The
Mail Buoy

A publication of the Association for Professional Observers
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NOP-Funded Observers for 2007 IFOC

APO Staff

Following, is a list of the observers (in alphabetical order by last name) who have been selected to receive funding by the National Observer Program (NOP) to attend the 5th International Fisheries Observer Conference (IFOC)[1] in Victoria, British Columbia, from May 15th – May 18th 2007:

1. **Evan Bing-Sawyer**	Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC)
2. **John Combs**	Pacific Islands Regional Observer Program (PIRO)
3. **S. J. B. Gulak**	Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC)
4. **G. F. Hinteregger**	Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC)
5. **Brad Justin**	Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC)
6. **Amanda Kardas**	Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)
7. **Tim Lescher**	Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC)
8. **Neal McIntosh**	Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)
9. **Heather Reid**	Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC)
10. **Jason Vestre**	Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC)

Each selected observer will present his or her selected abstract at the 2007 IFOC either by way of a panel speech or by way of a poster presentation. Please join me in congratulating all NOP funded observers and wish them good fortune at the conference in May. This list was provided to the APO by Teresa Turk of the US National Observer Program (NOP). If you have any questions regarding the NOP selection process, please contact Teresa: Teresa.Turk@noaa.gov .

[1] www.internationalobserverconference.com

APO Observer Housing Sponsorships for 2007 IFOC

APO Staff

The APO is sponsoring lodging for up to **6** national or international observers who are planning to attend the 5th International Fisheries Observer Conference (IFOC). We've reserved an entire house (all three suites)!!! Ocean Island Suites[2] is only a 15 minute walk to the conference center in downtown Victoria. One suite will be designated for the APO board and the other two suites will be reserved for 3 observers per suite (6 total observers).

Although we don't have the means to provide funding for attending the conference itself, we hope that these housing sponsorships will alleviate a bit of the financial strain for the six sponsored observers who are either planning to fund themselves or will be funded by other sources. Priority consideration will be given to those observers who are not already funded by any other source, though we encourage all to apply. Following are our guidelines in order to be considered for a 2007 IFOC Observer Housing Scholarship:

- You must be an active observer (have observed anywhere in the world within 12 calendar months of the 2007 IFOC)
- You must be registered to attend the 2007 IFOC by the March 31st "Early-bird" deadline and be able to submit proof (receipt) of your commitment to attend.
- Our deadline for submitted Letters of Interest for sponsorships is also **March 31st 2007**.

Please include the following 4 **paragraphs** in your Letter of Interest:

A. Full name and a brief summary of your observing experience (100-200 words).
B. Additional experience pertinent to topics you wish to address (100- 200 words).
C. State your intention for attending the IFOC- how do you plan to be active at the conference (please be thorough here ~ 500 words)
D. By what means do you plan to attend the conference, and how certain are you that you will attend (100-200 words)

Please send all submissions (Word or Adobe format are preferred, but e-mail text is fine), with at least two references, to the APO apo@apo-observers.org. Please address the letter to the "APO Staff" and write "2007 IFOC Housing Sponsorship" in the subject line so we don't mistakenly overlook your submission. Please contact us by any means if you have any problems submitting. We hope to see you in Victoria!

[2] http://www.oisuites.com/suites.html

OBSERVER BIOGRAPHY SERIES:

****** Formerly known as "Observer of the Quarter", the "Observer Biography Series" is a regular quarterly profile of an observer who has done something normal or new (but noteworthy) in the course of their career. Do you know of an observer who you would like to see profiled in our next issue? Contact Paul Wilkins*** pbwilkins@mac.com ***to nominate him or her for the "Observer Biography Series," and help us profile them!***

Stephanie Milne - Keeping Observing Exciting

Paul B. Wilkins; Mail Buoy Associate Editor and US Observer

For this issue, we're profiling Stephanie Milne, a bit of a pioneer in a program that is both biologically and politically at the top of today's headlines - Seismic Marine Mammal Observing. A native of Ontario, Canada, Steph came back from a year of traveling in Australia in 2001 to the prospect of living a "regular life" at home. Ever the adventurous spirit, she first decided to check out the Alaska groundfish program, intending on doing only a couple of contracts before moving up and beyond in the field of Marine Biology. She continued in Alaska for five years where she "loved being sent to tiny ports in the middle of nowhere and working around the unique challenges of each job - the boat with no bathroom, the crew member with bizarre superstitions."

