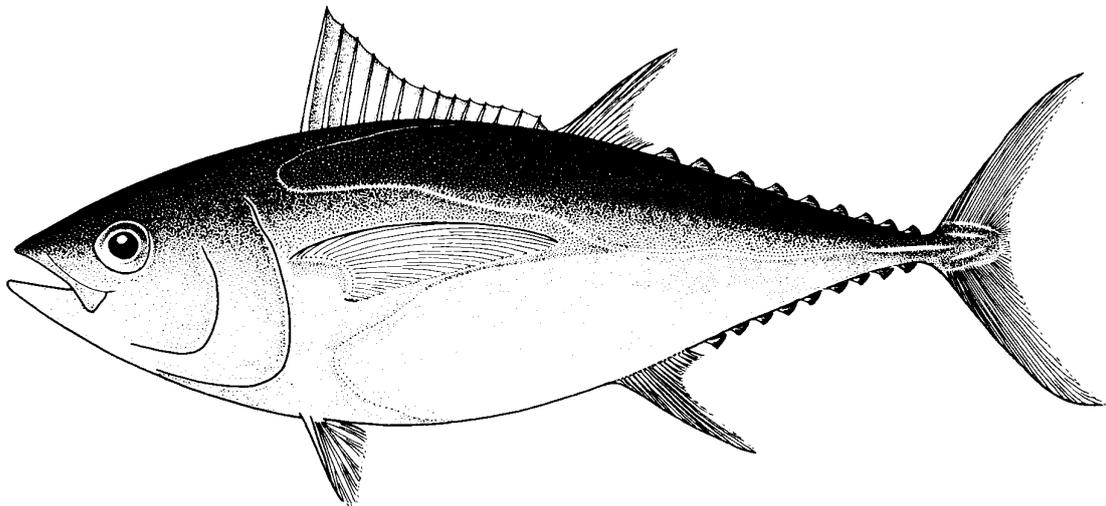




## **Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observer (PIRFO) Debriefing Policy**



as reviewed, approved and recommended at the

**FIRST PIRFO DEBRIEFING WORKSHOP**

Cairns, Australia

15<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> July 2010



## **Background**

A regional debriefing policy was first developed for, and reviewed, approved and recommended at the 6th Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observer Coordinators' Workshop (ROCW) held in Honiara in January 2006. The policy was called the Western and Central Pacific Island Observer Programmes Regional Observer Debriefing Policy. Since 2006 there have been major movements in observer activity in the region not least of which are: the adoption of the WCPFC CMM 2008-01 prescribing 100% observer coverage of purse seine vessels and 5% coverage of longline vessels; and development of Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observer (PIRFO) Certification and Training Standards for the PIRFO Observers and Debriefers that work for the Pacific Island members of FFA and SPC that have been endorsed for use at the 67<sup>th</sup> Forum Fisheries Council (FFC) meeting in May 2008. The standards include a PIRFO Certification and Training Policy Manual that outlines the make-up of a Certification Management Committee (CMC), charged with overseeing the certification of observers, observer debriefers and observer trainers.

Addressing the immediate demand for a five plus fold increase number of trained observers has fully occupied Pacific Island Observer Programme support staff since the inception of CMM 2008-01 at the expense of development of the debriefing processes that should accompany that increase. In recognition of this predicament there was call from the 9<sup>th</sup> ROCW in Noumea in September 2009. The US National Marine Fisheries Service and the WCPFC ROP responded by offering to host and facilitate a regional debriefing workshop to develop a plan of action that will lead to a satisfactory programme of debriefing. This workshop provided the ideal opportunity to review and update this regional debriefing policy.

## **Rationale**

PIRFO Observer Programme Managers and Coordinators are responsible to ensure that data collected by their observers fully accomplishes the goals of their programme, meet WCPFC obligations, and is of consistent high standard. For observer programmes working to PIRFO guidelines, providing rigorous and regular debriefing to their observers is a required step in this process.

Debriefing provides a mechanism to:

- quickly report, and action if necessary, critical incidents that took place on the trip;
- give observers timely direct feedback on how they can improve their data;
- flag data that does not meet the specific quality requirements of data users;
- give Observer Coordinators feedback on their observers performance;
- verify data forms before distributing them to other agencies (SPREP, FFA, SPC, etc);
- explore, through questioning, if additional information can be gathered about the trip;
- judge if the quality of the data has suffered through harassment of the observer;
- assess the skills and experience for pay and promotion purposes;
- find out if special consideration is necessary for future placements on that or like vessels

Whenever possible, debriefing should be carried out personally between a certified, skilled observer debriefer and the observer. It is important to regularly fully debrief all observers at any experience level.

## Policy

Only PIRFO *certified debriefers* trained to minimum regional certification standards can carry out debriefing. Trained national coordinators and PIRFO recognised staff from relevant supporting regional organisations may provide debriefing assistance if available when locally certified debriefers are otherwise unavailable.

