
12TH MEETING OF THE COMPLIANCE AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (CTC)

Santiago, Chile, 11 to 14 February 2025

CTC 12 – Doc 09

SPRFMO Observer Programme Implementation Report

Secretariat

1. Background

Paragraph 48 of [CMM 16-2024 \(Observer Programme\)](#) requires that the Secretariat shall prepare a report on the implementation of the SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP) for presentation at each annual meeting of the Compliance and Technical Committee (CTC), using information from annual reports, observer data, and all other suitably documented and relevant information in its possession.

This document represents the sixth iteration of this implementation report and summarises developments in the SPRFMO Observer Programme Implementation since the conclusion of the Commission's 2024 Annual Meeting.

The CTC is invited to:

- **Note** the contents of this paper particularly Sections 2.3 (developments), and 2.5 (constraints), and make any comments deemed appropriate;
- **Note** that there were no observer programmes evaluated in 2024;
- **Note** that the current observer accreditation provider's contract has been renewed for another 5 years;
- **Provide** advice and or a recommendation to the Commission regarding the appointment of an additional observer program accreditation evaluator;
- **Note** the final report (2024) from the current observer accreditation provider detailing the SPRFMO observer accreditation programme

2. CMM reporting requirements

2.1 Information on problems that have been encountered

During the 2024 [CTC11 meeting](#) one Member expressed the impossibility for its observer programme to be assessed by the current observer accreditation provider and asked the CTC to consider the circumstances and recommend that the Commission seek an alternative provider.

Following COMM12 the Secretariat confirmed that the current observer accreditation provider could not currently assess the Russian Federation's programme. In line with the COMM12 agreements (paras 44a and 48b of the [COMM12-Report](#)) the current observer accreditation providers contract was renewed (Section 2.4) and a tender was launched to select a provider, able to assess programmes from all Members, but limited to a single assessment for one Member (Section 2.3).



2.2 Recommendations for improving current standards and practices

During 2024, COMM12 created a Working Group on Electronic Monitoring Standards. The Co-chairs of this working group informed the SC of the progress of the group, sought endorsement of the key proposed elements and the objectives, purpose, and scope of the draft standards, as well as solicited advice and input on the work remaining to support the Commission adopting Minimum Standards for the use of Electronic Monitoring (EM) systems in SPRFMO Fisheries ([SC12-Doc35](#)). One of the open questions that this working Group is considering is: *How do we envision EM in SPRFMO will relate to the observer program and data standards?* An update from the Working Group is included in the CTC12 agenda as item 9bii.

COMM12 also adopted a new transshipment CMM ([CMM 12-2024](#)). This CMM takes effect from 1 October 2025 and requires receiving fishing vessels that engage in transshipment at sea to have an observer on board to monitor and record the information. Under the same CMM these carrier vessels observers are not required to be SPRFMO accredited.

Beyond that, in 2024 the current observer accreditation provider provided a report summarising the results and learnings of the accreditations carried out during the first 5 years of the programmes activities. That report acknowledges that the next stages will be to complete any remaining accreditations by the January 2027 deadline and develop a methodology for re-certification. The report also notes that the possibility of accrediting observers deployed on carrier vessels has been discussed given the increased interest in monitoring at sea transshipments and the harmonisation of data within the current programme. This should be a relatively simple exercise given that many of the processes adopted by an organisation already accredited for catcher vessels will carry across to Carrier vessels. The full report is available as Annex 1 in this document.

In October 2024, SC12 **noted** that work required to meet the observer coverage requirements contained in the squid CMM (18-2024) were incorporated into the SC workplan (Paragraph 212, [SC12-Report](#)).

2.3 Developments in observer programmes and observational methods

In February 2024, COMM12 approved a call for proposals for an additional observer accreditation provider (COMM12-report, [Annex 6d](#)) and approved a process for evaluating the received proposals (COMM12-report, [Annex 6c](#)).

The call for proposals was published on the SPRFMO website and notified to Members on 6 March 2024 (Letter G31-2024). One proposal was received, and the Secretariat's Evaluation was completed and made available to Members on 23 July 2024 (Letter G80-2024). The Secretariat's evaluation was presented to the 12th SPRFMO Scientific Committee meeting held in Lima, Peru for its consideration (paper SC12-Doc13) where *"The SC did not provide any specific advice on this process"*.

The SPRFMO Chair has consulted with the SC, CTC, and FAC Chairs to confirm that the proposal meets the evaluation criteria, is financially viable, and that no conflicts of interest have been identified (the full technical and financial analysis of the 2024 proposal for the SPRFMO Observer Program Accreditation Evaluator, including the Chairs consultation, is available as paper CTC12-Doc09.1 – Restricted).

