

# INFORMATION ABOUT FISHERIES OBSERVERS 1.0

Fisheries observers **help to manage fisheries sustainably** by collecting data and by observing if fishing vessels follow existing rules.



## WHO EMPLOYS A FISHERIES OBSERVER?

There are different models and programs by which observers are employed, for example:

- Observer programs which operate on a national level and are funded and operated through the national government.
- Programs that employ observers from third-party observer providers.
- Observers from national programs which are deployed under regional governance structures.



## HOW TO BECOME A FISHERIES OBSERVER?

- A training program must be undertaken, including principles of scientific data collection, shipboard activity and operation, survival and safety at sea, navigation, basic first aid, how to handle species, especially protected species, and what fisheries management rules are in place.
- Some programs require observers to be trained biologists or hold a degree in other natural sciences.
- It is important to be fit and healthy since life and work at sea can be for long periods as well as physically taxing.



## WHERE ARE OBSERVERS WORKING?

Fisheries observers work on fishing vessels and on vessels to which fish is transferred. However, non-fisheries observers also work on tour vessels or oil and mining platforms.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

**34.2%**

of the fish stocks are at a biologically unsustainable level (FAO, 2020).

In 2018, total global capture fisheries production reached the highest level ever recorded at (FAO, 2020).

**96.4**  
million tones



## BEFORE THE TRIP STARTS

- Observers have a briefing before boarding, where they receive their trip information, stationery, required documentation, workbooks (noting that many programs are changing from paper formats to electronic data reporting), and work gear. Some observer programs also issue a safety kit, including first-aid kit, life vest, personal lifesaving beacon, independent 2-way satellite communication device.
- Observers need to check their observer- and safety- kit and replenish items that may be lacking.
- A placement meeting needs to be carried out and the vessel safety layout walked through with Observer, Captain, and Placement Officer.
- Placement forms, containing specific tasks, need to be made known during the placement meeting and signed by Observer, Captain, and Placement Officer.



## WHAT ARE OBSERVERS DOING ON-BOARD THE VESSEL?

- Observers collect various data including:
  - Biological data
  - Fisheries interaction with other species such as seabirds, turtles and cetaceans
  - Catch related data such as estimating entire catch; fishing effort; fishing equipment and gear
  - Observing whether the fishing vessel follows the rules. It is important to note that in most observer programs observers cannot enforce existing rules.



## DATA REPORTING

Observers prepare a daily trip report, with details on fishing operations and collected data.



## WHEN THE TRIP IS OVER

After the trip, observers have a de-briefing, in which the trip report is submitted and discussed. During this meeting, the observer provides and verifies information collected and raises issues that occurred on the vessel.



## WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE COLLECTED DATA?

- The collected data helps scientists to make decisions on the status of the stocks and may help determine a quota on a particular species.
- Data is also used by scientists to assess and determine fishery impacts on non-target or "bycatch" species.
- The collected information helps monitor the effectiveness of vessel compliance with fisheries regulations, conditions of license and access agreements, and regional fisheries management treaties.



## EQUIPMENT

- Fisheries observers should have a standardized set of equipment
- Two-way satellite communication device
  - Hard hat and proper deck working boots or shoes
  - Gloves and protective sun-glasses
  - Calipers and other sampling equipment

## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

In 2018, the total number of fishing vessels across the world was estimated to be (FAO, 2020).

**4.6**  
million

For observers to do their job effectively it is important that a **safe working environment** is provided.



## WHAT RIGHTS SHOULD FISHERIES OBSERVERS HAVE?

- A right to a safe working environment free from assault, harassment, and interference, including bribery attempts.
- A right to observer program support, including adequate training, adequate field equipment and field support; species identification training and enforcement follow-up with reported violations, including any harassment experienced.
- Observers must be allowed full access to all the facilities and equipment on the vessel as well as all vessel records according to terms placement meeting agreed terms.
- Observers must have access to independent communication equipment, adequate personal protective gear and safety equipment, as well as communication protocols and Emergency Action Plan.
- The vessel must provide observers with food, accommodation, medical facilities, and access to sanitary facilities.
- A right to a signed copy of the written employment contract, proof of insurance, and insurance policy with their name - given to them before every boarding.
- Fair and equitable employment terms, as well as a competitive wage package, with danger and sea pay.