Steph has come to enjoy observing for other reasons as well: "I like having such a unique job and feeling like I am making a contribution to marine conservation. Observing is a really hard job to beat for the time off too. I am addicted to traveling in far away places on my time off where I can live in a little hut for weeks on what I would make in a day on the boats." Stephanie has sold some freelance photos and stories of her work and travels to publications like National Geographic Traveler and Lonely Planet and would love to make that a full time job someday. But for now, she still has observing.

In the autumn of 2005, Stephanie decided that it was time for a change from observing on fishing boats in Alaska. She investigated other observing-like jobs and in early 2006 ended up working as a marine mammal observer on seismic vessels and oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. As a Canadian citizen, Steph was eligible to work in the program with a standard TN visa. In 2004, using an NTL (Notice to Lessees), the Minerals Management Service advised oil land lessees that they were to take into account impact on sensitive species, using NOAA recommendations for protection of marine mammals during seismic operations. Seismic testing vessels use airguns to pulse the bottom and determine the economic viability of suspected oil deposits. Scientists suspect that such testing has a negative impact on marine mammals and the NTL creates the guidelines that vessels must follow in order to minimize this impact. Protocols include having trained marine mammal observers (MMOs) monitoring for marine mammals within the 500m (in proximity to the airguns) exclusion zone.

Two MMOs are required to be on watch at all times during daylight hours for no more than four hours at a time, so most jobs require three observers. Before the vessel starts up its airguns, the MMOs perform a visual survey to ensure that no marine mammals are within the exclusion zone. If after 30 minutes no marine mammals have been detected, the vessel can begin to "ramp-up" its airguns, slowly bringing them up to full power over a period of 20 to 40 minutes. The MMOs maintain watch throughout the day, record marine mammal sighting information in relation to the proximity of the airgun, and then use the NTL guidelines to determine if seismic operations need to be shut down.

Steph had to undergo a thorough NTL training and marine mammal identification before being deployed. MMOs also must take a rigorous marine safety training as well as helicopter crash instruction because many crew changes occur by way of helicopter. Steph said, "I got strapped into a simulator, blindfolded, and then 'crashed' into a pool and flipped upside down. To pass that portion of the class, I had to escape underwater from the wreck!"

Most of the Seismic MMO employment opportunities are in the Gulf of Mexico, but there is also work on boats in Africa, South America and even Alaska. "It's an interesting new area to be an observer, a chance to be a part of the conservation efforts in a new industry and an opportunity to continue working as a biologist in the field meeting new people and seeing new places." The APO highlights Steph this quarter for her dedication to biological data collection and for being at the forefront of this emerging field.

Steph says "It can be a real challenge out on the boat to stay focused on looking for signs of marine mammals but it is worth it when a pod of sperm whales surfaces nearby or a huge pod of dolphins comes over to bow-ride!"

INTERNATIONAL SPECTRUM:

Troubled Swordfish Stocks in the Mediterranean Sea

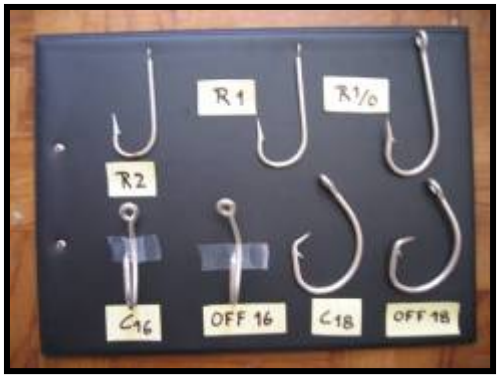
Anabel Colmenero; Observer/Fisheries Scientist; Spain

Presently, no permanent observer program exists in Spain's management area of the Mediterranean Sea. All current fisheries observation is solely based on the select science projects that the government conducts. Last summer, scientists from the Spanish Government, in conjunction with Oceana Europe[3], set to study why 80% of the individual landings of swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) are juveniles (under 120cm) in the Mediterranean Sea Swordfish (pelagic longline) Fishery.

[3] http://www.oceana.org

Over the past 10 years, Spanish Scientists[4] have seen swordfish captures in the Mediterranean increase, but the average size of these individuals has drastically decreased and the bycatch numbers of sea turtles and sharks has significantly increased at the same time. Scientists have determine that the main reason for these trends is because the actual main fishing area, around the Balear Islands, is a spawning and hatchery area for swordfish and is in a high migration area for loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*).

