

Agenda Item 1. Opening of Meeting

1. The Fourth Meeting of the High Seas Boarding and Inspection Working Group (HSBI-WG04) was convened virtually on 16 April 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-WG04 included representatives from Australia, Canada, China, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Chinese Taipei and United States, as well as the International MCS Network, 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. Two primary tasks were identified: first, the consideration and development of a new draft High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) voluntary guide covering inspections related to crew labour standards; and secondly, the review and updating of existing HSBI voluntary guides as necessary.
5. An edit to an existing HSBI voluntary guide had been contributed by a CCM (Working Paper 2) and had been uploaded to the HSBIWG04 meeting website on 10 April 2026. It was further noted that a discussion paper containing a draft questionnaire (Working Paper 3) for use by inspecting officers in assessing crew labour conditions had been uploaded to the HSBIWG04 meeting website on 15 April 2026. Both documents were presented for discussion under Agenda Item 3.
6. The Chair noted that, in preparation for the meeting, a working document (Working Paper 4) had been developed, drawing on input received from CCMs in the weeks preceding the session, incorporating that input into a preliminary skeleton draft structure for the proposed crew labour standards guide. At the request of CCMs who had not had prior access to the working document

shared during the meeting, the Chair arranged for the document to be uploaded to the HSB IWG04 meeting website on 16 April 2026 and the meeting's chat function.

Agenda Item 3. Discuss Draft HSB Voluntary Regional Guides

3.1 Voluntary Guidance for Inspections Related to Crew Labour Standards

7. The Working Group devoted the greater part of its proceedings to this agenda item, which concerned the development of a new voluntary HSB guide to assist inspecting officers in assessing compliance or alignment with CMM 2024-04, the crew labour standards measure adopted at WCPFC22.
8. [Working Paper 4](#) was considered first. The Chair indicated that the proposed approach for developing the guide would follow the methodology used successfully for other HSB voluntary guides. Namely, the elaboration of a purpose statement followed by a structured set of guidance provisions for inspecting officers, with an Annex containing a boarding report template containing relevant inspection questions directly linked to provisions of CMM 2024-04
9. The Working Group considered the proposed purpose statement for the draft guide, which was structured around two overarching objectives: monitoring and assessing owners and operators of fishing vessels for compliance or alignment with CMM 2024-04; and maintaining records of issues identified during inspections, including crew welfare concerns beyond the specific provisions of the measure. CCMs were invited to comment on the formulation of these objectives and on the use of the term "compliance or alignment" as it relates to the language of CMM 2024-04.
10. Following suggestions from several CCM regarding the need for intra-governmental consultations, the review of Working Paper 4 was held over to a subsequent meeting, with attention being turned to a review of the draft questionnaire contained in Working Paper 3.
11. The United States presented [Working Paper 3](#) containing a draft questionnaire intended for use by high seas boarding inspection officers when assessing crew labour conditions during high sea boardings. The paper was structured around the relevant provisions of CMM 2024-04 and covered a range of topics including working and living conditions, safety, accommodation, food and water supply, medical provisions, crew contracts, wages, rest periods, communication access, and repatriation arrangements. The questionnaire comprised ten questions, of which eight were directly linked to paragraphs seven and eight of the measure and were aligned with established International Labour Organization (ILO) indicators for identifying forced labour conditions. The remaining questions addressed the crew member's general work history and any awareness of pressure not to cooperate with inspections. The United States emphasised that the questions were designed to be practical and efficiently administered during a time-constrained at-sea boarding, serving primarily to identify red flags warranting further investigation rather than to constitute a definitive evidentiary assessment.
12. It was noted by the United States that the questions had been drawn upon and refined from experience gained through port State measures inspections and collaborative inspection exercises undertaken with national customs and border protection authorities in a joint forced labour enforcement context. The United States acknowledged that the experience base from which those questions were derived was principally port-based, and that adaptation for high seas boarding contexts would be necessary.