As per step 10 in the process, *the SPRFMO Commission will select the SPRFMO Observer Program Accreditation Evaluator during its 13th Annual Meeting in 2025 and authorise the Secretariat to commence contract negotiations with the successful provider on the basis of parameters set by the Commission, unless otherwise decided by the Commission.*

- CTC12 is invited to provide advice and or a recommendation to the Commission regarding the appointment of an additional Observer Program Accreditation Evaluator.



2.4 Accreditation process in 2024

The Secretariat held a meeting with the current Observer accreditation provider (MRAG) on 6 March 2024 and the new 5-year service contract was finalised on 26 March 2024.

On the same day the Secretariat requested Members and CNCs seeking accreditation in 2024, or seeking to continue with the accreditation process, to submit their points of contact by 19 April 2024. The only indication of interest was received from Ecuador (to continue with its accreditation process) and no points of contact were received.

A meeting was held with MRAG on 26 April to discuss the lack of responses and the final report due under the terms of the initial contract. Both MRAG and the Secretariat directly contacted those Members who had previously indicated some interest in seeking accreditation in 2024 but to no avail.

Consequently, there were no assessments for observer programmes conducted in 2024.

In July MRAG submitted its final report detailing the SPRFMO Observer accreditation programme, the process and the work done in the first 4 years (Annex 1).

2.5 Constraints to accreditation

Funding:

As noted in paragraph 111 of the [COMM 7 Meeting report](#), “*relevant expenses for accreditation will be covered by the EU contribution of 150,000 Euros for the first year, and Members’ contributions will be requested after that period*”.

As per paragraph 23 of [CMM 16-2024](#) (Observer programme) the SPRFMO Observer programme Accreditation Evaluator shall be paid out of the Commission budget. Based on Member provided information the 2024-25 budget anticipated that 3 new programmes would seek accreditation, and a 4th would finish the process. If that had indeed been the case, then the associated costs would have been able to be covered by the EU grant. However, there were no accreditations performed in the 2024.

We have examined the implementation reports and extracted Members intentions with regards to their accreditation. We now have 3 Members indicating their intention to enter the process in 2025 with another in 2026. This has implications for the Organisations future budgets ([FAC12-Doc07](#)).

The EU grant was initially meant to be completed by the end of 2020 and this end date has previously been extended twice. As of the date of this paper, preliminary discussions with the EU have indicated that the EU could envision a final extension to the end of 2025 however this would be subject to EU approval of a formal request to extend the grant deadline.

2.6 Any identifiable problem or obstacle in fulfilling the objectives and purpose of this CMM

There are indications that up to 4 Members will seek observer programme accreditation in 2025 (3 new and one Member that is partway through the process).

Members seeking accreditation are encouraged to react promptly to the Secretariat letter initiating the accreditation process and look to engage with the observer accreditation provider as early as possible so that the process can be completed, and their observer programmes are able to be assessed during the 2025 calendar year.



2.7 Potential challenges and considerations for the future of the SPRFMO Observer Programme

The potential for expanding the Observer Programme to carrier vessels has been identified previously noting that CMM 12-2024 (Transshipment) that was adopted last year significantly expands the observation of transshipments but excludes observers on carrier vessels from needing to be accredited.

The future interactions between Electronic Monitoring and Observer Coverage and the associated collection of catch and effort data, other scientific data and additional information related to the fishing activity in the Convention Area, and its impacts on the marine environment will need to continue to be considered. This will include how such data and information could be used to support the functions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

Fishery or gear-specific accreditations has also been identified as a possibility for situations where programmes expand their coverage into fisheries that were not assessed as part of the initial accreditation process.

Similarly, the potential usefulness of data quality criteria to continually assess whether observer collected data are meeting the objectives of the Commission and the needs of the Scientific Committee is another future consideration.

