

Terms of Reference for the SPRFMO Observer Programme Working Group

Background

Article 28 of the Convention calls for the establishment of an observer programme to collect verified 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. Information collected by the observer programme shall, as appropriate, also be used to support the functions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, including the Compliance and Technical Committee.

The Convention acknowledges the importance of the best scientific evidence available to support the conservation and management decisions for fisheries. In this context, a high priority should be assigned to undertake research and data collection in order to improve scientific and technical knowledge of fisheries, including their interaction with the ecosystem. The SPRFMO Convention also recognizes the value of monitoring and verification of fishing operations.

Consequently, the SPRFMO has recognized the importance of high quality standards by adopting guidelines to collect and report relevant fisheries data, even on a voluntary basis when the Convention was under development. After the Convention came into force in 2012, these guidelines became binding through the Conservation and Management Measure on Standards for the Collection, Reporting, Verification and Exchange of Data (current CMM 3.02).

In this context, the role that properly implemented observer programmes have played to obtain the required information has been globally recognized. The use of these programmes has supported the management and conservation of fisheries resources and marine ecosystems around the world. Observers can provide high quality data and, additionally through their work, observers can promote good communications between scientists, managers, RFMOs and fisheries users.

Establishment, functions and timeline of the Joint SC-CTC Working Group on Observer Programme

In order to develop the SPRFMO Observer Programme and fulfill the provisions of Article 28 of the Convention, taking also into account CMM 3.02, a joint Scientific Committee and Compliance and Technical Committee Working Group on Observer Programme (OPWG) is established. The OPWG will discuss intersessionally and seek to propose, subject to the review and recommendations of the Scientific Committee and the Compliance and Technical Committee, to the 5th Commission Meeting an initial conservation and management measure for the SPRFMO Observer Programme. The OPWG is to be chaired by the United States of America. The OPWG will conduct its work electronically using the secure section of the SPRFMO website.

The items to be addressed by the OPWG shall at a minimum include, but not be limited to the following¹. The OPWG may modify the following items and identify priority issues for inclusion in the development of the initial conservation and management measure:

- a. Scope of the SPRFMO Observer Programme;
- b. Objectives of the SPRFMO Observer Programme;
- c. Institutional setting (e.g. Commission-based, member and CNCP-based)
- d. Role of the observers;
- e. Source of observers;
- f. Minimum information and data to be collected;
- g. Level of coverage for different gear types or fisheries;
- h. Management of the SPRFMO Observer Programme;
- i. Funding of the SPRFMO Observer Programme;
- j. Alternatives and accreditation of observer providers;
- k. Development of minimum standards for observer's qualification, training, certification, and debriefing;
- l. Development of [or guidelines for] Code of Conduct of observer behavior;
- m. Data transmission, access to by vessel owners and operators;
- n. Considerations on exchange of observers between Members and CNCPs;
- o. Coordination with other Regional, Sub-regional and National Observer Programmes;
- p. Fisheries research support between Members and CNCPs;
- q. Development of minimum standards for supplies and equipment that should be provided to the SPRFMO Observers;
- r. Development of minimum standards for placement, and health and safety, including the ability to independently communicate with service providers or the Secretariat or other appropriate entity;
- s. Development of Observer Manuals, raining materials and Species Identification Guides;
- t. Requirements concerning observers on board for vessels operating in the SPRFMO Area, including accommodation, safe conditions, and full access to and use of relevant facilities and equipment;
- u. Elements of an annual reporting of Member and Cooperating Non Contracting Parties on the implementation of the Observer Programme, and by the Secretariat to the Commission;
- v. Confidentiality of the data.

The OPWG shall conduct its initial work according to the following timeline during 2016:

- February 15: The Secretariat sends a communication to all Members and CNCPs to nominate their representatives for the intersessional work of the OPWG with responses due back by February 29.
- March 15: The OPWG agrees on the priority items to be addressed and provides comments on an outline of an initial proposal for the SPRFMO Observer Programme that will be circulated by the OPWG Chair by early March.

¹ Matters may be referred to the OPWG by the Commission during the period of deliberations of the OPWG.

- April 29: The OPWG Chair circulates a first draft of the initial proposal for the SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP Draft 1)
- May 27: OPWG representatives provide comments on OP Draft 1.
- July 15: The OPWG Chair circulates a second draft of the initial proposal for the SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP Draft 2), to the representatives of the OPWG
- August 1: OPWG representatives provide comments on OP Draft 2
- August 15: The OPWG Chair incorporates all comments and submits a revised draft to the 2016 Meeting of the Scientific Committee (OP Draft 3).
- November 1: The OPWG Chair circulates a fourth draft of the initial proposal for the SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP Draft 4) to OPWG representatives, taking into account comments and recommendation of the 2016 Meeting of the Scientific Committee.
- November 30: OPWG representatives provide comments on OP Draft 4.
- December 20: The OPWG Chair circulates a fifth draft of the initial proposal of the SPRFMO Observer Programme (OP Draft 5), to be submitted to 2017 Meeting of the Compliance and Technical Committee or the OPWG decides whether it would be more appropriate to report back regarding the progress of its work, for consideration of the 2017 Meeting of the Compliance and Technical Committee.