



## Virtual Meeting 5 of ROP-IWG

11 April 2025 10:00h – 13:30h (Pohnpei time)

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### Chairs Summary Report

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WCPFC-ROPIWG5-2025

**Issued:** 23 April 2025

#### Agenda Items 1 and 2: Opening of Meeting, Introduction and Opening Remarks

1. The fifth meeting of the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme Intersessional Working Group (ROP-IWG5) was held virtually on 11 April 2025. The Chair, Mr. Lucas Tarapik, welcomed all participants and opened the meeting at 10:00am Pohnpei time, and offered an opening prayer.
2. The Chair expressed appreciation to all the participants at the ROP-IWG5 meeting for their continued support to the WCPFC Regional Observer Program (ROP) and acknowledged the participation of CCMs and subregional agencies (FFA, PNAO, SPC). The Chair welcomed all participants in the virtual meeting and reiterated the objectives of ROP-IWG5. The Chair encouraged all participants to engage actively in the discussions, noting that each participants' insights and perspectives would be invaluable to making positive and collaborative progress on the taskings from the Commission to the ROP-IWG.
3. The Chair introduced the agenda ([WCPFC-ROPIWG5-2025-01](#)) and explained that the agenda aims to commence discussions on some key issues that have been identified, and ultimately to fulfil the task of the ROP-IWG providing support to the Regional Observer Program. The agenda was adopted without amendment (Attachment 1).
4. The Compliance Manager, Dr Lara Manarangi-Trott, introduced the Secretariat staff supporting the meeting. Logistical information for the meeting, the meeting papers and the process for the ROP-IWG going forward this year were also outlined.
5. Participants in ROP-IWG5 included representatives from Canada, China, Cook Islands, European Union, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Chinese Taipei and United States, El Salvador, Birdlife International, Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office, Pew Charitable Trusts and the Secretariat. A list of participants is provided in Attachment 2.
6. Participants were invited to provide opening remarks. There were no opening remarks from participants. The Chair confirmed that a Chairs Summary Report would be prepared which records the key outcomes and next steps.

### Agenda Item 3: Review of ROP Minimum Standard Data Fields for purse seine, longline and pole and line observer trips

7. The Chair introduced Agenda Item 3 noting that work to review the ROP Minimum Standard Data Fields for purse seine, longline and pole and line observer trips (MSDF) had been underway since 2023/24. The Secretariat prepared for this meeting a consolidated version of suggested changes to the MSDF, as were contained in Annex 1 and Annex 1A to the [WCPFC21 paper 16 \(WCPFC-ROPIWG5-2025-02\)](#) Working Paper 02 **Annex A** includes the additional suggestions and comments of ROP-IWG participants that were received in 2024. There are also notes and placeholders to recognize further work is required by the ROP-IWG, for example additional discussions and additional amendments are expected to the data fields for Observer Trip Monitoring Summary, and Species of Special Interest (*these data fields will be further discussed under Agenda Item 4*). Working Paper 02 **Annex B** provides a concise version highlighting the suggested changes to the MSDF only.
8. The Secretariat's ROP Training and Audit Consultant, Mr Karl Staisch, presented Working Paper 2, and referred to the changes presented in Annex B. The [MSDFs](#) were last modified in 2016, and so the review by the ROP-IWG is timely to take into consideration newer conservation and management measures obligations. There are also some MSDFs that are proposed for removal in recognition that electronic reporting presents an opportunity to streamline data collected by observers, and experience has shown that observers may not need to independently collect certain data fields after all. Working Paper 2 also provides some initial suggestions from participants to modify and add new data fields. Although some suggested changes had been available for some time, it was expected that during 2025 the proposed changes to the MSDFs would need further discussion and review by ROP-IWG participants.
9. Before opening for discussions, the Chair guided participants that discussions on points related to the data fields for Observer Trip Monitoring Summary, and Species of Special Interest should be deferred to Agenda Item 4.
10. At the outset several CCM participants expressed appreciation to the Chair and Secretariat for preparing the consolidated paper, which usefully presented all the changes proposed to date in one place. These participants indicated that they needed additional time to consider the proposed changes to the MSDFs at a national level and requested an opportunity to provide written comments during the intersessional period.
11. Noting that some participants needed more time to consider the suggested changes, the meeting undertook an initial review of the proposed removals and additions to be MSDFs. Some of the points raised in the discussions included:
  - *RFV VID number (row 9)*: Acknowledging that vessel identification details, such as the *RFV VID number*, are typically only known to those who regularly use these identifiers. As such, it may be helpful to retain the *WIN/IRCS (row 3)* or *IMO number (row 8)* because these are more commonly known vessel identifiers.
  - *Vessel cruising speed (row 28)*: Questions were raised about the feasibility of calculating *vessel cruising speed* and if it was necessary for observers to separately collect this data during a trip. It was suggested that engine power and vessel weight may be more accurate metrics for purposes of scientific analyses.

