



THE CORAL TRIANGLE INITIATIVE ON CORAL REEFS,  
FISHERIES AND FOOD SECURITY

**Coral Triangle Initiative and NOAA/PIROP  
Observer Debriefer Workshop with Solomon  
Islands and Papua New Guinea**  
Honiara, Solomon Islands, 06 August – 09 August, 2013



**Supported by NOAA and Pacific Partnership**

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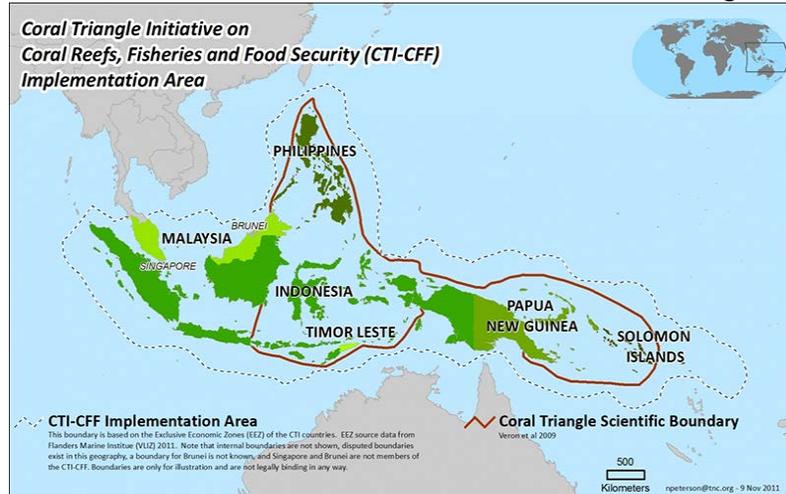
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# I. INTRODUCTION

Promoting sustainable fisheries and combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing globally is a world-wide job. Government and Non-Government representatives from the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste recently came together with various international organizations and several NOAA Fisheries facilitators to discuss these challenges in the Coral Triangle region -- one of the world's most important marine hotspots for biodiversity.

The Coral Triangle is a geographic area encompassing almost 6 million square kilometers of ocean and coastal waters in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific. The Coral Triangle is within the Exclusive Economic Zones of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, and the Solomon



Islands. Threatened by over-fishing, destructive fisheries practices and IUU fishing, the region is home to some 363 million people, one-third of whom are directly dependent on coastal and marine resources for their primary source of protein and their livelihoods

Three subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE) took place in Honiara, Solomon Islands. They brought more than 50 experts to discuss these and other challenges in the Pacific side of the Coral Triangle region. The goal of each of the SMEEs was to consider solutions to the challenges that have been discussed over the last few years within the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) context. The first SMEE provided a forum for local fisheries management officials and experts to discuss innovative tools to promote sustainable fisheries. A second SMEE tackled IUU fishing, bringing together fisheries enforcement personnel, monitoring and surveillance network organizations and experts to identify and address common IUU challenges between the Coral Triangle Initiative's Pacific countries.

The third SMEE, and the focus of this document, focused on strengthening the observer program partnership between the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The goal was to increase the capacity of the debriefers within the observer programs. A robust debriefer program is necessary in order to effectively collect critical fisheries catch and bycatch data which is needed to develop and implement appropriate fisheries management measures within the region. This discussion and recommendations in this report focuses on the last SMEE.

The focus of this effort leveraged the nexus of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea being within the Coral Triangle Initiative. The workshop also recognizes that these two countries have the strongest and most developed programs in the region. Through the sharing of experiences, it is hoped that they will 'lead' the other regional programs to become stronger. In addition to their CTI membership, they are also members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and FFA, in addition to many significant partners that interact with the United States in the tuna management organizations including WCPFC and the PNA. The participants have expressed

their belief that the workshop strengthened the cooperation between these two countries, increased knowledge (and the expected sharing) of CTI nation capabilities, and provided an opportunity to support regional capabilities outside of the CTI framework, such as with SPC and FFA. The unique opportunity is that the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have established observer programs.

