



14TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SPRFMO COMMISSION

Panama City, Panama, 2 to 6 March 2026

COMM14 – Report ANNEX 5a SPRFMO Guidelines for Observers

(COMM14-WP16_rev1)

1. Purpose

These Guidelines set out the principles, expectations, and conduct standards applicable to Observers participating in the work of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO). They aim to support Members and Observers in facilitating effective Observer participation in the work of the Organisation.

2. Legal Basis

Observer participation in the SPRFMO is governed by:

- a. Article 18 of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific Ocean; and
- b. Regulation 9 of the Rules of Procedure, which defines the rights and modalities of participation of Observers in the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

Under Regulation 9, Observers:

- a. may participate as Observers in meetings of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies unless otherwise decided by the Commission;
- b. may participate in deliberations but shall not take part in taking decisions;
- c. may submit relevant documents for circulation as information papers; and
- d. shall have timely access to documents subject to their confidentiality.

3. Principles of Participation

SPRFMO values the participation and contributions of Observers, who bring scientific, technical, and policy expertise that enhances transparency, legitimacy, and informs decision-making. Observer engagement is guided by the following principles:

- a. Transparency – including sharing information in good faith and respecting established confidentiality provisions.
- b. Constructive engagement – contributing constructively to discussions and the pursuit of outcomes that support the objective of the Convention.
- c. Professionalism – maintaining decorum and respect for all participants and Chairpersons.
- d. Integrity – acting consistently with SPRFMO’s objectives and in a manner that supports the effective functioning and governance of the Organisation and promoting the implementation of the Convention’s objectives.



4. Participation Rights and Responsibilities

Observers are entitled to:

- a. Attend open sessions of Commission and subsidiary body meetings. They are not entitled to attend sessions that are closed or otherwise limited in nature.
- b. Submit written information documents through the Secretariat.
- c. Access papers, subject to confidentiality restrictions.
- d. Make oral interventions during discussions at the discretion of the Chairperson.

Observers are responsible for:

- a. Respecting the Chairperson's authority to manage discussions and speaking order.
- b. Submitting relevant documents to the Secretariat for distribution to the Members of the Commission or its subsidiary bodies, and ensuring such materials are accurate, relevant, and aligned with SPRFMO's document standards, processes and timelines.
- c. Maintaining an up-to-date contact point with the Secretariat
- d. Respecting confidentiality provisions governing non-public data, deliberations, and intersessional exchanges.

5. Standards of Conduct

All Observers and their representatives shall at all times:

- a. Act professionally and courteously at all times during meetings and intersessional communications.
- b. Refrain from making any remarks or behaviour that could be perceived as personal, offensive, or disruptive.
- c. Respect established confidentiality provisions.
- d. Comply with reasonable instructions of Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, and Coordinators.
- e. Engage collaboratively and respectfully.
- f. Ensure representation integrity – only duly authorised individuals participate and speak on behalf of the Observer entity.

6. Document Submissions

Information papers and presentations must be submitted to the Secretariat in advance of applicable deadlines. The Secretariat may adjust format. Submissions should clearly state the submitting organisation's name, purpose, and relevance to the meeting of the Commission or subsidiary body agenda.

7. Meeting Etiquette

- a. Speak only on the floor when recognised by the Chairperson.
- b. Keep interventions concise, relevant, and oriented to achieving the objective of the Convention.
- c. Avoid interrupting or speaking over others.
- d. Use appropriate channels to raise procedural concerns.
- e. Respect time limits and Chairperson guidance during sessions.



8. Confidentiality and Use of Information

Non-public domain SPRFMO information and non-public information provided by Members and CNCP's—including documents marked restricted, draft, or confidential—shall not be distributed or cited externally without prior authorisation. This obligation extends to:

- a. Information disclosed by Members, Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, or other Observers during meetings, including written submissions and oral statements;
- b. Deliberations that are ongoing, including positions expressed by delegations during formal and informal sessions;
- c. Discussions held in informal settings (e.g., side events, corridor conversations, or working groups) where it is agreed or reasonably expected that no attributable record will be kept or that discussions are off-the-record.

Observers shall not disclose, including through social media or other public platforms, the content of deliberations or the positions expressed by any delegation while meetings are still in progress, nor after their conclusion if such information remains confidential under these Guidelines or applicable rules of procedure.

Failure to respect these confidentiality obligations may be considered a serious breach of these Guidelines and may result in the revocation of Observer status in accordance with section 10.

9. Coordination with the Secretariat

Observers are encouraged to communicate with the SPRFMO Secretariat regarding matters such as contact updates, document submissions, logistical arrangements, and any clarifications about these Guidelines.

10. Non-Compliance

Sustained or serious lack of respect for the rules of the Organisation, including the Rules of Procedure and these Guidelines, may lead to a formal warning by the Chairperson, or review and potentially revoking of Observer status by the Commission under Regulation 9(2). In assessing the seriousness of a breach, the Commission shall consider, *inter alia*, whether the Observer has failed to respect confidentiality obligations under section 8, made unauthorised public statements about ongoing deliberations, or otherwise undermined the integrity of the meeting process.

The Secretariat shall notify the observer in writing of the alleged breach, evidence, and proposed sanction, and give a defined period to submit a written response. The Observer may request a hearing before the Chairperson and Secretariat, in which case a report of hearing will be forwarded to all Members and Observers. The observer will be given an opportunity to speak at any meeting at which the alleged breach is being discussed, if the Commission considers it appropriate.

11. Review and Updates

These Guidelines may be reviewed periodically to ensure continued alignment with the rules of the Organisation and best practices.

12. Contact

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