13. The Chair then invited New Zealand to share a draft inspection template designed to extract the key provisions of CMM 2024-04 into a structured checklist format suitable for use by inspecting officers at sea. The template was modelled on the approach developed for the bycatch mitigation measures inspection guide and presented questions in a yes/no format, with provision for inspectors to record additional observations and contextual notes. Each question in the template was linked to a specific paragraph of CMM 2024-04, thereby grounding the inspection framework directly in the text of the applicable measure. New Zealand acknowledged that the template was preliminary in nature and welcomed feedback. It was noted that the document had been made available to participants late in the process, limiting the opportunity for detailed prior review or consultation with relevant domestic labour experts.
14. The Chair requested views from participants on the documents. Key points raised in the discussions highlighted a range of practical, procedural, and conceptual challenges associated with assessing crew labour conditions in the context of high seas boarding inspections. The following principal themes emerged from the discussion:
- *Language barriers.* It was widely acknowledged that language barriers present a significant practical challenge during high seas boardings, particularly where crew members may speak a language or dialect different from that of the inspecting officers. It was observed that inspections may involve multilingual crews where even the vessel master does not share a common language with all crew members. Possible practical responses were discussed, including the use of translation applications on mobile devices and the preparation of pre-translated question cards in the most commonly encountered languages. It was noted that while such tools offer partial mitigation, they do not fully substitute for qualified interpreters, who are more readily available in port settings. A concern was also expressed regarding varying levels of literacy among crew members, which may limit the utility of written questionnaire formats.
 - *Crew reluctance and welfare protection.* Concern was expressed that crew members may be inhibited from reporting labour concerns honestly while still aboard the vessel, particularly in the presence of vessel masters or senior officers. It was noted that parallels can be drawn with the established practice of interviewing fisheries observers, who are similarly interviewed privately and where possible away from vessel command. It was observed that high seas inspections impose inherent constraints on the ability to conduct private interviews, and that port inspections offer a more conducive environment for separating crew members and ensuring they can speak freely. The risk of retaliation against crew members following an inspection was identified as a serious concern requiring careful procedural consideration. The importance of protecting crew welfare not only during but also in the period after an inspection was emphasised by several CCMs.
 - *Complexity of interviewing and evidentiary challenges.* It was noted that high seas boardings take place within a four-hour time limit and must address multiple compliance matters simultaneously, leaving limited time for detailed crew interviews. Concern was expressed about the difficulty of gathering sufficiently concrete evidence at sea to support a formal investigation request by a flag State under Article 25.2 of the Convention. Reference was made to analogous experience from the Commission's Compliance Case File System (CCFS), where it was observed that boarding reports citing crew interview accounts without corroborating physical evidence have rarely provided a sufficient basis for flag State investigation. It was recognised that certain conditions on board, such as variations in accommodation standards or working environments between vessels, do not necessarily indicate non-compliance and must be interpreted with

contextual understanding. It was further noted that crew members may on occasion make complaints for reasons unrelated to genuine labour violations, which complicates the evidentiary assessment process.

