

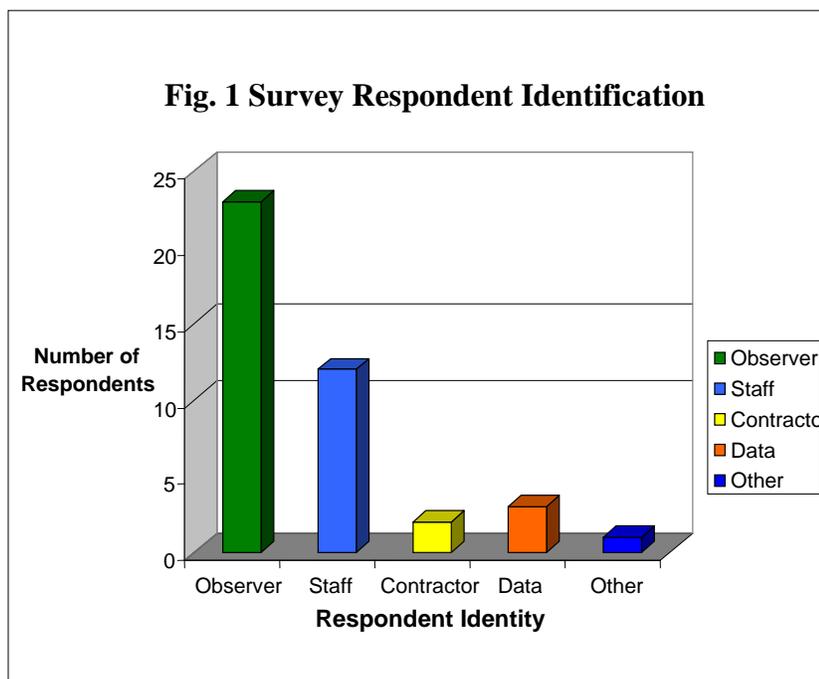
2008 Wages and Benefits Committee Findings

For a full report of all of the work of the OPWG up until July 2008, please navigate to the [2008 OPWG Report](#). This document holds only the work of the Wages and Benefits Committee of the OPWG up until July 2008.

2007 Survey Respondent Identification

We received 45 responses to the 2007 OPWG survey, with responses originating from 12 different countries. The scope of respondents' experience has been quite geographically broad, spanning across many of the world's seas.

Our aim was to reach the stakeholders with the most vested interests in observer employment practices, with our main emphasis on hearing from observers. Of the 45 responses, 61% were submitted by Observers, 30% from agency Staff members, 7% from Data Analyst /end users, and 2% from a source Other than these options (see Fig.1).



Wages and Benefits Analysis Highlights

The following were highlighted by 2007 OPWG Survey respondents in terms of positive responses (combined Works Well and Desire percentage), indicating a positive view:

1. **Paid Trainings and Debriefings (96%)** - Observers are provided compensation for attending trainings and debriefings related to their profession
2. **Reimbursables** - Observers are reimbursed for **travel (95%)** to and from a vessel, and **lodging (89%)** and **food (91%)** allowances when deployed.

