



COMMISSION
NINETEENTH REGULAR SESSION
Da Nang City, Vietnam
28 November to 3 December 2022

**UPDATED INFORMATION RELATED TO THE RESUMPTION OF OBSERVER
PLACEMENTS**

WCPFC19-2022-28
16 November 2022

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Commission on the status of the Commission's intersessional decisions at the Commission's Special Session (WCPFC-SS4-2022) on the 9th June 2022 to lift the suspensions of the obligations relating to the purse seine observer coverage, and the at-sea transshipment observers.

Background

2. At the commencement of the pandemic in 2020, the Commission decided intersessionally to suspend the operation of three sets of obligations relating to observers on purse seine vessels, at-sea transshipment for purse seine vessels and at-sea transshipment observers. The suspensions were extended for periods of between three and four months throughout 2020 and 2021. The suspensions continued until 15 March 2022, when it was decided that the suspension of one of the obligations relating to at-sea transshipment for purse seine vessels would not be extended (**Circular 2022/11** of 14 March 2022 as corrected in **Circular 2022/12** of 15 March 2022). The suspension of the remaining two obligations for observers on purse seine vessels and at-sea transshipment observers remained in effect until 15 June 2022. The Commission agreed intersessionally to a Special Session to consider these two remaining intersessional decisions relating to COVID-19 (**Circular 2022/24** of 5 May 2022 and **Circular 2022/29** of 17 May 2022).
3. The Commission at WCPFC18 agreed to continue the suspension of observer placement requirements under the three intersessional decisions after 15 December 2021 until 15 March 2022, which were further extended to the 15 June 2022. The Commission also agreed to undertake an intersessional review to explore the possible phasing in of the removal of those suspensions. Accordingly, the Commission convened on 9th June 2022, a virtual Special Session to discuss the COVID-19 Decisions that continued to suspend the obligations relating to the purse seine observer coverage, and the at-sea transshipment observers until the 15 June (WCPFC-SS4-2022).
4. The WCPFC-SS4-2022 was chaired by the Commission Chair and the meeting was well attended. During the WCPFC-SS4-2022 it was acknowledged that the COVID-19 situation in the region had changed significantly in the last 6 months. In particular, with the roll-out of

vaccines in the region, and the prevalence of a new, more contagious, but milder, variant of COVID-19, countries in the region are relaxing their border and other restrictions. While restrictions such as negative COVID tests prior to entry remain, many countries were noted to have opened their borders and the relaxation of restrictions was expected to continue. Consequently, the Commission agreed at WCPFC-SS4-2022 to:

- i. suspend further the requirements for observer coverage on purse seine vessels until 31 December 2022, but on 1 January 2023, this suspension would be lifted, and the obligation comes into effect; and
 - ii. lift the suspension of the requirements for at-sea transshipment observers and further agreeing on a transitional period from 15 June to 31 December 2022 during which time CCMs should make best efforts to embark observers as guided by the agreed guidelines to enable the placement of observers on fishing vessels and carrier vessels.
5. The Outcomes Document and the Summary Report of the Special Session may be accessed at [WCPFC-2022-SS4 Meeting](#). A copy of the report from that meeting is also tabled for WCPFC19 meeting as [WCPFC19-2022-IP16](#).

TCC18 consideration and outcomes

6. The Commission at WCPFC-SS4-2022 tasked TCC18 to review information related to how the resumption of observers on carrier vessels was progressing (SS4 Summary Report, paragraph 37) and provide advice and recommendations to WCPFC19.
7. Key points highlighted in the Secretariat papers to TCC18 were:
- Preliminary information reviewed by the Secretariat paper [TCC18-2022-RP03](#) *Annual Report on Transshipment Reporting*, for January to mid-September 2022, 82% of transshipments were unobserved although the majority of the unobserved trips from June to August occurred on trips that commenced prior to or immediately after the decisions of the Special Session of the Commission. It is encouraging that the Secretariat has received some communications demonstrating the collaborative efforts of observer providers and flag CCMs to embark observers, and that the outcome of these efforts is that some placements have recommenced on carrier vessels involved in transshipments.
 - At WCPFC-SS4-2022 the Commission also agreed that the suspension of the requirements for observer coverage on purse seine vessels set out in paragraph 32 and 33 of CMM 2021-01 and CMM 2018-05 must be lifted on 1 January 2023, and the obligation comes into effect. The papers [TCC18-2022-RP02](#) *Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme* and [TCC18-2022-IP02](#) *Status of Observer Data Management* reports that some observer placements were made in 2021 on both purse seine and longline vessels.
 - The paper [TCC18-2022-RP02](#) considers the impacts on the several observer programmes arising from the reduced flight schedules, border travel restrictions and health concerns for observers and crew from the COVID-19 pandemic. The ROP is comprised of 25 observer programmes of Members and sub-regional agencies, and during 2020 – 2022 most programmes had their operations curtailed and were not able to operate in a manner that enabled them to place and retrieve observers on most fishing vessels. Several Pacific Islands national programmes

and subregional observer programmes have lost experienced observers who have sought alternative employment during the extended period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional training will also be required to bolster the observer programme numbers and refresher training is encouraged for returning observers and debriefers, as CCMs prepare for the resumption of 100% coverage on purse seine vessels requirement from 1 January 2023.