- *Training requirements.* Multiple CCMs observed that the assessment of labour conditions during high seas boardings requires a different set of competencies from those typically applied in traditional fisheries compliance inspections. It was noted that in many jurisdictions, labour inspection responsibilities are held by dedicated government agencies separate from fisheries enforcement bodies, and that inspecting officers may lack relevant expertise. The need for specialised training was emphasised, along with the importance of ensuring consistency in how inspecting officers interpret and apply the questions and criteria set out in any guide developed by the Working Group. The Chair noted that guidance notes accompanying the questionnaire could serve an important role in promoting such consistency and that some training material has already been developed with input from the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- *Scope of high seas versus port inspections.* It was generally acknowledged that high seas boarding inspection has inherent limitations as a tool for the comprehensive assessment of crew labour conditions. It was broadly agreed that at-sea boardings should be understood as serving a screening or triage function, aimed at identifying visible indicators or red flags that would then be referred to the flag State for further investigation or followed up through more detailed port State inspection. The importance of establishing clear procedural linkages between at-sea inspections and subsequent port inspections was underscored.
- *Premature development* and the need for a measured approach. Concern was expressed by several CCMs that it would be premature to proceed directly to the development of a fully elaborated questionnaire at this stage, given that CMM 2024-04 has not yet entered into force, that audit points for the measure have not been agreed, and that many CCMs have not yet accumulated direct experience in conducting at-sea inspections for labour standards compliance. A view was expressed that the process would benefit from first canvassing the actual boarding experiences of CCMs' inspection officers, following the approach taken in the development of earlier HSBI voluntary guides. The view was also expressed that the process should proceed gradually and allow CCMs sufficient time to consult with their domestic labour authorities, industry stakeholders, and other relevant ministries before committing to specific inspection questions or guidance language. It was noted in response that the goal of the current meeting was not to finalise any guide but to introduce and share preliminary materials, and that ample time would be provided for consultation and review before subsequent sessions.
- *Staged questioning approach.* Support was expressed for the development of a tiered or staged questioning structure, in which a set of high-level screening questions would allow inspectors to conduct a rapid initial assessment of observable conditions, with more detailed questioning reserved for cases in which initial indicators suggest a potential concern. It was suggested that such an approach could usefully distinguish between elements that can be physically and visually verified by inspectors, such as the presence of crew injuries, physical mistreatment, sanitation conditions, and availability of food and water, and elements that require interview-based assessment, such as wage arrangements, contract terms, and freedom of movement, which may be better suited to port-based investigation.
- *Definitional ambiguities.* A concern was raised regarding provisions in CMM 2024-04 that involve inherently subjective or context-dependent assessments, for example, whether wages are "decent" or whether sleeping quarters are "adequate." It was noted that such determinations

may vary depending on national regulations, flag State standards, and the cultural context of the vessel in question, potentially giving rise to inconsistency in inspection outcomes. The importance of addressing such ambiguities well in advance of the measure's entry into force was emphasised, so as to minimise the potential for disputes or inconsistencies between CCMs in the application of the inspection guide.

15. The Chair proposed that the two submitted documents, the discussion paper with the draft questionnaire and the draft inspection template, be developed in parallel and subsequently consolidated into a single set of inspection questions and guidance for officers, which would ultimately form the annex to the draft voluntary guideline. Support was expressed for this approach. CCMs were invited to submit written comments on both documents through the Working Group forum, and it was confirmed that a revised working document would be prepared following the meeting to reflect feedback received.
16. The Chair further indicated that, in advance of the next meeting, previously developed training materials produced in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA members) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) on identifying conditions of modern slavery and labour standard deficiencies on fishing vessels would be compiled and distributed. CCMs with relevant inspection experience were invited to present at the next meeting on practical aspects of conducting at-sea inspections related to labour standards. The target outcome for this line of work was agreed to be the presentation of a draft voluntary guide at TCC22 for formal consideration.

3.2 Review of other Guides

17. The Chair invited Japan to introduce [Working Paper 2](#) which proposed revisions to the existing Bycatch Mitigation Measures Inspection Guide to reflect amendments made to the relevant seabird bycatch conservation and management measure at WCPFC22 in Manila.
18. Japan explained that the principal changes concerned updated specifications for tori lines used on large vessels operating south of 25° South latitude. The main amendments included: the insertion of a new inspection checkpoint for the minimum length of the tori line with attached streamers, set at a minimum of 100 metres from the stern of the vessel; the introduction of an alternative minimum tori line length of 120 metres in cases where a towing device is attached; the incorporation of provisions relating to the area extent of streamers attached to the line; and a modification to the requirements regarding the use of swivels to attach streamers, which were amended from a mandatory specification to a flexible one permitting the use of other attachment mechanisms capable of ensuring the flexibility of streamers. Certain provisions that were assessed as largely duplicative of other requirements were proposed for deletion.
19. The Working Group received the presentation. No objections to the proposed revisions were raised. CCMs were invited to review the proposed changes in detail and to submit written comments to the Working Group ahead of the next meeting.
20. A procedural question was raised regarding the adoption pathway for revisions to the guides, specifically, whether updates to existing guides could be finalised intersessionally by the Working Group or whether they required formal endorsement by the full Commission. The Secretariat confirmed that revised guides are required to be submitted to TCC22 and, if endorsed there, would form part of the body of work recommended to the Commission for formal adoption at its annual session. This pathway was noted by the Chair and confirmed as the applicable process for both the bycatch guide revisions and the new crew labour standards guide.