Observer programmes working under the PIRFO umbrella may choose to utilise this regional debriefing policy or to develop national policies that encompass the minimum guidelines that this policy describes. However, if developing a national policy, PIRFO programmes will accept an initial debriefing by certified debriefers of other programmes and can follow up with further debriefing according to their own policy under further arrangements made by the relevant programme.

To facilitate timely debriefing PIRFO Observer Programmes are to instruct their observers that data and journals must be ready for review as soon as they reach port on completion of each trip, whether or not they are expecting to continue working on the same vessel on a subsequent trip.

Observer programmes working under PIRFO umbrella should endeavour to get agreements in place that will address the administrative needs for their observers to be debriefed in foreign ports.

A cadre of certified debriefers must be built up over time within a programme with a recommended eventual goal of having one full or part-time (active observer) debriefer for every five active observers. Programmes must endeavour to ensure their programmes do not drop below a ratio of one debriefer to ten observers including a corps of full-time debriefers with staffing arrangements in place to ensure that debriefers are available at all times in busy ports of unloading and transhipping.

Observer debriefing encompasses an array of feedback and interactive communication activities from the time an observer first leaves the vessel until the observer data is processed. This includes pre-debriefing and initial review of observer data, full face-to-face debriefing and more remote feedback provided from the processing of that data.

Debriefing is the most important tool in observer data quality control and it takes time to develop a pool of certified debriefers. PIRFO Observer Programmes must therefore ensure that adequate incentives are in place to maintain high quality observer debriefers.

Regular review of PIRFO debriefing procedures and tools will be undertaken to ensure that debriefing processes meet with the latest expectations for data quality and to ensure that current debriefing procedures continue to function well.

Debriefing standards will be overseen by the PIRFO Certification Management Committee (CMC)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the PIRFO Certification and Training Manual, August 2009

## **When to debrief**

An observer must be fully debriefed immediately after completing a trip on a particular gear type for the first time.

A full debriefing should take place after every trip as soon as possible after an observer disembarks. Unless it will delay their confirmed return flight, observers arriving in foreign ports should be debriefed at their port of arrival. Programmes working under the PIRFO umbrella agree that their observers can be debriefed by PIRFO certified debriefer from any programme working under the PIRFO umbrella provided suitable administrative arrangements are in place.

In situations where rapid back-to-back trips make it difficult for an observer to be debriefed fully between trips a debriefing must take place after no more than three trips have been undertaken or after the completion of a trip during which an observer has passed three months since last being fully debriefed. There must always be a preliminary debriefing and review of data for every trip between such back to back trips.

PIRFO debriefing protocols involve a two step process that may be carried out either separately or combined, depending on the circumstances. The first step involves a minimum requirement for an observer arriving back in port that their GEN-3 form (Vessel Trip Monitoring Form) is reviewed and the observer is engaged face-to-face to establish whether critical incidents requiring urgent follow up occurred during their trip. Paper/data management checks, observer welfare and urgent updating issues would normally be carried out at this stage. The second step requires an observer to sit down with a certified debriefer to fully review all the observer data.

A PIRFO debriefer debriefing an observer from a different PIRFO Observer Programme should endeavour to first contact the observer's own Observer Programme to confirm whether they want the debriefing to take place, as ultimately the boarding programme will be responsible for the completion of the debriefing.

## **When personal debriefing is not possible**

If debriefing in the presence of the observer is not possible for some unforeseen reason the observer still needs to receive a copy of a completed debriefing form as soon as possible after the trip data has been evaluated. However, as many of the questions in a standard debriefing need a personal response from the observer, this method of debriefing should be avoided whenever possible. Observer Coordinators and managers are urged not to be tempted to forego debriefing for any reasons if it is at all possible to carry out the debriefing. Regional fisheries agencies charged with providing observer programme support should have back-up observer debriefing services as a high priority item in their work programmes.

## Placements

Taking time to place observers on vessels in a considered manner can also help to improve the quality of the data observers produce. Fast and hurried boarding may result in poorer data quality. While vessel schedules often dictate that observer placements are arranged at the last minute it is recognised that observers who are given time to gather their equipment and forms properly, reflect on their previous errors, and who benefit from a pre-trip briefing session, including guidance on data collection, will ultimately produce better data.

A proper placement meeting at actual time of boarding is also important. This provides an opportunity for a formal introduction between the vessel captain, observer and possibly the vessel owner or fishing company representative. Here, the role of the observer is explained and the relative responsibilities and duties of observer and vessel with regards to the upcoming observer work are fully aired in the presence of a senior fisheries officer or suitably qualified senior observer. License checks, instruction in GPS use and safety equipment checks are also important at this time.

