

**Statement to the 30th Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
Maldives, 11-15 May 2026**

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer in the 30th 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 to allow wider participation.

The Commission has continued to face challenges in negotiating contentious measures in recent years, resulting in an increasing number of objections to adopted conservation and management measures (CMMs). This undermines the ability of the Commission to effectively manage the stocks under its mandate. The ease with which members can lodge objections 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 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:

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

The Commission has made great progress with the adoption of management procedures (MPs), but additional steps should be taken at the 30th meeting to ensure implementation of agreed MPs and to prepare for adoption of other MPs next year without further delay.

Firstly, an implementation framework for the swordfish MP adopted in 2024 is overdue. ***The Commission should therefore adopt [Proposal J](#) to ensure the MP for swordfish is effective.***

We are disappointed at the additional delay in finalisation of the albacore MP development, which was initially scheduled for adoption in 2023. ***The Commission should resource this now mature work according to a clear and efficient workplan such that a proposal to adopt an MP can be brought forward to the 31st session in 2027.*** Any further delays risk creating a backlog, causing unnecessary delays in more efficient management of other IOTC stocks, and threatening sustainability certifications.

Yellowfin is arguably the most [important species](#) managed by IOTC. 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 continued development of the management strategy evaluation (MSE) should be prioritized. ***The Commission should therefore ensure sufficient resources are available to continue development of an MSE-tested management procedure for yellowfin tuna for adoption no later than 2027.***

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

Skipjack has an adopted MP (Resolution 24/07) that is due to be implemented via Resolution 25/03. This already endorsed process represents best practice management and to deviate from it in the absence of exceptional circumstances would be a backwards step. ***The Commission should therefore reject [Proposal I](#) which seeks to delay implementation of the MP until 2030 and maintain a TAC well above that recommended by the Scientific Committee.***

➤ **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 O](#) to allow for a HSBI scheme across the whole convention area and bring IOTC in line with modern international fisheries management.***

The Commission should 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. The current VMS resolution (Res 15/03) should be updated to build a more centralized system. While both the VMS and CDS working groups have been suspended, CPCs should continue to look to options for developing these tools for effective management. ***The Commission should revive the VMS and CDS Working Groups with a clear mission briefing and deadline to deliver proposals for consideration at the Commission meeting in 2027.***

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, effective implementation of this requirement is severely lacking and inconsistent. ***The Commission should task the Compliance Committee to hold a dedicated discussion on BO and provide recommendations, including guidance on a working definition of beneficial ownership, to resolve obstacles in order to improve and eventually achieve full compliance.***

➤ **Engagement with other international treaties**

The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty and the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies has highlighted the increasing overlap between RFMOs and other international fora. Until recently, RFMOs have largely been unaffected by obligations in other international treaties, but this is no longer the case. To be well placed to address these obligations, ***the Commission should adopt [Proposal Q](#) and maintain discussions on overlapping issues or ways it can assist CPCs in meeting their obligations under other international treaties.***