The objective of the 2006 summer study was to investigate ways to avoid sea turtle and shark incidental takes and to decrease or avoid the captures of juvenile swordfish. During the first part of the project, two marine biologists embarked on every single boat of the main Spanish long-liner fleet that aimed to fish in the problematic areas. The project lasted for the entire fishing season (around six months). There, we collected data regarding how different kind of hooks and baits (squid and Mediterranean mackerel) and changes on fishing time and depths, affect the captures of the target (swordfish) species and the bycatch of loggerheads sea turtles and sharks.



I was there only three months because two more observers relieved us the second part of the season. After observing for five years only in Alaska (the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program), this was really quite a different and interesting observer experience for me. Besides collecting fishing area information (date, time, position, depth) and fishing gear (hook and bait used that day), we collected all sorts of biological data from swordfish, like: lengths, weights, sex, measurements of the gonads, and stomach contents. If any loggerhead sea turtles were captured, we would try to unhook it first, tag it, sex it, weight it, and measure it.

We also collected skin and parasites samples from some of the captured turtles. For the rest of the bycatch species, lengths and weights were taken. For analysis purposes, we

[4] Istututo Español de Oceanografía: http://www.ieo.es/inicial.htm

associated what species was caught with the type of hook it was captured on and which bait was used on that hook.

In order to track migration patterns across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, we tagged ten Loggerhead sea turtles with satellite transmitters during the second part of the project. We can also gather information on how long the turtles spend on the surface and under water using these transmitters.

With all the collected data, the Spanish Government would like to help design a sustainable Mediterranean Sea Swordfish Fishery by imposing some longline fishing gear modifications that will increase the species capture selectivity. These changes will benefit both the fishing industry and the human community by providing long term sustainability of the swordfish stock and minimizing the bycatch of sea turtles.

Antarctic Krill Fishery Observers Should be Mandatory

Ebol Rojas; CCAMLR Scientific Observer; Uruguay

In the latest analyzed season (2004/05), the Krill (*Euphausia superba*) fishery constituted 86.42% of all biomass extracted in the CCAMLR (Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources)[5] Conventional area waters. The Krill fishery has been the most important harvested biomass in Antarctica since the 1970s and, from a recent study regarding the application of new capture techniques and processing methods, there is evidence that the potential exists for further development of the Krill fishery in the future[6].

Krill is also an incredibly important worldwide resource (especially in the Southern Oceans) and the health of many species and ecosystems are directly dependent upon the health of the Krill stock. Currently, the Krill biomass is considered to be approximately

[5] http://www.ccamlr.org

[6] Gascón V and Werner R. 2005. "El krill antártico: estudio de caso sobre las implicaciones de la pesca en el ecosistema". Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition. Puerto Madryn (Argentina), octubre de 2005.

500 million metric tons[7]. Up until the 2000/01 season, all krill captures only corresponded to area 48 (48.1, 48.2 and 48.3), but in recent years krill have been exploited in CCAMLR Areas 41, 48 and 58. Total annual captures over the last ten years have grown from 91,156 tons (season 1995/96) to 127,035 tons (season 2004/05), with a stocking of 106,639 annual tons and captures being quite a bit lower than the 4 million ton capture limit settled by the CCAMLR for Area 48.

Krill is solely captured with mid-water trawls (mesh size > than 22mm). Due to product quality assurance, krill need to be processed in less than three hours from capture. Therefore, the greatest factor that limits the capture rate is the capacity of the ship to fish efficiently and to optimally process the product. And, in the past few years industry has developed new capture methods that are fundamentally dedicated to maximizing the capture/processing rates of Krill. For example, in the 2003/04 season, the Vanuatu flagged FV *Atlantic Navigator* applied a new haulage technique that institutes continuous pumping from the codend of the net. This technique helps avoid the deterioration of the krill and helps to optimize the capture capacity and processing rate of krill[8]. This fishing method has been denominated "continuous fishing system with air-bubbling suspension and suction of capture (CFS)[9].

For the 2003/04 season, the FV *Atlantic Navigator* captured 24.96% of the CCAMLR managed Krill. For the 2004/05 season, they registered a significant capture increase- capturing 38.1% of all CCAMLR managed Krill. The increase in captures may be the result of a greater or improved knowledge of the fishing zones, of the fishing gear, longer time of permanency in the fishing area, and of course an increase in the overall processing rate. Within the last year, the FV *Atlantic Navigator* has been replaced by the FV *Saga Sea*[10], and the company that owns the vessel has plans to build two additional ships and is planning to utilize this advanced capture technology on board these new vessels[11].