8. The outcome from TCC18 was as follows:

TCC noted the positive development that some observer placements have recommenced on transshipment vessels and some purse seine vessels during the transitional period of 15 June – 1 January 2023 (*TCC18 draft Summary Report, paragraph 161*).

Post-TCC18 updates

9. Since TCC18, the COVID-19 situation in the region has continued to change as countries have adapted to the reality that COVID-19 is becoming endemic in the community. Most countries in the region have now relaxed their border and other restrictions that were implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mandatory quarantine requirements are not used to the same extent as in the past.

Recommencement of observer placements on transshipment vessels

10. To assist members with securing observer deployments during the 15 June to 31 December 2022 transition period, the Secretariat established a process facilitated by the PNA ROP provider in coordination with other national ROP providers. The aim of this process was to ensure that vessel operators could be linked with an ROP provider that could supply an observer through a simpler process. This approach would also spread deployments across ROP providers to the extent possible, maximizing the potential benefit across observer programmes as well as the level of coverage that could be achieved.
11. The process was established in light of information that companies were contacting an observer programme that, in some cases, could not assist while other observer programmes not contacted by vessel operators could assist. The result was that some deployments initially notified to the Secretariat as ‘not feasible’ ended up as feasible and observers deployed.
12. Since TCC18, information continues to indicate that the deployment of observers on receiving vessels has steadily improved with rates of observer coverage for July 2022 assessed at 19%, August 2022 - 48%, September 2022 - 87%, October 2022 - 94%, 1-7 November 2022 - 100%. The Secretariat believes these figures reflect that, with one exception, carriers departing port prior to the WCPFC-SS4-2022 decisions in mid-June and those departing later in June and in July are the carriers that have not had observers given the logistics of placements such as an ability to get visa’s and to travel to the departure port prior to the vessel’s departure. It is noted that, in one case, a carrier leaving port in September remains with no observer.
13. The Secretariat is not able to report information on the feasibility of placements on most of these vessels from mid-July onwards as there do not seem to have been notifications from flag

states with reports in accord with the guidelines to support the transitional arrangements agreed at SS4.

Resumption of observer placements on purse seine vessels

14. An informal review of ROP providers in early November 2022 indicates that there are around 650 observers available for deployment through Pacific based ROP providers and around 650 through Asian and EU providers. Of these, approximately 70 are cross endorsed for both WCPFC and IATTC deployments.
15. It will be useful to monitor the possible need for future training for additional cross endorsed observers noting the number of observers is significantly reduced from the 105 in early 2020 but that there are fewer vessels operating across the two areas.
16. The observer programmes have not reported significant issues in relation to their preparedness to support the resumption of 100% coverage of purse seine vessels from 1 January 2023.

Impacts on observer programmes

17. Despite the loss of observers to other professions, feedback indicates the investment national observer programmes have continued to make in training and through some on-shore work for observers during the worst effect of the pandemic, has provided a good base level of preparedness for the progressive removal of the suspension of observer coverage for longline and purse seine fisheries and for transshipment. Efforts to re-employ observers, and to recruit and train new observers in preparation for the resumption of deployments have also served to offset the loss of observers to some extent. Other members have retained some coverage through the use of their own observers particularly for 'own port to own port' deployments.
18. Regional capacity assistance funds from WCPFC have also supported sea safety training for selected observers from several FFA's members national observer programmes in 2021 and in 2022 similar funding will be used to facilitate Sea Safety Training for Nauru's national fisheries observer programme. (refer [WCPFC19-2022-08](#) Updated Strategic Investment Plan)
19. As has been noted at a range of meetings and as is set out in the FFA delegation paper ([WCPFC19-2022-DP-03](#)), FFA members have developed COVID-19 safety protocols to provide an important additional component for the redeployment of observers and are ready to recommence observer placement on fishing vessels from 1 January 2023.
20. In relation to transitional arrangements, the Secretariat does not have information to report on the nature of the issues affecting the feasibility of observer deployments during the transitional period towards 100% observer coverage of high seas transshipments from 1 January 2023.

Recommendation

21. WCPFC19 is invited to note the updates provided in this paper.