

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM FISHERIES AGENCY

FISHERIES OBSERVERS FACT SHEET

WHAT DO FISHERIES OBSERVERS DO?

Fisheries Observers are independent witnesses on board commercial fishing vessels who gather objective information about tuna catches and methods.

There are approximately 800 Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries observers. They are at sea for weeks or months at a time and collect data relating to the volume and type of fish, what methods are used to catch fish, and any observed breaches of fishing rules.

Fisheries Observers are not police, and have no power to enforce the rules. Their primary role is to Observe, Collect, Record and Report on fishing activities both at sea and in port.

WHY DO WE NEED FISHERIES OBSERVERS?

Fisheries Observers play an important role as one of the key monitoring tools in the management of tuna resources. They are essentially the “EYES and EARS” of fisheries authorities. The raw information they collect is needed for verification of activities and informs important fisheries management decision making.

There is a legal requirement to have observers embarked on all purse seine vessels fishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean within the area bounded by 20°N and 20°S, and a minimum of 5% observer coverage of the effort in other fisheries covered by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

HOW ARE OBSERVERS TRAINED AND SUPPORTED?

All Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) members, with the exception of Niue, have observers who serve under their national observer programmes. They are trained by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and FFA under the Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries Observer (PIRFO) training standards and framework, which also provides support to observers in their roles.

The training includes firefighting, navigation, basic first aid, sea safety and how to use and operate safety equipment on board a vessel. **You can learn more [here](#).**

OBSERVER SAFETY

Observer safety is a matter of utmost importance for FFA members and all FFA members' national laws provide explicitly for observers.

Observer safety requirements are enshrined in the FFA Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions (HMTCs) of licence for vessel access to FFA members' fisheries zones, the Regional Terms and Conditions under the Treaty between the United States and Pacific Island Parties (US Treaty), as well as the WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure on observer safety.

FFA provides technical support to national observer programmes in terms of safety training, safety videos and development of the Regional Observer Emergency Action Plan. FFA also provides various safety equipment to national observer programmes, such as Personal Locator Beacons, Two-Way Satellite Communication devices and Inflatable Life-vests. Safety training to use such equipment is also provided by FFA through established training institutions and certified marine safety trainers.

OBSERVER INSURANCE

FFA members require that vessel operators have full insurance coverage for the Observer travelling to and from the vessel, as well as on board the vessel.

Regulations require that insurance cover situations such as when an observer is injured or ill, requires medical repatriation or in the unfortunate event of death (e.g. the vessel operator is responsible for funeral expenses, repatriation, loss of earnings, and other related expenses).

Vessel operators are required to furnish a copy of the vessel's insurance policy, as well as a certificate of validity. Observer insurance provisions in the HMTCs are largely mimicked in the requirements for US vessels fishing under the US Treaty. **Learn more [here](#).**

ROLE OF FISHING VESSEL CAPTAIN

The vessel captain is responsible for ensuring an Observer is able to perform their duties safely without any hindrance, intimidation, obstruction or harassment. The WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure on Regional Observer Programme, [CMM 2018-05](#), (Annexures A and B) documents the rights and responsibilities of Observers, as well as for vessel operators and captains.

The captain is required to read and understand his obligations to the Observer and sign the SPC/FFA Regional Observer Placement Meeting Record (FORM SUP-1), as an agreement to Observer terms and conditions. **Find the form [here](#).**

ROLE OF FFA

The FFA provides technical and policy support to its members' national Observer programmes. The key role that FFA plays is to strengthen national Observer programmes and provide capacity building. FFA works in collaboration with the SPC to facilitate the annual Regional Observer Coordinators Workshop to discuss technical issues in relation to Observer programmes and their operations and training activities.

The FFA also manages the FFA Subregional Observer Programme that places observers on all US purse seine vessels operating under the US Treaty. FFA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the American Tuna Boat Owners Association (ATA) regarding services that the FFA Secretariat will provide through the operation of the FFA Subregional Observer programme to assist the ATA to meet its regional Observer obligations.

FFA sources Observers from members' national Observer programmes, under trip-by-trip contractual arrangements, to cover approximately 200 trips annually.

ROLE OF NATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMMES

National Observer programmes must meet their national and regional requirements for both bilateral and domestic fishing access arrangements. Fisheries Observers from the national programmes are deployed on distant water fishing vessels that are fishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean under bilateral arrangements and on domestic fleets fishing in their own EEZs.

All bilateral and domestic trips are coordinated by their respective national programmes. Observer terms and conditions are dictated by relevant national laws, based on the HMTCs.

National programmes have the opportunity to raise technical issues at the Annual Regional Observer Coordinators Workshop at which practical solutions to address those issues are identified. The national programmes also benefit from the regional Observer cost recovery levy, particularly for their training needs.