The independent and precise determination of fishing activities is one of the most important functions of CCAMLR Scientific Observers. In most cases, the information provided by the Scientific Observers, by way of the newly advanced Observer Electronic

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[7] FAO. 2005. Servicio de Recursos Marinos, Dirección de Recursos Pesqueros. Examen de la situación de los recursos pesqueros marinos mundiales. FAO Documento Técnico de Pesca. No. 457. Roma, p. 260

[8] www.lighthose-foundation.org
[9] http://www.ccamlr.org/pu/E/e_pubs/sa/abs05.pdf
[10] http://www.krillcount.org/issues.html
[11] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/09/25/wkrill25.xml

Logbook technology, is the only reliable estimate of the captures and discards. Fishermen's logbooks often contain incomplete or biased data[12].

Before 2002, the Krill fisheries didn't require capture and effort data reporting- the reporting of data was on an entirely voluntary basis. Being that the Scientific Committee needed detailed information regarding this fishery, the Conservation Measure 23-06 (2002) was adopted and required fishers to report this information. Nevertheless, although an appropriate observation system has been designed for the Krill fishery, there is no current rule that requires all Krill fishers to carry Scientific Observers, and the absence of Scientific Observers on board Krill fishing vessels, may be today's most significant legal loop-hole regarding proper management of this fishery.

On numerous occasions, the Scientific Committee has recommended the presence of Observers upon Krill fishing ships, especially on those vessels utilizing new fishing technology. The work group has asserted the urgent need to assign international Scientific Observers on board all ships fishing Krill (in the Area of the Convention) in order to understand the nature of the fishery, especially regarding the recent changes in the fishing technology and the new processing procedures. But, although most of the members agreed, the work group was not able to reach a consensus on this measure. For instance, some members lobbied for not requiring Scientific Observers on board their vessels, stating their concern for maintaining financial confidentiality. Alternatively, others proposed implementing a pilot (one-year) scientific study, in which each Krill fishing vessel carry a Scientific Observer to administer the tasks that the Scientific Committee habitually requires.

Conclusions:

With the absence of Scientific Observers, absolutely no information is collected from Krill fishing vessels in regards to: target biological data, secondary captures and discards, incidental mortality of birds and marine mammals, mitigation methods for mammal captures, loss of fishing material and waste, sightings of illegally fishing vessels, correct determination of conversion factors and green weight. The information provided by Observers offers the ordination for the Krill fishery, based on the ecosystem focus[13].

[12] http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/V4250S/V4250S00.HTM
[13] http://www.krillcount.org/solutions.html

Without observers, there is a high likelihood of significant bias of critical data needed to properly manage the fishery. For example, without the presence of Uruguayan Scientific Observers (from National Direction of Aquatic Resources, Uruguay), on board the FV *Atlantic Navigator*, the Commission would not have been able to obtain the operational data of that ship using the new fishing system and the associated composition of capture of Krill and have the ability to compare the new method with the historical conventional haulage method[14].

With Krill captures at 86.42% of the entire CCAMLR managed resources in a fishery in constant evolution … with such an important stock to the entire world's marine ecosystem… it's hard to believe that observers are still not mandatory for this fishery.

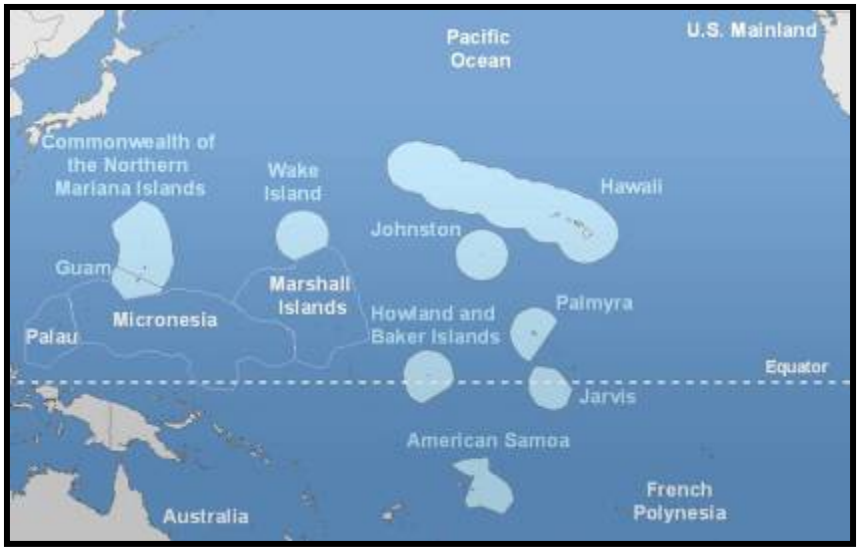
USA REGIONAL UPDATES:

