fishing vessels' activities by requiring that those licensed to fish in the Convention Area have an IMO number.



Jim Abernethy

Silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*).

It is essential that the WCPFC prohibit the retention on board, transshipment, storage, and landing of silky sharks this year.

Adopt CMMs to protect sharks

The latest stock assessment shows that the silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), a low-productivity species, is in an overfished state in the WCPFC Convention Area and that overfishing continues.⁵ Given this evidence, the WCPFC should follow the best practice established by the Commission when it prohibited the retention of oceanic whitetip sharks. **It is essential that the WCPFC prohibit the retention on board, transshipment, storage, and landing of silky sharks this year.**

This will be most effective in combination with improved shark bycatch-mitigation measures to prevent initial catch of this and other vulnerable shark species. Among the most effective are the use of non-entangling FADs⁶ and controls on the use of wire leaders,⁷ shark lines, and shark bait.⁸ **We recommend that the WCPFC mandate the use of non-entangling FADs and prohibit the use of wire leaders, shark lines, and shark bait.**



Angelo O'Connor Villagomez

A garbage can full of shark fins—primarily from oceanic whitetip, blue, silky, and mako sharks—that were confiscated in the Marshall Islands. The law there requires that seized fins be burned or disposed of at sea.

Action is also needed on the management of blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*), given the high levels of catch in the WCPFC Convention Area—about 40,000 tonnes annually over the last decade—and uncertainty on the status of the stock.⁹ **Given the WCPFC Scientific Committee’s advice to follow the precautionary approach¹⁰ in setting management measures while stock assessment work continues, blue shark catch levels should be limited at this year’s WCPFC meeting to recent year averages.**

This year’s Commission meeting is critical to the future of bigeye and Pacific bluefin tuna, as well as many shark species.

Endnotes

1. Article 6 of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean states, "In applying the precautionary approach, the members of the Commission shall: (a) apply the guidelines set out in Annex II of the Agreement ... and determine, on the basis of the best scientific information available, stock-specific reference points and the action to be taken if they are exceeded." <http://www.wcpfc.int/system/files/text.pdf>.
2. See The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Illegal Fishing, Your Number's Up!" fact sheet (2013), <http://www.pewenvironment.org/news-room/fact-sheets/illegal-fishing-your-numbers-up-85899498000>.
3. Vessels should include, but not be limited to, those 24 meters long or greater, those of 100 or more gross tons, and those operating outside their flag States' exclusive economic zone.
4. Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, *WCPFC Performance Review Recommendations_rev1*, sec. 6.2, 44, <http://www.wcpfc.int/node/3334>. The performance review recommended that "in considering Port State Measures, the Commission should take into account minimum standards in the PSMA, measures and practices of other RFMOs in implementing such standards and developments in the broader system of Port controls." *Ibid.*, sec. 3.2.5, 1.
5. Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, *Summary Report: Scientific Committee, Ninth Regular Session*, para. 228 (2013), <http://www.wcpfc.int/meetings/9th-regular-session-scientific-committee>.
6. John David Filmlalter, et al., "Looking Behind the Curtain: Quantifying Massive Shark Mortality in Fish Aggregating Devices," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 11 (2013): 291-296, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/130045>.
7. Peter Ward, et al., "Large-Scale Experiment Shows That Nylon Leaders Reduce Shark Bycatch and Benefit Pelagic Longline Fishers," *Fisheries Research* 90 (2008): 100-108.
8. Don Bromhead, Joel Rice, and Shelton Harley, *Analyses of the Potential Influence of Four Gear Factors (Leader Type, Hook Type, 'Shark' Lines and Bait Type) on Shark Catch Rates in WCPO Tuna Longline Fisheries*, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, WCPFC-SC9-2013/EB-WP-02 rev. 1 (July 22, 2013), <http://www.wcpfc.int/system/files/EB-WP-02-Shark-mitigation-Rev1.pdf>.
9. Joel Rice, et al., *Stock Assessment of Blue Shark in the North Pacific Ocean Using Stock Synthesis*, WCPFC-SC9-2013/SA-WP-02 (July 19, 2013), <http://www.wcpfc.int/node/3668>.
10. Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, *Summary Report*, para. 273.

For further information, please visit:

pewenvironment.org/ip

Contact: Amanda Nickson
Phone: 202-674-9829
Email: anickson@pewtrusts.org

Facebook: [facebook.com/pewenvironmentgroup](https://www.facebook.com/pewenvironmentgroup)
Twitter: twitter.com/pewenvironment or @pewenvironment
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