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EU's Observer Implementation report
Ad Corten

EU observer program implementation 2015-16

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1 General

This report covers the observer program of the European Union in the SPRFMO area in the years 2015 and 2016. At the time of writing this report (October 2016), the observer missions in the Pacific for the year 2016 had been completed, so the results for the current year could also be included.

2 Organisation of the observer program

The observer program was organised by the Dutch consultant agency Corten Marine Research (CMR). This agency has been responsible for observer missions on board Dutch, German and Lithuanian trawlers in the SPRFMO area since 2007.

In 2015 and 2016, the program was financed by the EU Data Collection Framework. This program is funded for 50% by the EU and for the other 50% by the member states involved.

3 Observer training

The two observers employed in the program in 2015 and 2016 had a wide experience in observer missions at sea:

J. De Klerk is a senior technician who has been involved in the observer programme in the Pacific since 2007. He has also been on observer missions in Mauritanian waters and he has trained Mauritanian observers.

T. Rackzynski is a PhD scientist who has worked as an observer on board EU pelagic vessels in the Pacific since 2008. He has also worked as an observer on board Polish vessels in the North-East Atlantic. In addition to his expertise on fish sampling, Rackzynski is also an experienced bird observer.

No special training activities were organised for the CMR observers in 2015 - 2016

4 Program design and coverage

The observer program on board EU trawlers in 2015 and 2016 was designed to obtain the 10% observer coverage in terms of fishing days that is requested by SPRFMO for vessels that make less than two trips in total (CMM 4.01, paragraph 22). In fact both EU vessels in 2015 and 2016 made more than two trips each (depending on how a trip is defined¹), so technically the coverage of only

¹ A trip may be defined for example as the period between two calls in port, or between two transshipments at sea. So far, SPRFMO has not defined the term "trip".

one trip would have been sufficient to comply with the SPRFMO regulation (that prescribes 10% coverage of all trips). However, following the spirit of the regulation, it was decided to apply the more stringent criterion of 10% coverage of all fishing days. This criterion was met in both years, as can be seen from the table below:

year	fishing days	observer days	coverage
2015	149	88	59%
2016	150*	37	25%

*) preliminary estimate as one of the vessels was still at sea at the time of writing this report

Fishing days are defined as the number of days for which catches were reported (including zero catches). Observer days are defined as days on which one or more catches were sampled.

Despite the lower number of observer days in 2016, the coverage in terms of fishing days in this year was still above the minimum requirement of 10%.

The details of all observer missions in 2015 and 2016 are presented in the text table below.

year	period	ship	observer	days with observations
2015	29 April - 13 July	Annelies Ilena	Co de Klerk	60
	13 June - 24 July	Margiris	Tomasz Raczynski	28
2016	15 May - 17 June	Janus	Tomasz Raczynski	14
	17 June - 17 August	Maartje Theadora	Tomasz Raczynski	23

5 Type of data collected

Observers collected information on species composition and length distributions of all species in the catch. In addition, biological samples were analysed for weight, sex and maturity stage, and otoliths (only for jack mackerel) were collected. Species sampled for biological characteristics included *Trachurus murphyi*, *Scomber japonicus* and *Brama australis*.

Otoliths of jack mackerel will be read by a specialist of CMR, and the information on age/length relationship will be used to convert length distributions into age compositions of the catch. This information is used subsequently by the Scientific Committee in their assessments.

Length and biological data on all species collected were (or will be in the case of 2016) transmitted to SPRFMO in the standard format.

Following a recommendation adopted by 2014 SPRFMO Commission Meeting (SPRFMO 2014), the observers also counted the numbers of birds around the vessel, and the number of birds that were caught in the net or that had collisions with the vessel of fishing lines. Results of these observations are reported in the national reports of the EU to the Science Committee (Corten 2015, 2016) and in a more detailed report on the bird observations in 2016 (Raczynski and Corten, 2016)

6 Problems encountered.

In general, the captains and crews of the vessels were very cooperative and the observers could execute their work without obstructions.

A temporary problem arose by the end of 2015 when a ship owner decided that one of the observers was no longer welcome on board his vessels in 2016. The reasons for this decision were not made clear to CMR, and as a consequence CMR temporarily suspended the cooperation with this ship owner. Because of this disagreement, there were no observers at sea during the first months of the fishing season in 2016. After discussions between the ship owner and government officials, the ship owner reversed his decision, and the observer programme was resumed in May 2016. By this time, however, the observer concerned had found employment elsewhere, and no qualified replacement could be found at short notice. Therefore, only one observer was available for observer missions during the rest of the season.

Although the friction between CMR and the ship owner caused some temporary problems in 2016, it helped to clarify the tasks and the authority of the observers on board and no further problem are to be expected in the future.

7 References

Corten, A, 2015. European Union 2015 Annual Report. Third Meeting of SPRFMO Scientific Committee, Port Vila, Vanuatu, SC-03-18_rev1

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Raczynski, T, and Corten, A, 2016. Seabirds and large pelagic trawlers in the south-eastern Pacific. 4th Meeting of the Scientific Committee, The Hague, The Netherlands, 10 - 15 October 2016, SC-05-22_rev1

SPRFMO 2014. Conservation and Management Measure for minimising bycatch of seabirds in the SPRFMO Convention Area. Report of the 2nd Commission Meeting, Annex N, CMM 2.04.