PIRFO programmes are encouraged to use the standardised placement procedures available to them. At placement meetings observers should be reminded of obligations to seek debriefing meetings as soon as possible after their return to port, regardless of the port they land at.

### Interim actions

The Regional Observer Debriefing Policy is a recommended goal for all observer programmes. Although the goal is to implement the Policy in full as soon as possible it is acknowledged that full debriefing for many observer trips in some programmes will not be achievable immediately, either through funding limitations or time constraints for national coordinators in emerging programmes. There are also few experienced observers with the minimum required certification pre-requisites. However, having a debriefer available right from the outset of new and emerging programmes significantly reduces the number of major errors that observers make.

Interim options are:

- the service is provided by the new National Observer Coordinator; or
- recruit a debriefer from outside until the national observer programme can provide its own debriefers; or
- regional Fisheries support organisations provide backup observer debriefing services.

Observer programmes should train new observers at a rate which reflects the amount of rigorous and continued debriefing they can provide. Basic training can be used to identify candidates for the role of future debriefers.

## Debriefer Certification

Debriefing certification (and decertification) will be overseen by the PIRFO CMC.

Only *certified debriefers* should carry out debriefing. Trained national coordinators, along with staff from SPC's OFP and FFA, can also help with debriefing when time is available and locally certified debriefers are otherwise unavailable. Do not use non-certified debriefers even if the nominated personnel have considerable sea-time. Extended sea-time is not a good sole indicator of proficient data skills and communication skills. Fisheries personnel with limited or no observer sea-time also do not have the necessary experience to be good observer debriefers even if they are very competent in other fisheries areas. A familiarity with observer duties is very important for understanding and reading between the lines if investigating certain potential observer data issues. Debriefing certification should be considered as another step in an observer's career ladder providing further motivation to observers to improve the quality of their data in order to be eligible for debriefing certification.

Debriefing certification needs to be fishing gear-type specific. Observers can become debriefers for one or more gear types but must be certified for each gear type separately.

### Debriefer certification requirements

To apply for 'debriefing certification training' in a particular gear type observers will need:

1. minimum sea-time experience with that gear type as shown in the following table:

Gear type	(required sea-days)		
	1 <sup>st</sup> certification		2 <sup>nd</sup> and subsequent certifications
	as fully functional observer only	as fully functional observer plus other	as fully functional observer
Purse seine	150 days	100 + 100 days	50 days
Longline	75 days	40 + 100 days	30 days
Pole-and-line	40 days	25 + 100 days	20 days

2. to have undertaken a minimum number of observer trips with that gear type from which near perfect data (under current PIRFO guidelines) has been compiled (see following table):

All gear types	(required near perfect trips)	
	1 <sup>st</sup> certification	2 <sup>nd</sup> and subsequent certifications
	3 trips on different vessels	1 trip

3. a written recommendation from an Observer Coordinator or an Observer Manager, for which the observer has completed at least three trips on any gear type, that the observer has good communication skills, has the motivation to provide good and honest advice to colleagues, and is likely to continue with observer-related work.
4. be able to provide at least one other referee that will confirm that the applicant is of good character and has the communication skills and motivation to provide good and honest advice to their colleagues. This other referee could be an Observer manager or Coordinator from another programme (perhaps regional programme) with which the observer has worked, an observer trainer, some other senior fisheries staff member with which the observer has worked, or similar person.
5. Once requirements 1-4 above are adequately met the applicant will be offered and must satisfactorily complete competency based training (CBT) in debriefing skills carried out by appropriate CMC endorsed personnel. This will include training in:
  - understanding how data is subsequently used by compliance personnel
  - understanding how data is subsequently used by scientific personnel
  - recognising, differentiating and prioritising the urgency and importance of incidents, critical incidents and infringements and how and when to follow up on such reports
  - recognising common errors made by observers
  - using the tools provided for debriefing
  - interpersonal communication skills
  - tricks of the trade

## **Certification**

Once all the requirements and training described previously have been completed and assessed satisfactorily successful applicants will be certified according to guidelines outlined in the PIRFO Certification and Training Policy Manual. They will then be technically capable and qualified to debrief any observer that disembarks from a vessel of the gear type for which they are certified no matter which of the PIRFO programmes that the disembarking observer works for in the region<sup>2</sup>.

## **Maintenance of certification**

Debriefers are the main source of training for observers once their basic training is completed. Hence observer debriefers must stay up to date with data collection and protocol changes and certified observer debriefers must attend any upgrade training opportunities that will be provided from time-to-time in order to maintain their certification status.

To maintain certification debriefers should complete a minimum of one debriefing per 12 month period on a vessel of each gear type that they wish to continue debriefing.

To maintain certification debriefers should complete one observer trip per 24 month period on a vessel of each gear type that they wish to continue debriefing.

