Electronic reporting logsheet systems: Beauty and the beast

Electronic reporting (ER) logsheet systems available to tuna longline fishing vessels continue to attract interest from the Pacific Community member countries. The 'beauty' is the fact that the vessel captain is the only person who enters the data, thereby allowing fisheries officers to spend time on verifying and analysing the data rather than on entering the data manually while reading a (not always clearly written) paper loghseet. The 'beast' is the amount of work needed to ensure that the implementation of ER tools is conducted in a standardised manner so that fisheries officers and vessel captains can build their confidence and willingness to use a new reporting system.

Standardising this implementation begins with a training, including a detailed lesson plan for the trainer to follow, and appropriate training materials such as an easy-to-read user manual for the application, and a species identification guide. Training needs to be well prepared and be conducted in a quiet environment (free of distractions) and, importantly, not rushed. The initial training is just one piece of the implementation process. Although ER tools are designed to be user-friendly, not all users can be expected to immediately accept a new tool. It is essential that fishery officers find time to meet with each captain when the vessel is back in port. This allows the exchange of information to ensure that the application is used correctly, and establishes and maintains a constructive relationship between the fisherman and the fishing authority.

The dynamics of tuna longline fishing vessels operating in the western and central Pacific Ocean are complex. For example, a vessel may fish in one country but offload its catch in another country. This is where inter-country collaboration is important, as a fisheries officer from the country where the vessel is unloading may have to meet with the captain to exchange feedback on behalf of the licencing country.

The implementation of ER tools is progressing at a rapid rate in the Pacific Islands region, and because of this, it will be essential to marry the 'beauty' and the 'beast'. This includes improving the training protocol for captains, and establishing a network of trained fisheries officers across the region who will be able to provide training and support where and when required (typically on short notice).

> 'Electronic reporting apps have eased our data entry workload, giving us more time to allocate to other duties and better our data reporting. With data sent via the OnBoard app., we have noticed a better reporting of bycatch species, something that was rarely done with paper logbooks.'
> *Lui Bell Jr, Senior Fisheries Officer, Samoa*

The transition from paper to electronic roadmaps is a major challenge, and one that must be met, as it will bring tangible benefits, namely an improvement in the quality, availability and timeliness of data. Scientists and fisheries managers need quality data, almost in real time, in order to manage the rapidly evolving tuna fishing industry. And, the challenge of implementing the new ER technology will require commitment from all parties involved.

For more information:

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Samoa Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture staff Mrs Laurian Finau Groves (right) and Mrs Tuapou Ariu (left) are trained by Malo Hosken on the use of the OnBoard application developed by SPC to facilitate electronic reporting from tuna longline vessels.