

SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM FISHERIES AGENCY

7th Licensing Period Observer Programme Report June 15 1994 - June 14 1995

The employment by FFA of Mr. Karl Staisch, of Australia, to the position of the Coordinator Observation and Monitoring Programme on September 15, 1994, resulted in a number of structural changes in the FFA observer programme. A new direction in policy and a reorganization of previous procedures has created a more efficient and dynamic programme. The programme has shown early improvement in monitoring and observer coverage of the US Treaty purse seine fishing fleet.

The assessment of observers was completed late last year, and new salary scales and conditions were started on January 10. This brought about increased participation in the FFA observer programme by previously trained observers who had been reluctant to continue because salary scales were not adequate.

The target of forty-one observer placements was not reached because of placement problems in Guam. However, thirty-seven observer placements occurred during the period. Scientific data collected continued to enhance the work of the South Pacific Commission's Oceanic Fishery Programme. Samples were also collected for David Itano of the University of Hawaii

Major initiatives commenced or completed in the period are as follows:

- continuation of dialogue with Papua New Guinea, Palau and Marshall Islands on the establishment of observer programmes in each of their countries.
- satisfaction of requests from Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands to upgrade their current observer programmes, by training 15 personnel for internal observer programmes as well as for FFA observer duties;
- an invitation by Kiribati to attend and assist in the retraining of observers for the Kiribati internal observer programme in October 1995.
- a combined effort with South Pacific Commission in the successful organisation and coordination of an international observer coordinator's workshop in Brisbane, Australia during February 1995. Thirty-five participants attended from California, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Hawaii, New Caledonia, American Samoa and from FFA member countries. The exchange of ideas and transfer of knowledge to newly developing programmes was excellent and this inspired several countries to re-assess their commitment to scientific and compliance fishery's observer programmes.
- official acceptance of the coordinator's review and recommendations for operational procedures for placement of observers at the United States Treaty and Pacific Island Parties meeting, held in Nadi, Fiji during March 1995. The new observer programme operational procedures started on June 15, 1995 and will make placement more conducive to the attainment of the 20 per cent trip coverage as required by the Treaty;
- organisation and coordination of a comprehensive observer training course at the Solomon Island School of Marine Studies during June & July 1995. The two, 10 day courses were attended by 54 trainees (48 passed) from FFA member countries. The FFA observer coordinator Karl Staisch, with assistance from Peter Sharples (SPC), Gordon Yamasaki

(NMFS) and David Itano (University of Hawaii) organised, trained and lectured trainees in gear technology, scientific data collection, scientific sampling, and compliance aspects of long line and purse seine fishing.

Observer Coverage

1. A total of 204 port to port trips were undertaken by U.S. purse seine vessels from 15 June 1994 to 14 June 1995. (7th licensing period). There were thirty-one completed observer trips in the period with 6 trips not completed by 14 June 1995. The shortest complete observer trip was 20 days with the longest observer trip being 91 days. The average time spent on vessels by observers was 57 days ⁽¹⁾.
2. The total sea days that FFA observers carried out duties on board U.S. vessels for the period was 1903 ⁽²⁾ observer sea days. This figure includes observers who had not returned from trips by June 14.
3. Thirty seven observer trips represents a trip coverage of the US fleets 204 trips of 18.04 % for the period

The total sea days for the fleet for the period was 9305 ⁽²⁾ The observer coverage of vessel sea days for the period is 1903. This represents 20.45% coverage of the vessel sea days.

4. FFA observers collected data on approximately 38,500 Skipjack and 8,400 Yellowfin. Data collected on Big Eye was low with only approximately 250 tuna having data recorded.
5. By-catch, discards and gear technology were also recorded by observers.

Summary

The FFA Observer programme has been reviewed and overhauled in the last few months with coverage targets expected to be reached in the next period. The influx of 48 new observers is expected to bring the FFA observer programme back to full strength, with approximately 65 observers being available for duties.

The data that is collected by observers should be reviewed. It is to be hoped that dialogue will take place after this meeting on how we can encourage selected observers to collect a little more than LCF and species composition. The new US Treaty observer data forms have been in use for one year, and while they are considered to be adequate, it is time to review these forms. Duplication should be reduced as well as minor changes to standardise codes and format.

The SPRTRAMP programme commenced during the period and is reported to be working well. The FFA programme has a slightly different purpose and carries out some compliance work. However, the thought that a compliance programme will unduly hinder in any way the collection of scientific data has not been proven. Therefore, a great potential exists to work closely with SPRTRAMP to ensure the information collected is accurate, worthwhile and meaningful. The FFA programme looks forward to an energetic time ahead with its observers in the Western Pacific.

⁽¹⁾ 57 days calculated on thirty-one complete trips.

⁽²⁾ Uncompleted trips calculated to June 14, 1995