- *Freezer type (row 31)*: A question was raised as to whether this was necessary for observers to separately collect during a trip. It was noted that this was data collected by other means such as on the Record of Fishing Vessels.
- *Vessel Electronics data fields (rows 35 - 47)*: Comments during the discussions indicated that some review of the list of data fields that observers collect within this section should be undertaken by the ROP-IWG. For example, the relevance of some vessel electronics data was questioned, as certain elements may be outdated. It was queried whether binary (yes/no) reporting is still necessary for all the items. There was discussion about the potential need for observers to report on electronic gear such as sea surface temperature sensors and sonar for scientific research purposes. Noting that there is new technology, such as Electronic Monitoring (EM) where observers could potentially record if the technology was installed and in use. It was acknowledged that electronic equipment data fields are intended to cover three types of vessels (purse seine, longline and pole and line vessels), and perhaps some types of equipment are still useful for observers to collect for some vessel types.
- *Total weight of each species used for bait (row 93)*: It was noted that this data field is collected by some ROPs, but it is not currently an MSDF; however, it has not been specifically collected by other ROPs programs. Some participants whose observer programs do not currently collect this field indicated the need for further time to consider the suggestion. They also requested further clarification on the scientific purposes for collecting this data and how it is used to calculate the total species composition of bait. The Secretariat and SPC undertook to provide additional details prior to the next ROP-IWG meeting.
- *Tori Line related data fields (rows 61 – 66)*: One CCM noted that estimating the aerial extent of tori lines is difficult and considered it not feasible for observers to verify this onboard. Further time was needed to consider the suggested additions.
- *Maximum depth and length of net (rows 111 and 112)*: A CCM queried if these fields which are suggested for removal, might be needed for scientific analysis. The Secretariat and SPC undertook to provide additional details prior to the next ROP-IWG meeting.

12. The Chair confirmed that it would be helpful if comments and suggestions on Working Paper 02 and other amendments to MSDF, were provided in writing within a few weeks of the conclusion of this ROP-IWG5 meeting. This will ensure that all participants' comments can be compiled into a revised version of proposed changes to the MSDFs, for review at the next ROP-IWG meeting.

#### Agenda Item 4: Use of ROP Data in Compliance and CMS Processes

13. The Chair noted that the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) was established under Article 28 of the Convention to collect verified catch data, scientific data, and additional information from the Convention Area, and to monitor the implementation of conservation and management measures (CMMs) adopted by the Commission. The ROP had at its core the collection of independent, verified data at sea, which was critical not only for scientific purposes but also for supporting compliance monitoring.

14. Since 2016, ROP data had been used as an independently collected source within the Compliance Case File System (CCFS), and this is considered by TCC including as part of the WCPFC Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS). The CCFS is maintained by the Secretariat as a secure, searchable platform designed to assist CCMs in tracking alleged violations by their flagged vessels, in accordance with CMM 2023-04.
15. Under Agenda Item 4, the Chair noted that two main topics had been proposed for discussion, and these areas had been highlighted in Working Paper 02, Annex A. The first was to revisit the data fields recorded on the Observer Trip Monitoring Summary, and to further consider some ROP-IWG participants' recommendations about how to enhance the initial review and use of debriefer processes for notifying observer-data based potential alleged infringements in ways that are more workable and link better to current CCFS and CMS processes. The second was to consider suggested refinements of observer collected MSDFs to better distinguish interactions with SSIs from potential violations of SSI related obligations in CMMs.
16. The Chair also highlighted that Agenda Item 4 would need to revisit the 2015 pre-notification process and approaches to address the current challenges.