## II. Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) on Fisheries Observer Programs Debriefing Strategies

Observer programs have proven to be valuable sources of information on fishing vessel operational characteristics that is otherwise unavailable to fisheries managers. At-sea data collection efforts provide a clear picture of catch and bycatch. Functioning observer programs provide fisheries scientist and managers with benefits beyond simple data collection. One of these important benefits is the increased detection of IUU activities. Often, the presence of observers in some fleets has led to substantial reductions of IUU practices. Developing and supporting observer programs in the western Pacific supports international priorities of improving stewardship and increasing environmental knowledge of the region's marine resources.

The scope of the SMEE is to provide a suite of tools for managing the debriefing part of an observer programs more holistically. For our Pacific partners, the emphasis on Observer Program development and a train-the-trainers model represents a significant contribution (and commitment) to sustainability. To this end, the SMEE brought together subject matter experts from NOAA and our Pacific partners. Participants from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Forum Fishery Agency, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the United States gathered in Honiara, Solomon Islands from August 6-9, 2013. The SMEE leveraged the training experiences and formal capacity building programs as developed by our partners.

Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have gained valuable observer program experience through the managing of their own national observer programs. This, as well as participating in the regionally focused FFA and SPC programs, means that they have much to share between themselves and the region. The focus on bringing together just these two programs was seen as an opportunity to strengthen the cooperation between the NOAA Observer Program, those of Solomon Islands & Papua New Guinea plus the regional observer programs. The overarching goal was to identify and share the best of everyone's experience. The focus of the subject matter expert exchange was to (a) cover debriefing strategy (b) improve integration of the observers into the regional MCS strategy, (c) increased debriefing capacity and trainer development. The exchange was an interactive process by design and was facilitated as a peer-to-peer conversation rather than a traditional lecture.

The training support offered addresses (1) the underlying goal to improve the quality of observer collected data. The objective of this goal is increasing the accuracy of the identification of marine mammals and fish while at sea; (2) to help develop observer trainers, in quantity and quality, throughout the western Pacific region. An output of the meeting is this

report that highlights and responses and/or policies on these topics.

- a. National observer program audit concerns
- b. Implementation of PIRFO Debriefing Strategy
- c. Improved integration of Observers into regional MCS issues
- d. Observer Professionalism
- e. Observer Safety
- f. Sub-regional / National Programs' roles
- g. Increased Debriefing Capacity & Trainer Development

### III. Discussion

The NOAA team was grateful to have the opportunity to work with the representatives from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the observer coordinators from both SPC and FFA. For the NOAA team, it was an opportunity to dialogue about the new issues and challenges that



impact the successful application of the debriefers/observer programs. This helps us be more sensitive to issues discussed in the RFMOs as well as work towards offering better targeted trainings and workshops in the future. The expectation is that this report will provide an accessible reference source that will provide fodder for discussions on this topic within the larger pacific observer community. Below are some general comments and additional recommendations based on the NOAA facilitator's observations and

background in other observer programs around the globe.

1. Safety: We are aware that, within the recent past, at least one observer was thrown overboard and subsequently died. When asked what steps had been taken to improve observer safety as a result of this incident, the participants were not able to provide much information. The main point here is that observer safety should be the #1 priority of any program. A very thorough and careful review of the current observer safety environment and protocol should be conducted. If observers feel they are not safe for whatever reason, they are unlikely to report MCS violations, are more likely to accept bribes and other overall quality of the data suffers. The recommendations to improve observer safety procedures should be addressed immediately and take priority over other items.
2. Lack of debriefers: The lack of qualified debriefers was discussed at length during the peer to peer workshop. This is a serious bottle neck but should be resolved by the end of the calendar year. The lack of timeliness of the observer data being reviewed degrades the overall quality of the observer data because errors are not caught close to when they occur. The entire chain of observer logistical procedures from placement on the vessel to when the data is entered into the database needs to tighten and is reflected in the recommendations.