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<sup>2</sup> Although political and security reasons may occasionally prevent inter-programme cooperation of this nature, under usual circumstances Observer Programme Managers and Coordinators can be comfortable that their observers can be quickly and adequately debriefed in any port that has a properly certified observer debriefer.

### **Evaluation of Current Competency**

Select experienced debriefers will be offered intense three-week training to fully certify them as PIRFO debriefers and equip them with the skills necessary to evaluate the current competency of other active debriefers in their own programmes. The recommendations of those debriefers will be reviewed by the PIRFO CMC with a view to automatically certifying the debriefers on the basis of current competency.

### **Decertification**

A certified debriefer for a particular gear type will, upon formal notification, be decertified and no longer eligible to debrief observers from that gear type for the following reasons:

1. they have not conducted a debriefing for a period of greater than 12 months;
2. their debriefing results have been compared against the trip data in a randomly selected trip audit and found to be, in the eyes of SPC and/or FFA staff, sub-standard;
3. they do not undertake debriefer upgrade training when it is offered in their region;
4. they have not undertaken a trip on the gear type that they debrief from for a period of greater than 24 months

#### *Notes on de-certification*

- *de-certification requires formal notification following a review of the circumstances involved with particular view to ensuring that effective debriefers are not unnecessarily removed from the debriefer pool*
- *if a debriefer's work has been deemed unsatisfactory by a single person that debriefer can, if they wish, appeal to have another person approved by the PIRFO CMC re-evaluate the work*
- *if a valid cause prevents a debriefer from attending an offered upgrade training, resulting in decertification of that debriefer, all reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that one extra upgrade training opportunity will be made available to the then ex-debriefer as soon as possible*

### **Recertification**

1. as long as the quality of previous debriefings has been of good standard, a debriefer who has been decertified under decertification reasons 1 and 4, above, can be recertified following a refresher interview with a staff member of SPC, FFA or National Observer Programme endorsed by the PIRFO CMC;
2. a debriefer decertified because the quality of their work had been considered unsatisfactory (decertification reason 2., above) may be recertified under the following conditions:
  - the Coordinator or Manager under which they usually work provides a written recommendation that the ex-debriefer be considered for re-training
  - the ex-debriefer successfully undertakes a second training and assessment programme as described in section 5 of the 'certification requirements' when next such a training is offered in their country.
3. a debriefer who was de-certified because they did not attend an offered upgrade training will be recertified as soon as such upgrade training is next carried out



## **Observer Debriefing Financial Considerations - Options and Recommendations**

Payment for debriefing, which only *certified* debriefers can be eligible to receive, should be sufficiently attractive to ensure debriefers will strive hard to maintain their certification status. It should be at the very least equal to one day's sea-going rate for an experienced observer. However, a payment scheme should not put off senior observers from continuing to go to sea. A standard fee is thought to be preferable to an hourly rate however there may be a basis for linking the fee to the gear type or trip length. The total time needed to debrief an observer trip will depend both on the length of the observer trip and the quality of the observer data.

Observer programmes should consider the cost of debriefing when working on budgets.

### **Costs of debriefing**

Observer programme managers should include the costs of debriefing in their annual budgets. Such costs should be factored in at the trip level (i.e. – so much per trip for debriefing).

It is recommended that a central debriefing fund is established to help to pay for debriefing observers who have come from other observer programmes. When debriefers work with observers from different observer programmes they can then be paid a regional observer debriefing rate.

### **Debriefing for purpose of observer payment**

Debriefing can be used to evaluate observer payment on the basis of data provision, data quality and promptness of submitting data. It is recommended that payments to observers at the completion of a trip should not be made until after debriefing is complete. It is also recommended that the rate observers are paid reflects the amount of quality data that they produce rather than just the number of sea-days that they complete.

Contracts for observers who fail to produce acceptable data after two or three rigorous debriefings should be reconsidered.

Observer programmes should consider the cost of debriefing when working on budgets.

## **A suggested regional observer payment scheme**

To facilitate the possibility that observer debriefers may be asked to debrief observers from other programmes and that there may be need for cross programme compensation to pay for such service it is recommended that a common regional debriefer payment scheme be adopted. This can also provide a template for national programmes to set up their own debriefer payment scheme.

The following three stage payment scheme is suggested:

(rates used are for example purposes only and have not been endorsed by any particular group)

1. \$20.00 paid per trip; plus
2. \$10.00 paid for each 10 sea-days<sup>3</sup> in the trip, or any part thereof (up to 50 days) plus
3. \$5.00 is paid for every 10 sea-days, or part thereof, over 50 days in the trip.

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<sup>3</sup> Sea-day refers to calendar days and includes the day that the vessel departed port (or upped anchor) and the day that the vessel returned to port regardless of the time of departure or arrival.