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**The Pew Charitable Trusts’  
Statement to the 95<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission  
November 30-December 4, 2020, online**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 95<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). We appreciate the work of the Secretariat, Chair, and members to convene a virtual meeting due to the extraordinary situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global health crisis has highlighted the importance of having healthy and resilient fisheries that are well equipped to handle extraordinary circumstances. As the effects of the pandemic are likely to persist during 2021 and possibly beyond, RFMOs should be shifting from enacting reactive measures to developing procedures and standards that will help them legally and sustainably manage fish stocks in the new normal. Additionally, while there will always be a place for in-person meetings, a shift to virtual gatherings should be seen by RFMOs as an opportunity to increase participation in decision-making and improve transparency, rather than restricting it. This year and moving forward, it is imperative that IATTC maintain its commitment to transparent discussions, including by ensuring observer organizations and other stakeholders are included in the process at least at the same level as afforded during in person meetings.

While the agenda before the Commission this year is necessarily limited, there remains opportunity for progress. We therefore urge members to hasten the introduction of new approaches that provide greater resilience and stability to the region’s fisheries, including to:

**Support the development of minimum standards for electronic monitoring and move towards 100 percent observer coverage**

The ongoing pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen and increase the resilience of the Commission’s observer program. An electronic monitoring (EM) program that includes robust standards on how to collect, transfer, analyze and store data will increase the available information on catch, bycatch, and effort, and ensure that data is always available to support the scientific and compliance processes, even when human observers are not able to be onboard vessels. To ensure that an EM program

is developed and implemented in a timely manner, at this year's full Commission meeting, members should:

- Adopt a plan that outlines the objectives and key elements for a comprehensive EM program;
- Schedule an EM workshop in the first quarter of next year in order to complete EM standards for consideration at the 2021 annual meeting; and
- Support the trials of EM technology onboard longliners and purse seiners and commit to requiring 100 percent observer coverage of all longline vessels fishing in the Convention area, via a combination of human observers and EM.

### **Maintain Pacific bluefin tuna catch limits and recommit to management strategy evaluation**

Conservation measures for Pacific bluefin will be a central issue at this year's annual meeting. The new stock assessment for Pacific bluefin indicates that the spawning stock biomass is only 4.5 percent of its historic size, a slight increase from the previous assessment. This increase reflects progress for the stock, and it is important that IATTC does not adopt measures that threaten this progress, particularly during a virtual meeting and when the species is still overfished and undergoing overfishing. As such, the Commission should:

- Adopt the recommendation of the joint meeting with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee, which is to roll over current bluefin management measures including leaving the catch limit at its current level. Any move to increase catch at this stage would undermine the work of the joint working group in managing Pacific bluefin across its entire geographic range; and
- Focus their attention on formalizing the commitment to developing management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the species. The IATTC scientific staff have shown a willingness and capacity to support MSE development for bluefin, and this approach will be critical to helping the Commission to lock in any early growth in the stock and achieve long-term recovery.

### **Adopt a tropical tuna measure in line with scientific advice and commit to tropical tunas MSE**

IATTC should adopt a new tropical tuna measure that includes science-based catch and effort limits, ensures that catch of juvenile tunas associated with FADs does not threaten fishery productivity, and demonstrates a commitment to MSE development for tropical tunas.

Additionally, IATTC should take the necessary actions to ensure progress is made in 2021 on other priorities that need urgent attention, which include: improvement of reporting and monitoring of transshipments; reduction of impacts of tuna fishing on bycaught species; and adoption of strong controls at port to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Finally, we have submitted two technical papers for your consideration: A paper on transshipment in the IATTC Convention Area and one that combines a series of factsheets covering the steps necessary to develop an EM program.