#### 4.1 Observer Trip Monitoring Summary and Pre-notification:

17. The Chair referred participants to the annotated agenda notes for background on this sub-agenda item. By way of background, within the CCFS, there are three types of cases that are based on Observer Trip Monitoring Summary Data:
  - **OAI:** Observer Obstruction Alleged Infringements which have a clear link to CMM 2018-05 15(g).
  - **POL:** Marine Pollution Alleged Infringements which link to marine pollution CMM 2017-04 02 or 03-07.
  - **PAI:** refer to the other data fields on the Observer Trip Monitoring Summary that were answered in the affirmative by a ROP observer (other than alleged observer obstruction incidents (OAI) and marine pollution incidents (POL)), and these currently cannot be linked to any specific CMM or obligation.
18. The reason that the OAI, POL and PAI cases are notified through the CCFS stems from a previous Commission decision from WCPFC12 (December 2015). This was the Commission Adopted pre-notification process from observer providers to flag CCMs of possible alleged infringements by their vessels and to coastal State CCMs of possible alleged infringements in their waters" ([WCPFC12 Summary Report paragraph 569, Attachment U](#)). This decision tasks the SPC-OFP and the Secretariat to prioritize data entry of the observer trip monitoring data fields and to facilitate the notification of any affirmative answers on the Observer Trip Monitoring Summary to the responsible flag CCM with a view to providing flag CCMs with earlier notification of potential alleged infringements by their vessels.
19. Some current issues identified include, but are not limited to:
  - That presently, the remaining MSDF Observer Trip Monitoring Summary codes (other than alleged observer obstruction incidents (OAI) and marine pollution incidents (POL), do not have a clear link to an obligation in a WCPFC CMM or a specific requirement in the Convention.

- The Commission has acknowledged the PAI cases are an issue and at WCPFC14 accepted the TCC13 recommendation that TCC not consider the information contained in the ROP Pre-notification List for the purpose of assessing any obligations for which it was relevant, except for those cases related to observer interference or obstruction in future years.
  - Noting the scale of PAI cases in the CCFS, resolving the issue of PAI cases is a priority task for the ROP-IWG in its 2023-2025 workplan.
  - In practice, the current MSDF Observer Trip Monitoring Summary codes do not provide sufficient information necessary to support data management procedures used to define if the observed trip should be classified as ROP or non-ROP data. Consequently, the earlier notification to flag CCMs that was envisaged has not been practical to implement.
  - In 2024, some suggestions were made as part of ROP-IWG discussions of ways to utilise debriefing information in supporting reviews of PAI cases, these are noted in [Working Paper 02, Annex A](#).
20. In addition, the Chair acknowledged that [Working Paper 04](#), which provided some further suggestions to enhance the recording of the current observer trip monitoring data fields, was a late paper for this meeting. At the invitation of the Chair, the Secretariat (K. Staisch) briefly introduced the suggestions in Working Paper 04.
21. The points raised in the discussions included:
- The pre-notification process had the good intention to provide early advice to flag CCMs of potential alleged violations by their vessels, however what was intended has not been possible.
  - Noting that the WCPFC CCFS aims to assist flag CCMs with tracking alleged violations by their flagged vessels, and the observer programs are intended to support monitoring the implementation of conservation and management measures (CMMs).
  - Considering whether processes and standards can be agreed with a view to ensuring that the ROP data recorded by observers is of a standard that is sufficient for supporting flag State investigations of WCPFC CCFS cases. Perhaps there needs to be guidance on the package of information that should accompany each CCFS case.
  - Should debriefers or coordinators undertake a verification of the Observer Trip data before it is used to develop WCPFC CCFS cases, and if so, how should the information from debriefers flow to WCPFC so it can support the WCPFC CCFS case process and flag State investigations.
  - The lack of clear linkage to most CMMs in the current data fields in the Observer Trip Monitoring Summary section is an issue. For example, much of the observer trip monitoring summary data is not useful for the purpose of the CCFS. Only RS-a to RS-d, WC-c, PN-a, and perhaps LC-a to LC-f is sufficiently useful for the CCFS.
  - When reviewing the MSDF Observer Trip Monitoring Summary codes, it will be necessary to distinguish what is needed for national purposes *vis-a-vis* the data and information that is specifically needed for CCFS/CMS -purposes.

22. The Chair requested that ROP-IWG participants continue to consider these matters and confirmed the expectation that this would be a matter that will be further discussed at the next ROP-IWG meeting. Participants were requested to share their comments and suggestions in writing within a few weeks of the conclusion of this ROP-IWG5 meeting, so that they can be considered in preparations for the next ROP-IWG meeting.