3. National programmes accredited under the SPRFMO Observer Programme

The Secretariat through the Implementation Reports submitted under the Convention and CMM 10-2020 (CMS) requested Members and CNCPs to identify in which year they were intending to begin the accreditation process of their National Observer Programmes. The results are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Currently Accredited SPRFMO Observer programmes and expected timelines for other programmes

Timeline for Accreditation	Member/CNCP
Currently accredited	Australia, Chile, China, European Union, Korea, New Zealand, Chinese Taipei, CapMarine
Accreditation in progress	Ecuador (2 programmes)
Seeking Accreditation in 2025	Belize, Cook Islands, Russian Federation
Seeking Accreditation post 2025	Peru
No plans to pursue accreditation	Cuba, Curaçao, Faroe Islands, Liberia, Panama, United States of America, Vanuatu

4. List of Annexes

Annex 1 – MRAG final report (2024) detailing the SPRFMO Observer accreditation programme



SPRFMO Observer Programme Accreditation Assessment

SPRFMO

NZ2674

Final Report

July 2024

Submitted by





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Introduction

The South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) is an inter-governmental organisation responsible for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fishery resources of the South Pacific Ocean. As part of this they developed an observer programme and alongside it an accreditation process which required any Member/CNCP¹ wishing to participate to undergo an evaluation by an independent assessor. In 2020 MRAG Ltd and MRAG Asia Pacific (MRAG) were chosen as the evaluators, this report summarises the results of the accreditations completed so far.

The Commission currently has 17 Members (Australia, Belize, the Republic of Chile, People's Republic of China, the Cook Islands, the Republic of Cuba, the Republic of Ecuador, the European Union, the Kingdom of Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Republic of Panama, the Republic of Peru, the Russian Federation, Chinese Taipei, The United States of America and the Republic of Vanuatu). The Commission also has two Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (the Country of Curaçao and the Republic of Liberia).

It was originally determined that from 1st January 2024, Commission Members and CNCPs would only be allowed to deploy observers from national observer programmes or service providers that had been accredited and that the length of the accreditation should be 5 years before undergoing re-evaluation. However, at its 2024 meeting, the deadline for accreditation was extended to 1st January 2027, after which time only accredited observers can be used (CMM 16-2024, Para. 56). Additionally, the Commission decided that for Members whose programmes were granted accreditation by the Commission by the close of its 12th Meeting, such accreditation shall have an automatic extension of 3 years (CMM 16-2024, Para 36).

The accreditation process followed a simple pathway using an audit style checklist to ensure that Members, CNCPs and Service Providers can meet the minimum standard for accreditation for each of the categories listed under the SPRFMO Observer Programme and for the observers themselves (Annex 3 and Annex 1 of CMM 16-2024 respectively). All applications have been assessed against these standards and were requested to provide documentation to support their submission. These included identification guides, operational manuals and general outlines of procedures undertaken by the organisation. Dates for submission and review of these documents were agreed upon on a preliminary meeting between the organisation and MRAG, an outline of the timetable and stages in the assessment is given in Table 2.

The main document used in the evaluation was split into 13 sections, according to the requirements outlined in the CMM and a guideline to the evidence required was given against each one. The body seeking accreditation was asked to summarise the evidence that had been provided against a particular requirement or requirements. Information was provided in English although Members were only asked to translate relevant sections rather than whole manuals. Funding provided by the European Union and available through SPRFMO was available for this.

Once a preliminary evaluation had been undertaken, feedback was given to the organisation gaps in the submission were filled through a series of follow up meetings and through a series of follow up meetings

MRAG submitted the Final Evaluation Reports, incorporating any feedback on the preliminary evaluation, to the Secretariat no later than 60 days in advance of the Commission meeting which would include recommended conditions on the decision, if any. The Commission would then make its

¹ Cooperating non-contracting party

accreditation decisions at the meeting, a summary of the process against the timelines is given in sections 0 and 0.

Table 2 Accreditation Process and timeline

Stage	Date	Actions
1	Annual Commission Meeting	Members, CNCP or service provider provides notification of intention to be assessed.
2	Following Annual Commission Meeting	SPRFMO Secretariat to ask applicants to provide points of contact for provision to the Assessor (MRAG Ltd).
3	Following notification of points of contact	Assessor (MRAG Ltd) contacts each Member, CNCP or service provider and agrees a timetable for the assessment process (Starting at time T) and shares assessment guidelines.
4	T + 0 days (Start of process)	Assessment process to begin with Member, CNCP or service provider.
5	T + 14 days	Member, CNCP or service provider provides all required documentation to assessor, in country visits or online meetings take place to discuss information provided by Member, CNCP or service provider. Assessor may request additional documentation if substantive or essential information is missing
6	T + 28 days	Assessor receives additional documentation requested during assessment process and collates all materials
7	At least 100 days before Annual Commission Meeting	Assessor reviews all material and completes its preliminary evaluation. Following this Members, CNCPs and service providers will be offered 30 days for Bilateral consultations to ensure that they have an opportunity to provide additional information and corrections relevant to their evaluation
8	60 days before Annual Commission Meeting	Assessor provides all Final Evaluation Reports including recommended conditions and incorporating feedback received on the preliminary evaluation.
9	Annual Commission Meeting	The Commission evaluates all reports and recommendations and will decide whether to grant accreditation (including specified conditions).

