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**The Pew Charitable Trusts’  
Statement to the 24th Regular Session Indian Ocean Tuna Commission  
November 2-6, 2020, online**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). 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 shocks to the system. 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 IOTC 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:

**Advance the development of management procedures to achieve sustainable and productive fisheries**

IOTC is a leader among RFMOs in its shift to more modern management of fisheries, particularly through its adoption of a harvest control rule (HCR) for skipjack tuna and the advancement of management strategy evaluations (MSEs) for albacore, yellowfin, and bigeye tunas as well as swordfish. To continue this progress, the Commission should:

- Provide feedback on the draft management procedure (MP) for yellowfin tuna and establish a process for adopting the MP in 2021;

- Dedicate adequate funding to advance all five MSE processes in line with the current Schedule of Work adopted at SC22; and
- Take steps to ensure compliance with the skipjack catch limits dictated by the HCR in line with Resolution 16/02.

### **Develop minimum standards for electronic monitoring and move towards 100 percent observer coverage**

Low levels of observer coverage limit the availability of catch and operational data, reducing the accuracy of stock assessments and effectiveness of conservation management measures. The Commission currently requires only 5 percent observer coverage for longline vessels larger than 24 meters operating within its Convention area. To increase this coverage and reduce the risk of future disruptions due to pandemics such as COVID-19, the Commission should prioritize the development of a comprehensive electronic monitoring (EM) program that would complement the existing observers. Resolution 16/04 already directs the Scientific Committee to develop EM standards but does not set a deadline for this work. The Commission should modify the resolution to:

- Set a 2021 deadline for the development and adoption of a comprehensive EM program by 2021; and
- Require the SC to draft an implementation workplan and timeline to increase longline observer coverage to 100 percent, using a combination of human and electronic means.

### **Strengthen monitoring, control and surveillance to reduce opportunities for IUU fishing activities**

To further reduce opportunities for IUU fishing in the IOTC area of competence, the Commission should strengthen its monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS). IOTC established the VMS Working Group in 2019 to improve its vessel monitoring system, which enables authorities to track individual vessels. However, the IOTC needs to take additional steps this year to reduce opportunities for IUU fishing in its waters, including:

- Encourage the VMS Working Group to provide advice, by the Commission's meeting in 2021, for the implementation of recommendations from the February 2019 Options Paper for the IOTC Vessel Monitoring System (Document IOTC-2019-WPICMM02-VMS Study);

- Encourage Cooperating non-Contracting Parties to routinely share data with the IOTC Secretariat in a timely manner; and
- Support the Indian Ocean Memorandum of Understanding (IOMOU) on Port State Control proposal to establish a cooperation program aimed at improving the coordination and efficiency of port inspections; identifying commonalities and/or potential obstacles in their consistent application; and exchanging information on fishing vessels and their inspections.

Looking towards 2021, additional issues that will need to be addressed in the future include: tightening the transshipment resolution to reduce opportunities of IUU fish entering the supply chains; reducing impacts on bycatch species; and ensuring that all eligible vessels obtain and submit IMO numbers to the IOTC Secretariat.