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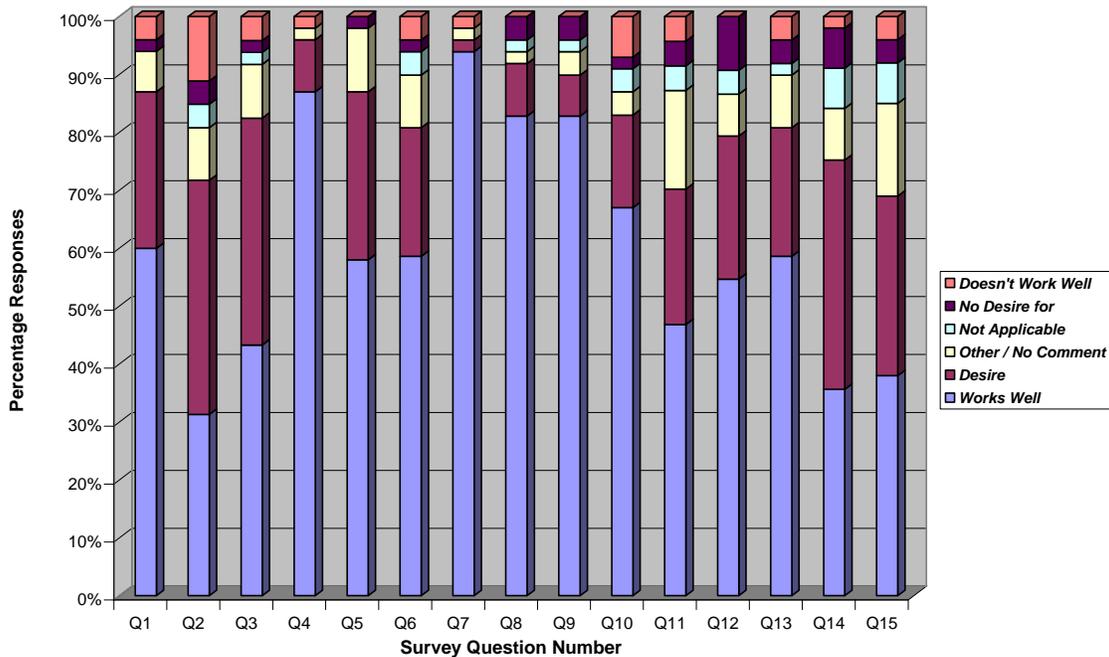
3. **“Stand-by” Land Based Pay (87%)** - Observers are compensated for while on land in between vessel deployments
4. **Experience-based Compensation (87%)** – Observers’ salary / wages are based upon their working experience
5. **Health Insurance (83%)** - Observers are either provided with health insurance or are compensated so that they may provide it on their own.

Wages and Benefits Complete Analysis

The following is an analysis of responses to each question raised in the *Wages and Benefits* section of the 2007 OPWG Survey.

The following figure graphically presents survey responses, in terms of percentages, per listed question in the *Wages and Benefits* section of the 2007 OPWG Survey:

Fig.1 Survey Analysis Results - Wages and Benefits Committee



Question 1. Experience-based compensation system:

In the majority of professions, career progression is achieved through a combination of training, qualifications and experience. The fisheries observer profession does not differ in this regard. The importance of this issue was reflected in the survey results for this question.

This issue was viewed positively by respondents; 60% felt that the application of experience based remuneration systems *worked well* and 27% thought that such systems would be useful to the professional development of observers (*desire* response). Just 2%

indicated *no desire* for (one respondent) – but this is thought to be an anomalous answer (perhaps the question was not well understood).

Recommendations: Whilst there are no immediate recommendations on this issue, experience-based compensation systems should be taken into consideration in any future work on developing international standards for the profession

Question 2. Performance-based bonuses and / or awards:

This question is less clear, since the application of performance based bonuses or awards may in fact have a deleterious effect on the profession (especially in compliance-based programmes). Such bonuses, if they are applied, need to be carefully planned and any negative effects which might be generated by them should be considered. That such systems are not as universally applied as those referred to in Question 1, is evident from the survey results.

31% of respondents thought that in their experience such systems *work well*, 40% of respondents felt that such systems might be useful to the development of the profession (*desire* response) and 11% felt that such systems *do not work well*.

Question 3. Experience transferability (between programmes):

Similarly to Question 1, the issue of the transferability of experience is fundamental to career development. This is reflected in the survey results.

42% of respondents indicated that experience transferability *works well* in their experience and 38% felt that it would be useful to the professional development of observers (*desire* response). 9% of respondents chose the *no comment* option.

Question 4. Paid trainings and debriefings:

Fisheries observers should reasonably expect to receive some form of remuneration for training and debriefing periods, since they are giving up their time for the profession and should be duly compensated for this. A strongly positive response to this question in the survey reflects this view.