#### 4.2 Interactions with Species of Special Interest (SSI):

23. The Chair referred participants to the annotated agenda notes for background on this sub-agenda item. By way of background, within the CCFS, there are two types of SSI related cases that are based on ROP set-level data:

- **SHK:** Shark Catch Alleged Infringements. These are Cases for alleged infringements related to retention of oceanic white tip or silky sharks, or shark fining activity identified in ROP observer data (obligations in [CMM 2022-04](#)). SHK cases are generated where a ROP observer has reported instances during a WCPFC ROP trip where:
  - i. fishing vessel has caught an oceanic white tip or silky shark as identified by a specific species code (SP\_code) in combination with an observed fate code (FATE\_code) indicating retention is whole or in part.
  - ii. fishing vessel has caught shark as identified by a species code (SP\_code) in combination with an observed fate code (FATE\_code) indicating fining activity.
- **CWS:** Cetacean and Whale Shark Interactions. Relevant WCPFC requirements prohibit purse seine vessels from setting if a whale shark or cetacean is sighted prior to the commencement of the set; required reporting of any incidents of unintentional encircling; and guidelines for safe release (obligations in [CMM 2011-03](#) and [CMM 2022-04](#)). CWS cases are generated where a ROP observer has reported instances during a WCPFC ROP trip where a cetacean or whale sharks as identified by a specific species code (SP\_code) in combination with an observed fate code (FATE\_code) indicates an interaction with the fishing vessel's activity.

24. Some current issues identified include, but are not limited to:

- The Commission has acknowledged that the CWS cases in CCFS are an issue and TCC17 (2021) agreed this data would be excluded from consideration of the current trial process of reviewing the Aggregated Tables in the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS).
- The CCFS CWS instances currently reflect a recording by the observer of interactions between the vessel and marine mammals or with whale sharks (an observer on a purse seine vessel has reported a cetacean or whale sharks, as identified by a specific species code (SP\_code) in combination with an observed fate code (FATE\_code)). Currently the ROP data fields do not permit the observer to categorise the data fields that are inputs to the CCFS to distinguish between interactions where there is no alleged infringement and that are of scientific interest, with those interactions or actions by the crew that could indicate a potential infringement has occurred.
- As is noted in [Working Paper 02 Annex A](#), there are a number of other SSI obligations in CMMs (seabirds ([CMM 2018-03](#)), sea turtles ([CMM 2018-04](#)),

mobulids ([CMM 2019-05](#)) and potentially refinements for sharks ([CMM 2024-05](#)) and cetaceans ([CMM 2024-07](#)), which would facilitate the creation of additional types of observer-initiated cases in the CCFS, but the ROP data fields need to be reviewed to support more clear identification of potential violations of SSI related obligations.

- In 2024, some suggestions were made as part of ROP-IWG discussions of data fields that will support the review of implementation of seabird mitigation measures under [CMM 2018-03](#), these are provided in [Working Paper 02 Annex A and Annex B](#).

25. At the invitation of the Chair, the Secretariat (K. Staisch) briefly introduced the suggestions in [Working Paper 02 Annex A](#). This includes initial suggested additional data fields to support the collection of data related to cetaceans, whale sharks, seabirds' mitigation, and mobulids.

26. Several participants reiterated that they needed additional time to consider the proposed changes to the MSDFs and some participants indicated an interest in providing suggestions for additional data fields to be added to MSDFs.

27. The Chair confirmed that it would be helpful if comments and suggestions were provided in writing within a few weeks of the conclusion of this ROP-IWG5 meeting. This will ensure that all participants' comments can be compiled into a revised version of proposed changes to the MSDFs, for review at the next ROP-IWG meeting.

28. In summary, the Chair noted that as a next step, ROP-IWG participants were to further consider the tables provided in [Working Paper 2](#) and points raised during the discussions. Participants were requested to provide written suggestions and comments by **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025** so that they could be consolidated into a revised version of Working Paper 2 for consideration at the next meeting.

29. The Chair undertook to work with the Secretariat on further elaborating some suggested changes to the pre-notification processes, that includes debriefing information and to circulate this during the intersessional period for consideration at the next meeting.