3. The staff at the SPC/FFA-housed Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observers (PIRFO) program are funded by outside donors from the EU, New Zealand, Australia and Japan. Reports and evaluations are made on a regular basis in order to receive continued funding. However it may be worthwhile to contract an outside review team to assess the program. From an overall coordination perspective, this is a model program having 17 different nations coordinating their data collection in a standardized fashion. However all programs have areas that need attention and improvement. PIFRO appears to have most of the standard operating procedures in place, it seems to be a matter of enforcing or following those procedures that are the biggest challenge and the continued challenge of keeping all 17 nations in synch with each other.

## IV. Recommendations

### A. Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

1. Convene a workshop (initially, then move to a consistent event) to improve communication and create a feedback process on enforcement actions taken using observer data. The workshop would include staff from the country, regional and maybe partner country's MCS enforcement unit, observer staff (trainers and debriefers), observers and possibly enforcement partners such as the national coast guard or Navy. Currently there is a lack of communication, coordination and information between the observers, the observer program and enforcement. This workshop may assist in improving the overall respect of observer programs.
2. Ensure sufficient time and appropriate personnel are made available within observer and debriefer training modules to provide opportunity to properly integrate MCS/enforcement experts into the workshops. MCS/enforcement experts to share experiences with observers and vice versa, to encourage a better understanding between them; work to address funding constraints that limit the duration of workshops.
3. Improve observer reporting of infractions by:
  - a. Implementing practices that improve the protection of observers while at sea on board the vessel
  - b. Ensuring that employment opportunities are not jeopardized by the reporting of violations; if an observer is unable to perform their duties due to their inability to be placed because of the reporting of infractions, compensation is due
  - c. Providing compensation if observers are required to provide testimony or are required to do additional work related to the reporting of an infraction
  - d. Implementing a code system for weekly radio/email/fax reporting to ensure observer is safe or provide additional sensitive information.

### B. Observer Code of Conduct

4. Implement procedures to reduce bribery and increase professionalism among observers:
  - a. Rotate observers more often from vessel to vessel. Establish a rule that no observer could spend more than two trips/year on board the same vessel. No more than one cruise/campaign per year.

- b. Once debriefing staff is increased, implement a measure that observers must fully debrief after serving no more than 2 trips.
  - c. Observer must complete a full debriefing before being deployed on their next assignment. Prior to the debriefing, the complete set of data must be submitted by the observer.
  - d. Increase observer pay overall and implement a pay for performance system much like that of PNG.
5. Recommended change to WCPFC code of conduct.: Replace last sentence to read “until arriving at home port” to ensure that observers maintain a professional demeanor until full completion of the trip.
  6. Add to the WCPFC code of conduct to include gender equality and prohibit discrimination.
  7. Develop a code of conduct for trainers and debriefers. The code of conduct should include all elements of the observer code of conduct but with additional rules such as prohibitions against cheating, etc., and even greater-awareness attributes
  8. The code of conduct should be enforced equitably by all programs.
  9. If an observer is suspended due to a code of conduct violation and his suspension is overturned within the appeals process (no longer than 14 days of filing the appeal from the time he/she was suspended), then the observer should be compensated for lost wages during his/her time of suspension.

**C. Improvements to Overall Program Efficiency and Effectiveness**

10. To increase efficiency in data quality,
  - a. Ensure dedicated facilities for debriefing are provided – ideally co-located with the MCS/enforcement group. This needs to be provided with the tools necessary (computers, fax machine, internet, phone, desk, observer report writing cubicles, etc) to properly support a debriefing activity.
  - b. Continue to improve the use of automated error checking features in the database.
11. There has been considerable discussion about the requirements and the process to hire data entry personnel. Require that steps be taken to improve the understanding of data entry personnel such as sending those without observer experience to observer courses or preferentially hiring those with hands-on experience as an observer. Continued adherence to following data entry and review protocols.
12. The group discussed reasons for the delay in observers’ data being entered into the system. While there are many provisions in place that require the timely submission of data, it is recommended that the enforcement of these provisions, by the observer program be improved. One reason was that observers do not always bring their data in for debriefing.