## WHAT TO DO IF A FISHERIES OBSERVER GOES MISSING OUT AT SEA?

Each program has different sets of rules in case an observer is reported missing, however, the following is practised by many programs:

- 1 Immediately stop fishing and fishing operations (this would include, for instance, setting a net to clean it);
- 2 Contact the nearest Marine Rescue Center (MRC) and report the incident and receive instructions for procedure for Search and Rescue (usually a 72-hour search);
- 3 Secure all vessel, crew, and observer electronics, including all CCTV cameras dating back to the last time the observer was seen alive and well (i.e. working);
- 4 Secure areas on vessel where observer has been known to operate (this would include any cleaning);
- 5 Contact surrounding vessels to assist with the search and rescue, according to the MRC instructions;
- 6 Contact Observer Program manager and appropriate agencies;
- 7 Observer manager must ID and notify responsible countries and management organization;
- 8 After being released by the MRC, return to the nearest port.
- 9 Cooperate with all official investigations.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

In 2018, about

**88%**

of the

**179**  
million tones

of total fish production was utilized for direct human consumption (FAO, 2020).



## HOW ARE FISHERIES OBSERVERS REPORTING CREW ABUSE?

The mandate to report on crew mistreatment differs among observer programs. For example, observers in the Pacific report abuse of crew as part of their data collection and written reports or through the 2-way communication device.



## WHERE DO FISHERIES OBSERVERS FIND SUPPORT?

Observer programs are responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of their observers. There are laws which the vessel is required to follow that protect the observer's health, safety, and welfare. Several external government and non-government organizations also offer support, including:

- the Association for Professional Observers (<https://www.apo-observers.org/>)

## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

In 2018, an estimated

**59.5**

million people were engaged in the primary sector of fisheries and aquaculture (FAO, 2020).



## KEY INSTRUMENTS & REFERENCES

Fisheries observers are in a difficult position, as they are not seen as fishing crew and thus are not covered by some of the regulations that address fisheries. Some references are listed below:

- Conservation and management measures of the fisheries management organization in the Western and Central Pacific: <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/cmm-2017-03/conservation-and-management-measure-protection-wcpfc-regional-observer-programme>
- 16 U.S. Code § 1827 - Observer program regarding certain foreign fishing: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title16/html/USCODE-2011-title16-chap38.htm>
- International Observer Bill of Rights and associated Code of Conduct for Responsible Observer Programmes - Health and Safety & Stakeholder Responsibilities: <https://www.apo-observers.org/billofrights>
- Cape Town Agreement: <https://www.cdn.imo.org/localresources/en/About/Conventions/Documents/Consolidated%20text%20of%20the%20Agreement.pdf>
- The International Labour Organisation of the United Nations - C188 Work in Fishing Convention: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::PI2100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C188](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::PI2100_ILO_CODE:C188)

## IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE, CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES;

- PNA FSMA Observer Programme - <https://www.pnatuna.com/content/pna-fsma-observer-programme-2021-annual-booklet>
- WCPFC - <https://www.wcpfc.int/regional-observer-programme>
- Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observer - <https://www.pirfo.org/>
- Association for Professional Observers - <https://www.apo-observers.org/>



The United States Coast Guard's Investigative Service (CGIS) works to investigate any crime within the United States maritime jurisdiction. We are a force of professional criminal investigators with specific expertise on maritime matters and we have a special interest in the fishing community and protecting the safety of fishing observers. CGIS relies on YOU to provide tips about suspected crimes affecting the maritime community and that is why we have launched CGIS Tips a web-based and mobile means to submit tips anonymously to CGIS criminal investigators.

## WHAT KIND OF TIPS SHOULD I REPORT?

Download the CGIS Tips app from your mobile provider's marketplace

Available on the iPhone Available on Google play

Any US crime committed on or affecting the maritime community to include illegal fishing, polluting the ocean, maritime smuggling of weapons, narcotics, money, or humans. If you are a fishing observer and are in danger, you can certainly submit a tip and we can notify the appropriate jurisdiction as well as appropriate government vessels.