Overview

Any updates which may impact the accreditation were monitored by MRAG to ensure they were assessed against the latest requirements. Table 3 lists the current stage of accreditation for each of Members and CNCPs.

Table 3 Member / CNCP Accreditation Status as of July 2024

Timeline for Accreditation	Member/CNCP
Currently accredited	Australia, Chile, China, New Zealand, Korea, Chinese Taipei, CapMarine, European Union
Potentially seeking Accreditation in 2025	Belize, Ecuador, Russian Federation, Peru, Cook Islands, Panama
No plans to pursue accreditation	Cuba, Curaçao, Liberia, Faroe Islands, United States of America, Vanuatu.

The European Union submitted a joint submission, representing Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and Germany with an understanding that all observers operating in the SPRFMO area would need to be trained through this course and following the procedures outlined. Ecuador started the process in 2021; however completion of the process has been deferred until a later date.

Table 4 lists the year the various bodies were accredited, and the projected year renewal will be required, assuming five years after the initial accreditation and the recent three year extension. The exact process for renewal has yet to be determined but will likely be much quicker than original accreditation with the interested party highlighting any changes they have made, to the programme in general and specifically to any new requirements laid out in the relevant CMMs.

Table 4 Year of Member/ CNCP Accreditation

Member/CNCP	Year Accredited	Renewal required
Australia	2021	2029
Chile	2021	2029
China	2023	2031
New Zealand	2021	2029
Korea	2022	2030
Chinese Taipei	2022	2030
CapMarine	2023	2031
European Union	2024	2032

Member/ CNCP Summaries

All Members/ CNCPs passed in all areas of the assessment. Below are the actual dates each step of the accreditation process was completed, in line with Table 2.

Table 5 Accreditation Process - Dates actions were completed

Step	Actual Dates							
	Australia	Chile	China	New Zealand	Korea	Chinese Taipei	CapMarine	European Union
1	14/02/2020	14/02/2020	28/01/2022	14/02/2020	05/02/2021	05/02/2021	16/06/2022	07/02/2023
2	22/05/2020	22/05/2020	29/03/2022	22/05/2020	09/04/2021	09/04/2021	29/03/2022	27/03/2023
3	03/08/2020	03/08/2020	11/04/2022	03/08/2020	02/06/2021	02/06/2021	01/07/2022	09/03/2023
4	29/08/2020	24/09/2020	06/07/2022	03/08/2020	28/07/2021	26/07/2021	10/08/2022	05/04/2023
5	04/11/2020	07/10/2020	24/08/2022 +	21/08/2020	18/08/2021	11/08/2021	20/08/2022	11/04/2023
6	04/11/2020	10/11/2020	03/10/2022	-	13/08/2021 & 23/11/2021	13/08/2021	03/08/2022	22/08/2024
7	11/11/2020	25/11/2020	08/11/2022	13/10/2020	26/10/2021	03/11/2021	08/11/2022	26/09/2023
8	26/11/2020	18/12/2020	26/11/2022	22/11/2020	25/11/2021	24/11/2021	07/12/2022	03/11/2023
9	05/02/2021	05/02/2021	17/02/2023	05/02/2021	28/01/2022	28/01/2022	17/02/2023	02/02/2024

Conclusion

The SPRFMO programme is now in its 4th year and has successfully accredited eight organisations (seven Members and one private company) to ensure that data collection standards are high and consistent throughout the fisheries managed under SPRFMO. It also ensures that adequate safety measures are in place, that observers are properly trained, provided with appropriate safety equipment and looked after should anything go wrong while performing their duties. Possibly, most importantly it gives observers confidence and pride in their work which is vital when potentially spending long hours at sea in difficult conditions.

The next stages will be to finish off any remaining accreditations by the January 2027 deadline and develop a methodology for re-certification. In the future the possibility of accrediting observers deployed on carrier vessels has been discussed given the increased interest in monitoring at sea transshipments and the harmonisation of data within the current programme. This should be a relatively simple exercise given that many of the processes adopted by an organisation already accredited for catcher vessels will carry across to Carrier vessels.

Finally, MRAG would like to thank all the organisations who have so far been accredited. The level of cooperation and standard of the materials submitted has been excellent and made the job of reviewing much easier.

References

SPRFMO Observer Programme Implementation Reports, (Compliance and Technical Committee 7 – 11, 2020 – 2024). Available at: <https://www.sprfmo.int/meetings/ctc/>