- a. It is strongly recommended that data is provided to debriefers within 7-14 days of arrival in port, depending on gear type. Exception to these rules may be made due to medical and family emergencies. Delays should be formerly communicated to the observer program.
  - b. The group encouraged that all observers be paid for a reasonable amount of their time being debriefed.
13. In general the group recommended that observer and debriefer wages be significantly increased from their current level, given the inconsistent nature of the work and that these increased rates incorporate a significant performance incentive component (it was suggested that a rate close to the recently improved performance governed PNG rate of around US\$65 as a guideline). This would professionalize the position as well as improve the overall program.
14. Although all PIRFO debriefers are former observers, the group suggested that there be a very clear rule that all debriefers must be active, competent, and professional observers, no exceptions.
15. There was a recommendation that to improve the PIRFO training, that all PIRFO training should be incorporated into the curriculum or supported by the faculty of a maritime/fisheries college. There should be a link between government fisheries agencies and maritime/fisheries colleges in order to strengthen them both and ensure that observer needs are met.
16. Every observer should be issued a valid observer identification card good for one year. The card should contain vital information required such as date of birth, nationality, phone number and contact information of the observer program where he/she is employed.
17. Every observer should have a contract with their employer that clearly states the rules and performance requirements of the position.
18. Every observer deployed should be assisted by an authorized placement officer that assists with an introduction to captain and crew, review of safety equipment, provides assistance with getting sampling gear on board and fully completes the placement worksheet and ensures that captain sign the placement form.
19. Observer programs need to create permanent authorised placement officers. If an observer placement is not conducted by an authorized placement officer, then the observer should not be deployed.
20. Debriefing recording mechanisms should be developed to enable review of an observer's three most recent trip performances before placing that observer on a new vessel.
21. The placement officer should be familiar with the vessel where he/she is placing observers and shall have reviewed the most recent report.
22. Most national fisheries authorities hold an annual meeting at the end of the licensing year, before vessels are licensed/registered for the next fishing year. Observer program

coordinators and staff should attend that meeting and provide program updates, working together with fisheries managers and MCS staff to resolve any problems identified during the previous season.

23. The observer program needs to provide transportation to the vessel at least 4 hours before departure to board the vessel.
24. Clarify that observers should not sign any documents while on board the vessel. Note: Tim/Peter needs to check with WCPFC regarding the catch discard document. Observers are placed in an awkward position if they are required to sign any documents while on board.
25. Contracts oblige observers to report to the port coordinator or their programme coordinator upon landing in port. Observers must obtain authorization from the observer provider before leaving the vessel and checking into a hotel.
26. Contracts oblige observers, upon completion of an assigned trip, to receive authorization from the observer provider before departing to sea on a new trip.
27. Disregard for the reporting rules be treated as breaches of contract with recognized penalties imposed.
28. Develop a procedure where in country enforcement agents notify an observer program that a vessel carrying their observer is coming in to port. This procedure will corroborate the observer's arrival.
29. Observer coordinators inform other nations observer programs that a vessel is in port or is coming in to port with the observer on board.

#### **D. Improvements to Safety Coordination and Procedures**

30. Create better communication between the safety authority and the observer program. Establish that the observer coordinator has the authority to hold a vessel in port if the safety equipment is expired or deficient.
31. Purchase single person or like life rafts in key port cities to be deployed with the observer if the vessel does not have sufficient life raft capacity on the fishing vessel.
32. Encourage the use of or investigation of a device that can send safety messages in real time. The device will also need 2 way messaging and should have broad coverage. (NOTE: Nick Reese of FFA is working on a platform that would do this.)
33. Fisheries authorities must work with agencies responsible for inspecting safety equipment and due diligence must be taken by both agencies to ensure all equipment is on board before issuing a vessel a license or registration.
34. If safety equipment is not in place, the observer should not be deployed.

