



HIGH SEAS BOARDING AND INSPECTION INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP

Virtual Meeting 5

21 July 2026

10:00 – 12:00 (Pohnpei time)

Chair's Summary Report

HSBIWG05-2026

15 August 2026

Agenda Item 1. Opening of Meeting

1. The Fourth Meeting of the High Seas Boarding and Inspection Working Group (HSBIWG05) was convened virtually on 21 July 2026, commencing at approximately 10:00 Pohnpei time. The Chair opened the meeting and extended a welcome to all participants.
2. The Chair acknowledged the ongoing support of the Secretariat in facilitating the Working Group's intersessional meetings and expressed appreciation for the engagement of CCMs in advancing this important programme of work.
3. Participants in HSBI-WG05 included representatives from Australia, Canada, China, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Chinese Taipei and United States, as well as the Global Fishing Watch, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Sharks Pacific and the Secretariat. A list of participants is provided in Attachment 2.

Agenda Item 2. Introduction and Opening Remarks

4. The Chair provided an introductory overview of the Working Group's mandate and the programme of work assigned to it following the Twenty-Second Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC22), held in Manila. The agenda, as presented by the Chair, was adopted without objection.
5. In his introduction the Chair emphasised the practical importance of the Working Group's current task of developing guidance to support implementation of the high seas boarding and inspection framework in relation to crew labour standards. It was noted that this was a relatively new area of work for the HSBI process and that the development of practical guidance, procedures and tools would be important to assist boarding officers in identifying, recording and reporting relevant observations in a consistent manner.
6. The discussion also reflected a common view that the Working Group should focus on producing materials that are operationally useful, aligned with the applicable conservation and management measure, and capable of supporting follow-up by the relevant flag CCM. The need for the Working

Group's products to complement, rather than replace, domestic procedures and other ongoing regional initiatives was also implicit throughout the introductory discussion.

Agenda Item 3. Discuss Draft HSBI Voluntary Regional Guides

3.1 Updates to and review of the voluntary guidelines for seabirds

7. Japan provided the Working Group with a brief update on the voluntary guidelines for seabirds. As no comments or edits were received the guidelines will be sent to TCC22 with a request for approval by the Commission this year.

3.2 Presentations on HSBI inspections relating to crew labour conditions

8. The Working Group received a series of presentations on experiences and practices relating to HSBI inspections and crew labour conditions. Across the presentations, there was broad recognition that fisheries boarding and inspection activities can provide an important opportunity to observe and document conditions on board vessels, but that inspectors face significant operational limitations when attempting to verify labour-related concerns during time-constrained inspections at sea.

3.2.1 Australia

- a. The presentation on Australia's experience prompted discussion on the use of boarding observations and documentary records to identify potential indicators of labour abuse. Particular attention was given to work-hour and rest-hour information, including the possibility that vessel activity patterns could be compared with reported timesheets after the boarding in order to assess whether the records appeared credible.
- b. Australia also indicated that domestic standard operating procedures and protocols exist for different aspects of boarding activity, while noting that procedures specifically tailored to labour-related observations remain under development. This was presented as part of a broader process in which practical experience is informing the development of updated guidance through the Working Group.
- c. Questions were raised by several CCM on the potential conflict between normal shipboard procedures and administrative requirements in some port CCM, such as the requirement for crew to have "unfettered" access to their passports when standard procedure in some port CCM is for the passports to be stored in a sealed pouch on the bridge.

3.2.2 New Zealand

- d. The presentation on New Zealand's experience drew attention to observations made during past HSBI patrols, particularly in circumstances where labour-related issues were observed when the applicable framework was still a resolution rather than a binding conservation and management measure. It was explained that, in such cases, concerns could be recorded and passed to the relevant flag CCM even where no formal breach under a specific measure was alleged.

- e. The presentation further emphasised the importance of evidence collection practices, including contemporaneous notes, time-stamped observations, video where available, and corroborative information from different personnel involved in the boarding. It was noted, however, that such evidence still reflects only a single point in time and therefore serves primarily to support subsequent awareness-raising and investigation by the flag CCM rather than definitive findings by the boarding team itself.

3.2.3 FFA

- f. The presentation from FFA outlined a broad programme of regional work to support implementation of harmonised minimum terms and conditions. The Working Group was informed that national consultation workshops, legal gap analyses, and implementation support had been undertaken across a number of FFA members, with further work planned in cooperation with international partners.
- g. Discussion under this item highlighted that some CCMs continue to face legal and institutional gaps in implementing crew labour standards, including the need for standalone laws, regulations or policies, clearer national mandates, and better coordination among fisheries, labour, health, police and other authorities. Several practical challenges were also identified in relation to the handling of serious incidents, including deaths, illness, injury and missing crew, particularly where clear reporting pathways and lead agencies are absent.
- h. FFA also described ongoing and planned work on training modules, training-of-trainers packages, cooperation with ILO, development of standard operating procedures, and related materials such as indicators field guides, which could be made available if requested.

