



Observer Requirements

Purposes of Observer Programs

Observers collect biological and fisheries-related data, such as catches for each set, species composition, gear attributes, set information, vessel attributes and non-target or bycatch species interactions, and, in some programs, depending on their mandate, record whether or not the vessel, master and crew comply with applicable national or regional fisheries regulations (i.e. are they high grading or discarding fish, retaining prohibited species or sizes, discarding trash or plastics, fishing with prohibited gear or in closed areas, interactions with species of special interest, setting on FADs, etc.).

Functions of Observers

Some national or RFMO programs prescribe strictly a “scientific” function for the observers, whereas others have a dual “scientific” and “compliance” function. Therefore, the functions of human observers onboard vessels can be divided into two components:

1. Collecting catch-related information and other scientific data (the science component); and/or
2. Monitoring the implementation of RFMO and/or national conservation and management measures or the terms of access or licensing agreements (the compliance component).

The data collected as part of the science component can also be used for compliance purposes, depending on individual RFMO measures, national laws, licenses or access agreements. For example, data on catches can enable the cross-checking of entries made in logbooks. Also, the information on fishing activities can be used to determine if a set was made in contravention of a time/area closure, full retention or live release or certain species requirements, or identify the amount of catch made within a specific EEZ or high seas transshipment activities. This type of information can be valuable to the RFMO compliance processes, flag state and/or licensing State authorities, and vessel owners and fleet managers.

Human observers can also perform specific functions under seafood certification schemes where very close monitoring is required to meet the conditions of such schemes.

RFMO Observer Requirements

Human observer coverage requirements vary among the tuna RFMOs. In the WCPFC and IATTC, 100% coverage is required for large-scale purse seine vessels. In the IOTC and ICCAT, a minimum of 5% coverage is required for various gear types, including purse seine. ICCAT also requires 100% observer coverage for all vessels 20m LOA or greater during a FAD time-area closure in a defined area of the ICCAT Convention Area, including support vessels, and

100% coverage in the bluefin fishery. For other types of fishing-related activities, such as at-sea transshipment by longline vessels, some RFMOs require 100% coverage of at-sea transshipment with transshipment observers on the receiving vessels. Large-scale longline vessels in all RFMOs have a requirement of a minimum of 5% coverage.

The ICCAT and IATTC scientific committees have highlighted that the 5% minimum requirement is inadequate to provide reasonable estimates of total bycatch, which hinders scientific input on effective conservation measures for non-target species. A 100% observer coverage requirement for large-scale purse seiners ensures full and accurate collection of catch data, interactions with non-target species, and other scientific information, which are necessary for

stock assessments and analyses. For other gear types, such as longline, scientists have recommended that the minimum level of observer coverage should be at least 20% of the effort by gear type. Further, a 100% observer coverage of at-sea transshipments ensures accurate data collection on catches (by species and geographic location) and monitoring to combat IUU fishing activities.

For comprehensive review of **observer programs** in Tuna RFMOs please refer to [ISSF Technical Report 2018-12](#).



Assessment of Observer Requirements by RFMO

Recommended Best Practices

The following table shows the **progress of each tuna RFMO** in implementing the recommended best practices.

RFMO	Coverage Level and Observer Function			Program Design					Electronic Monitoring/Reporting	
	100% coverage of large-scale PS	Minimum of 20% coverage for large-scale LL	Scientific and compliance functions (e.g., data can be used for RFMO compliance purposes)	Binding measure on observer safety	Clear data collection standards	Requirement that observer has no conflicts of interest, e.g., not a crew member or employee of the vessel, fishing company or carrier company	Defined Observer Qualifications	Standards for Observer Program Management (either RFMO or national program)	Standards for EMS	Standards for ER
WCPFC	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	In development for PS and LL	✓ For observers and in development for transshipment

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Color Coding Key	Element(s) are consistent with the suggested best practices.	Some element(s) are present, but amendments or a change in procedure is needed to be consistent with best practices.	Element (s) are missing or inconsistent with best practices.
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IOTC			Scientific role only; reports be provided to the IOTC Secretariat who prepares summaries of the information submitted, which are provided to the Scientific Committee, Compliance Committee and Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch						Endorsed for PS Other gears in development	
IATTC										
ICCAT			Scientific only, except for observers during the 2 month FAD closure					Only for Bluefin observer programs	Endorsed for PS LL in development	

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CCSBT	✗	✗	Scientific only; but each member must include in National Reports to the Compliance Committee and Commission, a summary of the levels of compliance in relation to the implementation of mandatory mitigation measures	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗



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