87% of respondents indicated that in their experience being in receipt of payment for trainings and debriefings *works well* and 9% expressed a *desire* for such a provision. Being that such a high percentage of respondents have indicated *works well*, may be indicative that this practice has been adopted by the majority of programmes as a norm.

Recommendations: The OPWG should undertake further research into the provision of paid trainings and debriefings, by providing a similar question in the planned *focused interview* work for the 2009 conference.

Question 5. land-based ‘stand-by’ pay:

This question is a little more difficult to consider. Many observer jobs are subject to seasonality – a feature of the fisheries themselves, or management related restrictions such as closed seasons and / or effort control. This means that observer work can be highly irregular. Many observers deal with this by moving from fishery to fishery as opportunities open and close due to the various factors which affect the fisheries. The issue of land-based ‘stand-by’ pay can be a means of introducing stability into an otherwise unstable profession. The drawbacks of such a system however, can mean that an observer is tied to a given fishery / agency / Government department, and would have little opportunity to augment experience with time spent on other programmes.

For this question, 58% of respondents indicated that in their experience ‘stand-by’ pay systems *work well*, 29% expressed a *desire* for such a system and 11% chose not to comment.

Recommendations: The OPWG should continue to look into the practical realities of land-based ‘stand-by’ pay and continue to gauge the views of the profession.

Question 6. Year-round employment:

Again, this is a difficult question to be general about, since there are many variables which can affect an observer’s view of the attractiveness or otherwise of year-round work.

Some 80% of respondents gave positive responses to this question (58% works well and 22% desire). This indicates that, in general, observers have a favourable viewpoint to obtaining year-round work.

Recommendations: The OPWG should continue to undertake research into the possible mechanisms which might be developed to ensure year-round work – including the transferability of experience referred to in Question 3.

Question 7. Reimbursed / provided travel to / from vessel:

This issue should be a given, unless there are specific provisions in the observer salary which cover an allowance for transport.

Some 95% of respondents gave a positive response to this question (93% works well and 2% desire), indicating that travel costs appear to be provided in the large majority of programmes of respondents’ experience.

Recommendations: It is usual, and perfectly reasonable to take the view that once an observer leaves his or her home to undertake an assignment, they should be regarded as ‘on hire’ and all expenses related to that activity should be reimbursed at cost.

Question 8. Reimbursed/provided food/per-diem on land:

For the reasons outlined in Question 7, such costs whilst ‘on hire’ should be reimbursed to the observer. The same general points apply also to Question 9.

82% of respondents indicated that this provision *works well*, 9% indicated a *desire* for reimbursement of food costs and 4% indicated *no desire*.

Question 9. Reimbursed/provided lodging:

Lodging costs should also be reimbursed to an observer whilst ‘on hire’. These related issues elicited similar responses during the survey.

In this case, 82% of respondents indicated that reimbursement of lodging costs *works well* in their experience, 7% expressed a *desire* for this, and 4% indicated *no desire*.

For questions 8 and 9, those who have indicated *no desire* are staff, not observers.

Question 10. Health Insurance for Observers:

If it is accepted that ‘Health Insurance’ includes accident insurance, then there is most certainly a need for this in the observer profession. Moreover, in many countries, the provision of health and safety insurance to employees is a legal obligation. Fishing vessels are highly dangerous workplaces, and fisheries observers are exposed to the same hazards and dangers as the fishermen themselves. It is for that reason that health and safety insurance provision to the fisheries observer whilst ‘on hire’ is absolutely vital.

For the survey, 67% of respondents indicated that the issue of health insurance *works well* in their experience, 16% indicated a *desire* for this provision, 4% felt it was *not applicable* and 7% indicated that the provision *doesn’t work well*.

Recommendations: Given that insurance is such an important issue, it is recommended that the OPWG follows up on this issue through the forum of *focused interviews* planned for the 2009 conference.

Discussion Points: That some observers believe the provision of health insurance as not applicable and others do not see this provision working well, are both causes for concern. The recommended follow-up should seek to identify the underlying reasons for these trends.

