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The use of electronic monitoring within longline fisheries in the western and central Pacific Ocean: implications for international data collection, analysis and reporting

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Abstract

At-sea observers have historically been used to collect fishery-dependent data to support scientific analyses that inform management decision-making. However, the associated financial and logistical costs of observer programs have often led to lower levels of coverage than anticipated or considered optimal. Through a combination of video and/or sensors, electronic monitoring (EM) has the potential to address some of the limitations within at-sea observer programs and facilitate adequate data collection to support management decision-making, particularly in longline fisheries. In the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) tuna longline fisheries, where observer coverage has historically been low (<5% of total effort), the advent of EM technology has been perceived as a way of meeting their international data collection and exchange obligations under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). However, the complete or partial replacement of at-sea observers with EM at a national level may lead to a range of data continuity issues, with flow on effects in the provision of scientific analyses and advice at an international level. We use the WCPFC as a case-study to review the use of EM as a data-collection tool in longline fisheries by examining the WCPFC regional observer program (ROP) minimum standard data fields for longline fisheries, their current scientific application and the capability of EM to collect this data now and in the future. We frame this review in the context of member State requirements under international law and the recognition by the WCPFC that EM is likely to form a major component of future research and monitoring programs in the WCPO longline fisheries.

Key words: *fisheries management, electronic monitoring, cameras, at-sea observers, data, WCPFC, longline, tuna*