21. A constructive suggestion was advanced that future drafting of HSB1 voluntary guides should, where possible, reference CMM provisions in generic terms, directing inspectors, for example, to verify that a particular specification meets the requirement set out in the applicable CMM, rather than embedding specific numerical values or measurements directly into the guide text. This approach would have the practical benefit of ensuring that guides do not become out of date each time a CMM is amended, thereby reducing the frequency with which guides would need to be submitted for full Commission adoption. The Chair endorsed this suggestion and indicated it would be taken into account in future drafting of all voluntary guides.

Agenda Item 4. Programme of Work and Next Meeting

22. The next steps for the Intersessional Process outlined by the Chair included:

- I. The Chair invited the Working Group to consider its programme of work for the remainder of the intersessional period and the scheduling of the next meeting. It was proposed that a second intersessional meeting be held in approximately eight weeks' time, placing it in the period of mid-June 2026. A preference for eight weeks rather than six was expressed, to allow CCMs sufficient time to undertake the necessary internal consultations with domestic labour authorities, industry representatives, and inspection personnel.
- II. The Chair proposed that the document introduced by New Zealand be used as the framework for future work, with the contents being drawn from the questionnaire provided by the United States and other material to be provided by CCM during the intersessional period. The Chair requested CCM to seek the views and draw from the experience of other government agencies, and industry experts, to provide input into the framework
- III. The agenda for the next meeting was proposed to include the following elements: presentations by CCMs with practical experience in conducting at-sea boardings with a labour standards component, with the aim of informing the development of the questionnaire and guide through direct operational insight; and further substantive discussion on the consolidated draft questionnaire and the developing structure of the voluntary guide. Both the revised bycatch mitigation guide and the draft crew labour standards guide remain targeted for presentation at TCC22.

Agenda Item 5. Summary and Close of Meeting

23. In closing, the Chair summarised the principal themes and outcomes of the meeting. The unique challenges of assessing crew labour conditions during at-sea high seas boarding inspections, as distinct from port-based inspections, were identified as the central practical and procedural challenge confronting the Working Group. The Chair underscored the following specific issues requiring ongoing attention: the inherent limitations of the at-sea inspection environment; the importance of language solutions for inspection questions and crew interviews; the need for specialised training and consistent guidance for inspecting officers; the value of a staged or tiered questioning approach that distinguishes between observable physical conditions and matters better suited to port-based investigation; the protection of crew welfare during and after inspections; and the evidentiary challenges associated with generating evidence sufficient to support formal flag State investigation proceedings.

24. The Chair expressed appreciation for the active, substantive, and constructive engagement of all CCMs throughout the session and for the contributions of those who had prepared and submitted discussion papers ahead of the meeting. It was reiterated that the current meeting represented the first step in a carefully sequenced and consultative process and that ample time would be afforded to CCMs to review materials and consult domestically before the next session.
25. The Working Group adopted the summary of the meeting's outcomes as presented by the Chair. There being no further business, the Chair formally closed HSBIWG04 at 12:00 Pohnpei time.



Virtual Meeting 4 of HSBI WG
16 April 2026 10:00 – 12:00 (Pohnpei time)

Adopted Agenda

1. Opening of Meeting
2. Introduction and Opening Remarks
3. Discuss Draft HSBI Voluntary Regional Guides
 - 3.1 Voluntary guidance for inspections related to crew labour standards
 - 3.2 Review of other Guides
4. Programme of Work and Next Meeting
5. Summary and Close of Meeting

FOURTH MEETING OF HSBI WG

ONLINE

16 April 2026

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