Question 11. Retirement Plan for Observers:

Should observers be provided with a retirement plan by their employers? If observers as a professional group of people aspire to the development of a long-term career, then perhaps yes. If however, observers are interested only in doing the work for a short time, to gain experience to secure a permanent job, or earn money for traveling, servicing student debt etc., then perhaps not.

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Given the ambiguity of the issues surrounding this question, the survey results are not particularly surprising, with 44% of respondents indicating that in their experience, this provision *works well*, 22% have indicated a *desire* for the provision and 16% chose not to comment.

Discussion Points: What are the professional aspirations of fisheries observers as a group? Do they prefer to remain with one / company / agency throughout their careers, or do they enjoy moving around for the varied experience it gives? If the latter, what about the transferability of pension schemes? Are different employers able to contribute to the same scheme, or must the observer maintain several schemes with the various employers for whom he or she might work during the course of the year?

Question 12. Paid Vacation and Holidays for Observers:

This question sought to gauge the views of respondents on the issue of paid holidays for observers. This of course relates to the issues of stability, year-round employment etc. There are two main ways in which observers are employed: firstly, as established employees paid a twelve-month salary, with all of the usual benefits of employment such as paid vacation etc. In such cases, observers may be paid a per diem augmentation for days spent at sea undertaking observation duties. Secondly, observers may be employed on a contract basis for the period of observation. Under such contract conditions, the contract ceases when the period of observation ceases and fees paid during the observation period are deemed fees-in-full, and it is for the observer to cover his or her costs for periods between contracts. Permutations of these employment systems may exist.

The survey results indicate that 53% of respondents felt that in their experience, paid vacation systems *work well*, 24% expressed a *desire* for such systems, 7% had *no comment* to make and 9% had *no desire for* a system of paid vacation. Without detailed information regarding the employment conditions of all respondents, it is not possible to infer much from these results.

Recommendations: In any future work on international standards for the fisheries observer profession, the OPWG should look into the issue of paid vacations in greater detail.

Question 13. Disability and sick leave for Observers:

It is usual in employment law, for there to be provision for disability and sick leave. Even under short term contracts, such provision should also be made. Of course, not all coastal states' legal systems will make provision for this.

The results of the survey indicate a generally positive view of this provision, as one would expect. 58% of respondents indicated that such provisions *work well* in their experience, 22% indicated a *desire* for the provision and 9% had *no comment* to make.

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Recommendations: The issue of disability / sick leave should be fed into any future work on international standards for the profession.

Question 14. Dental Insurance for Observers:

This question sought to gauge the views of respondents as to whether observers should be provided with a dental insurance provision as part of their employment package. One would expect views on this matter to be highly variable as experiences, cultures, policies etc. differ greatly throughout the various coastal states in which fisheries observer programmes are operated. The survey results reflect this.

36% of respondents indicated that such provisions *work well*, 40% expressed a *desire* for the provision of dental insurance, 9% made *no comment*, 7% felt that the issue was *not applicable* and 7% had *no desire* for this provision.

As one might expect, the view of respondents was in majority positive, though without further detailed information, nothing may be inferred.

Discussion Points: What are the features of the programmes which offer dental insurance to their observers? What are the employment conditions? Can they be standardised?

Question 15. Life Insurance for Observers:

This question is linked to Question 10 (Health Insurance). Insurance cover provided to fisheries observers whilst ‘on hire’ should always contain a provision for death benefit. The points raised in the overview of Question 10 are reiterated here. There should always be the provision of insurance cover to observers whilst ‘on hire’ – and such insurance should always include the provision for death benefit.

For the survey results, 38% of respondents indicated that the provision of life insurance *works well*, 31% expressed a *desire* for such provision, 16% had *no comment* to make and 7% felt that this issue was *not applicable*.

Recommendations: The planned *focused interviews* for the 2009 conference should include a detailed question on the issue of the provision of insurance cover to fisheries observers.

Discussion Points: It is a cause of some concern that 23% of respondents to the survey either had no comment to make or felt that the issue of life insurance was not applicable. During the work for the 2009 conference, it is imperative that this issue is examined in detail.