



**Statement to the 29th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
La Reunion, 13-17 April 2025**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 29th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). We appreciate the work of the Secretariat, Chair, and members to continue to convene the annual Commission meeting in a hybrid format.

The Commission has faced a number of challenges in negotiating contentious measures in recent years, and this has resulted in an increasing number of objections to adopted conservation and management measures (CMMs). This continues to undermine the ability of the Commission to effectively manage the stocks under its mandate. The ease with which members can lodge objections and the increasing frequency with which members are using this option remains concerning for the future direction of the Commission. ***We encourage all members to negotiate solutions to difficult issues so that consensus can be reached, resulting in full implementation of measures and more effective management.***

We also urge members to hasten the introduction of new approaches that will provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries, and encourage them to:

➤ **Strengthen monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) to reduce opportunities for illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing activities**

Low levels of observer coverage limit the collection of independent catch and operational data, reducing the accuracy of stock assessments and effectiveness of conservation and management measures. The Commission currently requires only 5% observer coverage for vessels larger than 24 meters operating within its Convention Area, well below the scientifically recommended level. The adoption of electronic monitoring standards in 2023 provides a clear pathway to increase this coverage and improve the amount and quality of data used for management decisions. ***The Commission should immediately increase required observer coverage rates for all industrial vessels from the current 5% level and adopt a timeline to reach 100% coverage.***

IOTC's 2nd Performance Review states that "the sense of accountability within IOTC seems to be very low; therefore more accountability is required." A high seas boarding and inspection (HSBI) scheme is intended to monitor compliance and will help ensure adherence with the provisions of the Convention and CMMs adopted by the Commission. Similar measures have been adopted by other RFMOs including by WCPFC in 2006, which has proven successful in monitoring the waters of the Convention area efficiently through the pooling of resources, and by the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA). Furthermore, it is worth noting that a 2022 FAO Legal Office advice to IOTC's Compliance Committee concludes that IOTC "can adopt measures such as

boarding and inspection on the high seas.” ***The Commission should therefore adopt [Proposal G](#) to allow for a HSBI scheme across the whole convention area and bring IOTC in line with modern international fisheries management.***

The Commission must also continually work to close management gaps that present opportunities for IUU fishing in the IOTC area of competence. Vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and catch documentation schemes (CDS) represent essential MCS tools for fisheries management. But progress in both working groups has been too slow and recent meetings were postponed without adequate explanation, hindering yet again progress on these matters. The current VMS resolution (Res 15/03) must be updated to build a more centralized system. ***The Commission must further encourage and support the work of the VMS and CDS Working Groups to deliver proposals for consideration at the Commission meeting in 2025.***

Resolution 19/04 mandates the submission of comprehensive information on the beneficial owner (BO) of a fishing vessel – the person or entity who profits most from the vessel’s activities. However, implementation of this requirement is severely lacking and inconsistent. ***The Commission should provide guidance on a working definition of beneficial ownership to resolve obstacles in order to improve and eventually achieve full compliance.***

Fishing has long been known as one of the world’s most dangerous professions with a recent [study](#) finding that more than 100,000 fishing-related deaths occur each year—three to four times previous estimates. Furthermore, vessels with substandard safety and working conditions for fishers and observers are frequently linked to IUU fishing activities¹. Yet no official data are collected on incidents at sea, despite reports of fatalities in the IOTC Convention area. ***The Commission should therefore require regular data collection and reporting on such incidents that occur in the Convention Area and initiate a dialogue on wellbeing, safety and labour conditions of those onboard fishing vessels, observers included, with the aim of proposing relevant measures for the 2026 Commission meeting. These could be based on the best practices developed in other RFMOs such as WCPFC and ICCAT.***

- **Advance sustainable fisheries management through the development, adoption and full implementation of management procedures.**

The Commission made great progress in 2024 with the adoption of management procedures (MPs) for skipjack and swordfish, but an implementation framework is still needed. ***The Commission must therefore adopt implementation measures to ensure the MPs for both skipjack and swordfish are effective.*** In addition, both the swordfish MP and bigeye MP catch limits require updating. ***The Commission should also therefore endorse both [Proposal F](#) and [Proposal U](#).***

¹ 4th FAO/ILO/IMO Joint Working Group meeting on IUU Fishing and other related matters

The new yellowfin tuna assessment has addressed many of the technical issues associated with previous assessments and as such, reopens the ability to develop a yellowfin MP. The years of unsuccessful negotiation around yellowfin management highlight the importance of pre-agreed management action. A yellowfin MP will provide IOTC with the tools necessary to maintain a sustainable, profitable, and predictable fishery, so the management strategy evaluation (MSE) should be prioritized for the latter half of 2025. **The Commission should *reinitiate the yellowfin MSE with an associated budget to enable MP adoption no later than 2027.***

Blue shark is a key commercially important, targeted species caught by IOTC fisheries with 10,000s of tonnes landed annually. **The Commission should *therefore ensure sufficient funds are available to develop an MSE-tested management procedure for blue shark for adoption no later than 2027.***

➤ **Prepare for overlap with other international treaties**

To date RFMOs have largely been unaffected by obligations in other international treaties. However, this is changing with new treaties being signed that will require input from RFMOs, including the United Nations High Seas Treaty and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Subsidies Agreement. In the words of Peter Thomson UNSG Special Envoy for the Ocean, “*the age of working in silos is over*”. To prepare for these and other obligations, **the Commission should *adopt [Proposal R](#) and establish a standing agenda item to discuss overlapping issues or ways it can assist CPCs meet their obligations under other international treaties.***