35. The placement officer should include inspection of sea safety certificate, certificate of insurance, and master's license.
36. If it is discovered that safety equipment is missing or has expired, the observer shall disembark the vessel at the next port call.
37. Include in training that the observer has the right to refuse to board if the safety equipment is missing, defective, or expired.

## V. Participants/Facilitators

1. Harold Norman Vilia (Solomon Island)
2. Patterson Clifford Omi (Solomon Island)
3. John Agi (Solomon Island)
4. John Still Villi (Solomon Island)
5. Ambrose Orianihaa (Forum Fishery Agency)
6. Jimmy Belade (Papua New Guinea)
7. Richard Asi (Papua New Guinea)
8. Adrian Nanguromo (Papua New Guinea)
9. Issac Vitolos Tomidi (Papua New Guinea)
10. Lucas Tarapik (Papua New Guinea)
11. Peter Sharples (Secretariat of the Pacific Community)
12. Manoi Kutan (Secretariat of the Pacific Community)
13. Dennis Yehilmo (Forum Fishery Agency)
14. Tim Park (Forum Fishery Agency)
15. Nick Reese (Forum Fishery Agency)
16. Teresa Turk (NOAA)
17. Michael Abbey (NOAA)
18. Ann Mooney (NOAA)

## VI. Agenda

### **Regional Observer Program Review King Solomon Hotel Conference Room**

#### Tuesday, August 6, 2013-Day 1

- 9:00 Check in and coffee
- 9:15 Introductions and Welcome to the workshop
- 9:30 Improved integration of observers into regional MCS issues  
-Present Review of CTI Activities and Summary Information from last weeks MCS-IUU workshop (Ann Mooney)
- 10:00 Welcoming by USN's Commodore
- 10:30 Break for tea
- 11:00 Observers as Witnesses (Teresa)
- 11:30 Table top exercises on observer integration into MCS
- 12:00 Lunch

- 1:00 Table top exercises on observer integration into MCS-continued
- 2:00 Presentations on the exercise
- 3:00 Break for tea
- 3:30 Develop recommendations to improve observer integration into MCS
- 5:00 Class Ends

Wednesday, August 7, 2013-Day 2

- 8:30 Increased Debriefing Capacity and Trainer Development
  - Presentations by each country to review and discuss the training and debriefing process
  - Discuss any recommendations from the meeting (Manoi)
  - Discuss implementing training evaluations (Teresa)
- 10:30 Break for tea
- 10:45 Role playing/table top exercise (Manoi)
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Discuss and create recommendations on how to improve the PIRFO debriefing strategy
- 2:00 Observer Professionalism
  - Review WCPFC Code of Conduct (Manoi)
- 3:00 Break for tea
- 3:30 Table top exercises on observer professionalism
- 4:30 Discuss and create recommendations on how to improve observer professionalism
- 5:00 Class ends

Thursday, August 8, 2013-Day 3

- 8:30 Review implementation of the PIRFO debriefing strategy
  - Review of discussion from last week's meetings (Manoi)
  - Discuss any recommendations from the meeting (Manoi)
- 10:30 Break for tea
- 10:45 Role playing for improved debriefing (Manoi)
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Create recommendations for improved debriefing
- 2:00 Observer Safety
  - Review Observer Safety Checklist (Manoi)
- 3:00 Break for tea
- 3:30 Table top exercises on observer safety
- 4:30 Create recommendations to improve observer safety
- 5:00 Class Ends

Friday, August 9, 2013-Day 4

- 8:30 Open floor for discussion of any outstanding issues or additional presentations
- 9:30 Review all recommendations from previous 3 days and identify specifically who to send the recommendations to.
- 10:30 Break for tea
- 10:45 Finalize recommendations or any outstanding issues
- 11:00 Trainer Evaluations
- 11:30 Closing Remarks and presentation of certificates
- 12:00 End of workshop