

# The Pew Charitable Trusts

Statement to the First Session of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries

15-18 January 2024

## Agenda Item 5: Climate change and fisheries management

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Pew welcomes the inclusion of the agenda item on climate resilient fisheries, noting that climate adaptation efforts must be accompanied by rapid, large-scale emission reductions. The paper rightly emphasises that effective fisheries management is the best adaptation tool and foundation of climate-resilient fisheries, and that ineffective management systems are a barrier to building resilience. In addition to the practical support the paper outlines, Pew would like to put forward four priorities for the improvement of management systems, **and urges the FAO to help its Members prepare for these priorities in line with the following recommendations:**

1. *Governance reforms that enable international management bodies to prepare for changes in fisheries productivity and the distribution of fish populations.*

Pew reiterates the key role of regional governance processes in supporting effective climate adaptation and welcomes the FAO's recent work to convene workshops with RFBs to look at transboundary issues, including in the Indo-Pacific in 2023 and the Atlantic region (expected early 2024). Pew agrees that climate-induced changes in the geographical distribution of key fish species should be of primary concern to RFBs. **We recommend that any future workshops consider the integration of climate-related changes into management objectives, in particular harvest strategies, to support the long-term sustainability of fish populations and fisheries.**

Pew also welcomes the efforts of the FAO in addressing the threat that climate change poses to fisher safety and the potential influence it will have on IUU fishing activity. We recognize that this includes issues such as the increases in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events as well as stock shifts at sea and harvesting issues ashore, driving some communities into engaging in IUU fishing activities which put them at risk. **Pew encourages further work on this critical issue and exploration of the interlinkages between disaster risk, fisher safety, and IUU fishing.**

2. *Implementing long-term, adaptive management including comprehensive harvest strategies tested through robust and transparent management strategy evaluation.*

Harvest strategies – or management procedures – are an important tool in adaptive management, which shifts managers' perspective from short-term, reactive decision-making to longer-term objectives—most typically based on the numbers or biomass of a given fish population—and agreeing in advance how fishing rules (often quotas) will be adjusted to meet those aims. An important part of harvest strategies development is the use of detailed scientific models, called management strategy evaluation (MSE), to ensure that the adopted rules will meet the objectives, under a variety of environmental conditions. This tool provides scientists and managers with the opportunity to incorporate expected or potential impacts from climate change into their decisions.

When designed properly, MSE and the resulting harvest strategies can incorporate direct measures of the effects of a changing climate, like sea surface temperature, or indirect measures, like egg production, growth rates, and other biological characteristics impacted by climate. This tool can be particularly relevant for small pelagic species that form the basis of

marine food webs and for sensitive bycatch species that may be overlooked in traditional fisheries management regimes. **Now that the proof of concept for harvest strategies has been clearly demonstrated for global tuna populations, Pew recommends that the FAO invest in harvest strategy adoption, with MSE development, particularly for small pelagic species, invertebrates, and demersal fishes, and that these tools be developed to explicitly account for the effects of climate change.**

3. *Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation to bolster the resilience of fisheries and the ecosystems on which they depend.*

Climate change is already impacting marine and freshwater ecosystems, and fisheries, and further impacts are inevitable. We strongly support the FAO's efforts to understand and develop ways to adapt to these changes and enhance the resilience of fisheries and ecosystems, including the GEF-funded Common Oceans Program, which features ecosystem-based management as a central theme. **Pew welcomes the focus of this Sub-Committee on mainstreaming biodiversity conservation, and we urge the FAO to use the impetus provided by GBF targets, particularly targets 5 and 10, to broaden the application of ecosystem-based fisheries management.**

4. *Investing in scientific research to develop new management tools and reference points that account for climate change impacts.*

The FAO notes the importance of ecosystem considerations and scientific advances in adapting global fisheries to climate change, but highlights the current limitations in management systems, modelling, and context-specific information on adaptation. **To address these scientific and policy gaps, Pew supports increased investment in research that will improve modelling of physical and chemical ocean conditions, impacts on ecosystems and fish populations, and combined ecological and socio-economic implications, to help inform practical adaptation tools for fisheries managers.**