#### Agenda Item 5: Observer Transshipment Monitoring – Non-Fish Transfers

30. The Chair introduced the WCPFC21 tasking to include non-fish transfer to the [observer minimum data fields for monitoring transshipment](#) (WCPFC21 Summary Report paragraph 511). At the invitation of the Chair, the Secretariat (L. Manarangi-Trott) explained the context to the tasking, noting that the task stemmed from some discussions through the review of the Transshipment CMM (CMM 2009-06). The discussions had recognized the challenges in identifying and understanding these transfers during transshipment and participants identified that enhanced reporting mechanisms were critical for validating and verifying activities within the Convention Area. The proposal presented during the review of the transshipment CMM was intending to introduce a requirement that vessels submit data to report when two vessels meet at sea, but no catches are transferred. However, the proposed amendments were not finalized for adoption at WCPFC21, and instead the Commission tasked the ROP-IWG to discuss adding non-fish transfers to the observer

minimum data fields for monitoring transshipment. The Chair's intention at ROP-IWG5 was to commence discussion of the task, and further discussions were anticipated at the next meeting of the ROP-IWG.

31. Points raised during the discussion included:

- General support to revising the [observer minimum data fields for monitoring transshipment](#) in response to the tasking.
- Recalling that the discussions at TCC in 2024, had identified that bait is also “fish”, and the importance of having clear phrasing and/or specific guidance.
- Desirability of WCPFC considering harmonizing with other RFMOs, noting that ICCAT uses “supply services” as the equivalent of “non-fish transfers”, and IOTC has adopted an explicit definition of “non-catch transfer”.
- An interest in reviewing other changes to the [observer minimum data fields for monitoring transshipment](#), for example SP\_number which is currently non-mandatory.

32. In summary, the Chair noted that as a next step, ROP-IWG participants were to further consider the [observer minimum data fields for monitoring transshipment](#) and points raised during the discussions. Participants were requested to provide written suggestions and comments, preferably by **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025**.

33. The Secretariat was also requested to compile information for the next meeting on approaches for observer data collection related to “non-fish transfers” which are used in other tuna RFMOs and Pan-Pacific bodies.

#### Agenda Item 6: ROP-IWG Workplan Update (2023–2025)

34. The Chair referred to [Working Paper 3](#) and explained that it contained proposed updates to the workplan and indicated that the update to the workplan is overdue. The Chair requested that ROP-IWG participants review the draft revised workplan and provide comments and suggested amendments intersessionally, to have a revised version for discussion at the next virtual meeting.

35. The Chair acknowledged that several participants had indicated an interest in providing written comments after this virtual meeting. Participants were requested to provide comments within 3 – 4 weeks. This would allow for the Chair working with the Secretariat to prepare papers for a second virtual meeting.

36. A second virtual meeting was proposed for early-mid June 2025, ahead of key SC/TCC deadlines. This was noted to be in addition to the hybrid meeting that was proposed to be held immediately prior to TCC21.

37. In summary, the Chair noted that as a next step, ROP-IWG participants were to review the revised workplan ([Working Paper 3](#)). Participants were requested to provide written suggestions and comments, preferably by **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025**.



38. The Chair, in consultation with the Secretariat, proposed **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2025** as the date for the next virtual meeting of the ROP-IWG.

#### Agenda Item 7: Summary and Close of Meeting

39. The Chair confirmed that a Chair's Summary of the ROP-IWG05 meeting would be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting. Participants were thanked for their engagement and contributions.

40. The ROP-IWG05 meeting closed at 1:20pm Pohnpei time.



Virtual Meeting 5 of ROP-IWG  
11 April 2025 10:00h – 13:00h (Pohnpei time)

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Adopted Agenda

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Agenda Item 1. Opening of Meeting

Agenda Item 2. Introduction and Opening Remarks

Agenda Item 3. Revisit Annex 1/1A table presenting some updates to the WCPFC Minimum Standard Data Fields (MSDFs) for observer monitoring on purse seine, longline and pole and line vessels

Agenda Item 4. Developing a standardized solution to use ROP data in the CCFS and CMS process

4.1 Review of Observer Trip Monitoring Summary data fields and current pre-notification process and challenges

4.2 Considerations for defining scientific interactions for SSI and potential violations of SSI related obligations

Agenda Item 5. Review of the Minimum Data Fields for Observer Transshipment Monitoring, including to consider data fields related to Non-Fish Transfers

Agenda Item 6. Updating the 2023-2025 ROP-IWG workplan and next steps

Agenda Item 7. Summary and Close of Meeting

**5TH REGIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMME INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP  
ONLINE**

11 April 2025

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