



**SPECIAL SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
to discuss the COVID-19 Decisions Relating to Purse Seine Observer Coverage and At-Sea
Transshipment Observers**

Electronic Meeting
9 June 2022 from 10.00am to 2.00pm Pohnpei time

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION REGARDING THE SPECIAL
SESSION OF WCPFC ON COVID-19 DECISIONS**

**WCPFC-SS4-2022-DP03
4 June 2022**

Paper by European Union



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

International Ocean Governance and Sustainable Fisheries
Regional Fisheries Management Organisations

MARE.B.2/SV

MR FELETI TEO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WCPFC
WCPFC SECRETARIAT
POHNPEI, FEDERAL STATES OF
MICRONESIA

Subject: Communication from the European Union regarding the Special Session of WCPFC on COVID-19 decisions

Dear Mr Feleti,

I would like to inform you that unfortunately the European Union (EU) will not be able to participate to the forthcoming Special Session of WCPFC on COVID-19 intersessional decisions scheduled on 9 June 2022.

The absence of the EU from this meeting only reflects the increasing difficulty for the EU delegation to participate effectively to online WCPFC meetings that do not take into account the time difference across the geographic range of the WCPFC membership. This remains an issue of great concern for the EU, especially noting that also SC18 and TCC18 will be apparently held again online this year.

Despite that, the EU remains fully committed to the work and proceedings of the organisation and with that in mind, I would like to share the views of our delegation regarding the decisions relating to the derogations to the requirement to deploy observers for purse seine and at sea transshipment operations that will be discussed at the forthcoming Special Session. We appreciate if the Chair could take into account our position, as expressed in this letter, when discussions take place at the said Special Session.

First of all, while the health and safety of crew members and observers onboard fishing vessels remain the overarching priority for the EU, we are increasingly concerned by the implications of the continued suspension of observer coverage requirements both in terms of science and compliance as outlined in the Secretariat discussion paper WCPFC18-2021-08. It is therefore critical that the derogations are suspended as soon as the sanitary situation and related restrictions in force in Pacific coastal States can guarantee the safe deployment and repatriation of observers.

Since the effective lifting of the two remaining derogations very much relies on the specific circumstances and applicable rules in different coastal States, the EU is flexible regarding the three options proposed for consideration (WCPFC-SS4-2022-02). The EU

could also envisage that these two derogations are treated differently based on their specificities. In any event, until the remaining derogations are lifted the EU encourages CCMs to take voluntary steps to ensure that collection of ROP data that are critically needed for underpinning the work of WCPFC.

The EU believes that, until the derogations are lifted, alternative solutions that could contribute to increase the current level of observation of purse seine and at sea transshipment operations should be also envisaged. Among the possible options that could be already considered, CCMs could commit to deploy observers onboard purse seine and carrier vessels that have scheduled to start and end their fishing trip in the same port. That could offer a reasonable degree of guarantee that observers would not be stranded at the end of the fishing trip.

In addition to that, as a temporary measure, where, due to COVID-related restrictions, it is not possible to deploy ROP observers, CCMs should be allowed to deploy observers of their own national programmes until ROP observers can be safely deployed and the derogations are finally suspended. That would allow ensuring that the flow of critical scientific and MCS information increases and that the workplans of the SC and TCC are not undermined.

Furthermore, in addition to the useful information compiled and provided by the Secretariat, it would be useful to consider also providing the following:

- Number of PS trips observed by Flag State and by Service Provider in 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.
- Number of at sea transshipments observed by Flag State and by Service Provider in 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.
- Number of PS trips and carrier vessels trips starting and ending in the same port in the same period, and which ports are these.

Last but not least, the EU considers that it is essential to continue implementing applicable COVID-19 protocols, based on WHO and IMO recommendations, onboard fishing vessels operating in the WCPFC. Noting the variety of CCMs, cooperation between flag CCMs and/or vessel operators and observer providers can contribute to ensure the safe deployment and repatriation of observers.

I would appreciate that you circulate this letter to WCPFC Members and the WCPFC Chair and post it as delegation paper on the webpage of the Special Session.

Yours faithfully

(e-signed)

Stamatis VARSAMOS
Head of the EU delegation to
WCPFC