3.2.4 Chinese Taipei

- i. The presentation from Chinese Taipei discussion highlighted several practical lessons that the Working Group considered relevant to its draft guidance. These included the value of having standard operating procedures, onboard checklists, interview checklists and multilingual questionnaires, as well as the importance of arranging safe and reasonably private interview conditions where possible, keeping vessel operators or masters away from interviews, and using interpreters or simplified questioning to address language and literacy challenges.
- j. At the same time, it was emphasised that HSBI inspections face significant constraints. These include the general four-hour inspection timeframe, competing inspection priorities, limited multilingual capability among inspectors, variable crew literacy, lack of independent interview space, and concerns for crew safety where answers may be perceived as adverse to the vessel master or operator after inspectors depart.
- k. Chinese Taipei noted that port and HSBI inspections were complimentary, where port inspections allow inspection of living and working conditions and interviews with crew, while HSBI activities have relied more heavily on the distribution and collection of questionnaires because of the limitations of time, space and operating conditions at sea.

3.2.4 Discussion

- l. Interventions by other CCMs reinforced several cross-cutting issues arising from the presentations. These included concern about the time required for meaningful crew interviews, the educational and literacy barriers that can affect the reliability of written questionnaires, and the need for practical techniques to support comprehension and accurate responses in a time-constrained inspection environment.
- m. Further discussion also underlined the importance of neutral and practical inspection methods, and the value of sharing procedures among CCMs that are still developing their own approaches to labour-related HSBI observations.

3.3 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Guidelines

- 9. In discussing the draft crew labour standards guidance materials, the Working Group focused on how to ensure that the proposed tools are legally and operationally appropriate. It was agreed that the documents should be closely aligned with the relevant conservation and management measure and should support inspectors in recording observations that are useful for subsequent follow-up by the relevant flag CCM.
- 10. A clear view was expressed that HSBI inspections should observe and describe conditions rather than purport to determine compliance conclusively or make legal findings on labour standards during the boarding itself. In this regard, the discussion emphasised the importance of maintaining the distinction between at-sea observations by boarding teams and the responsibility of the flag CCM to conduct any necessary investigation and assessment after receipt of the report.

3.3.1 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Checklist

- a. The draft checklist was discussed as a possible tool for boarding officers to complete during an inspection. It was generally understood that such a checklist could support a more structured and consistent approach to recording labour-related observations, especially where inspectors are operating under time pressure and in unfamiliar circumstances.
- b. At the same time, views expressed in the discussion suggested that the checklist would need further refinement to ensure that its text mirrors the relevant conservation and management measure as closely as possible and avoids wording that could be seen as leading, overly evaluative or outside the scope of HSBI observations. The Chair acknowledged the comments and offered to share an updated draft for participants to consider that reflected the points raised and directly aligned with all the points in the Conservation and Management Measure for Crew Labour Standards.

3.3.2 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Questionnaire

- c. The Working Group also discussed the possible use of a questionnaire for inspection crews. Discussion considered whether such a questionnaire should be a separate tool from the boarding officer checklist or whether the two should be combined into a single document. Some participants noted the value of having a separate questionnaire that can be provided to crews to complete while inspection officers are undertaking other aspects of the

inspection. The questionnaire can also be used to support interviews and inform the final completion of the inspection checklist.

- d. More broadly, the discussion highlighted that any questionnaire would require additional work to ensure consistency with the measure, neutrality of wording, operational feasibility, and sensitivity to language concerns. No final agreement on questionnaire text was recorded, and the Working Group proceeded on the understanding that this component remained under development.

Agenda Item 4. Programme of Work and Next Meeting

11. The Working Group discussed the immediate timeline for reporting to the Technical and Compliance Committee and the broader timeframe for completing its draft guidance materials. It was acknowledged that papers would need to be circulated to TCC by late August, but there was also recognition that the documents under development were not yet sufficiently mature to be presented as final products.
12. The Working Group also considered how best to manage intersessional work ahead of the TCC paper deadline. In the absence of objection, support emerged for convening a further brief virtual meeting, of approximately one hour, in about three and a half weeks' time to review progress and consider the material to be forwarded to TCC in draft form.
13. The discussion also reflected a shared understanding that the Working Group should make use of the longer implementation timeframe associated with the measure, including work extending into the coming year, rather than seeking to rush the development of guidance materials that would benefit from further technical consideration.

Agenda Item 5. Summary and Close of Meeting

14. In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked participants for their active engagement and noted that the meeting had provided clear direction for further progress on the draft guidelines. The overall tenor of the discussion suggested that the Working Group had advanced a common understanding of the practical issues that should shape the labour-related HSBI guidance, while also recognising that substantial drafting work remains.
15. The meeting closed with the understanding that additional documents and comments would be shared intersessionally, that a further short virtual meeting could be scheduled ahead of the TCC paper deadline if feasible, and that any material forwarded to TCC would be presented as a status update on work in progress rather than as a final agreed product.



Virtual Meeting 5 of HSBI WG
21 July 2026 10:00 – 12:00 (Pohnpei time)

Provisional Agenda

HSBIWG05-2026-01_Rev04
17 July 2026

1. Opening of Meeting
2. Introduction and Opening Remarks
3. Discuss Draft HSBI Voluntary Regional Guides
 - 3.1 Updates to and review of the voluntary guidelines for seabirds
 - 3.2 Presentations on HSBI inspections relating to crew labour conditions
 - 3.2.1 Australia
 - 3.2.2 New Zealand
 - 3.2.3 FFA
 - 3.2.4 Chinese Taipei
 - 3.2.5 Others
 - 3.3 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Guidelines
 - 3.3.1 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Checklist
 - 3.3.2 Discuss draft Crew Labour Standards Questionnaire
4. Programme of Work and Next Meeting
5. Summary and Close of Meeting

FIFTH MEETING OF HSBI WG

ONLINE

21 July 2026

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