



2 MINUTE BRIEFS

YOUR QUICK GUIDE TO FISHERIES ISSUES



OBSERVER PROGRAM

WHAT ARE OBSERVERS?

Observers report on tuna fishing catches and methods. Often they travel with the fishing vessels, being away at sea for weeks or months at a time, to gather independent information about what is happening on fishing vessels at sea.

WHAT DO THEY DO?

Observers make notes of what is happening when the fishing vessel is fishing – how much fish is caught? what type of fish is caught? what methods are used to catch fish? whether there are any observed breaches to laws and regulations? This information is then fed back into a central database so that the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and national governments can keep track of what fishing vessels are doing and whether fishing laws and regulations are being implemented.

Observers are not police and have no power to enforce the rules. Their role is to be objective and independent observers of what is happening on fishing vessels. If they report on illegal activities it is up to the national authorities to use this information to investigate ships.

Observers are placed on foreign fishing vessels such as US, Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese fishing vessels. Often the fishermen on these ships have limited English language skills so cards using pictures and different languages are provided to explain what the role of an observer will be on the ship.

Fishing vessels are obliged to provide observers with a bed and food for the time they are on-board the ship but observers must be able to cope with life at sea which can mean much time away from family and basic living conditions. On FFA organised trips observers earn approximately USD\$30-50 a day.

WHERE DO THEY GET THEIR TRAINING AND SUPPORT FROM?

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) strengthens national capacity and regional solidarity so its 17 members can manage, control and develop their tuna fisheries now and in the future. An important part of this work is the FFA Observer Program

All FFA member countries have observers, who are trained by FFA, which also provides support to observers in their roles. Training includes not just how fishing is done and how to report on it but also how to work on a boat at sea, fire fighting, navigation, basic first aid and sea safety training. Once they have a job as an observer, they may be provided with support from FFA. FFA trains debriefers who meet with observers when they come back to port to check their data and provide feedback and discuss any issues observers have such as relations with the crew and payment of relevant salary and allowances. In Honiara, FFA Observer Program Officer meets with observers arriving at port to discuss these issues. Some observers receive training for participation in scientific research done by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) such as further training in collecting scientific samples and tagging tuna.

The FFA Observer Program was started in 1986. It has put observers on US fishing vessels since 1988 under the US Treaty Observer Program (which covers the multilateral treaty between many Pacific Islands and the US over fishing in the region) and another regional fishing agreement the Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement since 1995.



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HOW MANY OBSERVERS ARE THERE?

Across the Pacific region, there are about 200 active observers, trained by FFA and employed by their national governments. Observers may also work across the region, travelling across many countries and some will be employed by other governments.

Women have begun to work as observers with Papua New Guinea having seven female observers and Solomon Islands having 2 female observers.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR OBSERVERS?

At the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) meeting of Pacific Islands and fishing entities such as Japan, Korea, EU and US, in Busan, Korea, last year countries agreed on a goal to increase the number of observers so they cover 100% of purse seine fishing vessels in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. So demand for observers is likely to increase in future, however it is uncertain who pays the cost and how long it will take to reach this goal. Building capacity to meet this goal will be an ongoing task for FFA and its member countries and territories.

WHERE DO I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION?

FFA

Refer to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) website for more information about the observer program on <http://www.ffa.int/observers>