******We greatly depend on volunteered updates from your program. Please, submit stories and commentaries from any national or international observer program.***

The Pacific Islands (USA):

American Samoa Observer Program Update

Richard Kupfer; Samoa Program Coordinator; American Samoa, USA



American Samoa, a group of five volcanic islands and two coral atolls located some 2600 miles south of Hawaii in the South Pacific, is an unincorporated, unorganized territory of the U.S. It includes the eastern Samoan islands of Tutuila, Aunu'u, Rose, the three islands of Manu'a (Ta'u, Olosega and Ofu), and Swain's Islands. About 1000 B.C., Proto-Polynesians established themselves in the islands and their descendants are one of the few remaining native Polynesian societies.

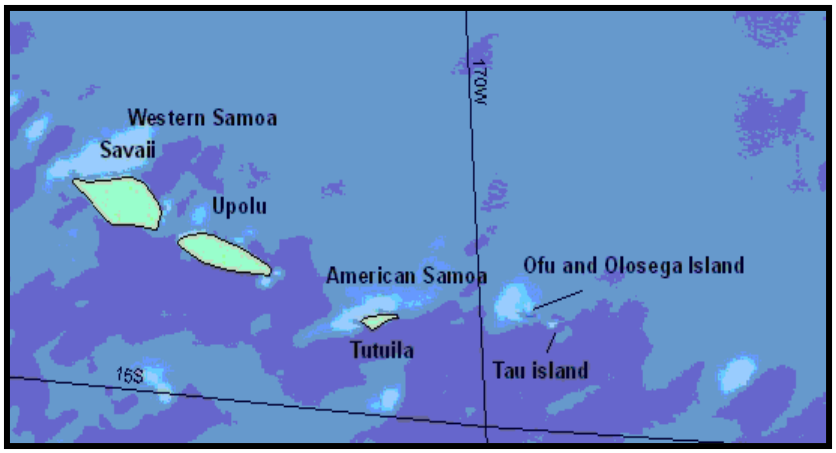
[14] http://www.ccamlr.org/pu/E/e_pubs/sa/abs05.pdf

The Dutch navigator Jacob Roggeveen sighted the Manu'a Islands in 1722, and American Samoa has been a territory of the United States since April 17, 1900, when the High Chiefs of Tutuila signed the first of two Deeds of Cession for the islands to the U.S. (Congress ratified the Deeds in 1929). Swain's Islands came under U.S. administration in 1925.

In April 2006, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Regional Observer Program (PIROP) deployed the first two observers out of Pago Pago, American Samoa (AS). Observers provide coverage for 33 federally permitted longline fishing vessels that fish out of AS for Albacore Tuna. Since this is the first time that observers are being deployed out of AS the Program is using the first year as a time of "discovery" to learn more about fisheries operating out of this isolated US territory.

We have focused our efforts on evaluating the level of interaction between protected species and longline fishing, fleet safety, and bycatch interactions. As of December 2006, 9 observed trips have been completed, yielding an overall coverage level of just over 10%. Observer collected data has demonstrated the diversity of species in AS that reflects all of the same species seen in the Hawaii program and a number of additional South Pacific species that are new to Hawaii-trained observers. This data also shows the definitive need for more protected species related data to help develop a biological opinion that is specific to the resources of this region.

A number of benefits to AS have come with the observer Program; the most significant being the increase in fleet safety. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) Marine Safety Detachment office in Pago Pago, is working very closely with the Program, and has issued the first Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety stickers in over 4 years. This combined effort has increased the number of fishing vessels with safety examination stickers in this fishery by 66%. The Program is helping AS vessels to get safety stickers by assisting the USCG in certified vessel safety drills and instructions, as well as helping vessels correct documented deficiencies. Due to the remote location of AS and limited resources, all vessel placements include vessel safety drills with the observers and the crewmembers. Upon request from the Captain/Owner, the Program also performs safety drills and training regardless of whether an observer is assigned the vessel.



Currently the observer coverage level in AS is about 10%, which is a result of the "**Continuing Resolution**" to NOAA's budget. Once the Program achieves full funding, the coverage rate in AS will be stepped up to 20%.

Like the Hawaii program, AS observers are employed by MRAG Americas Inc[15]. While observer "sea duties" between Hawaii and AS remain essentially the same, AS observers additionally assist with the administrative and logistical duties of both the contractor and the NMFS. Although the AS Program was received with some skepticism at its inception, the AS fishing community has come to realize the associated benefits with our presence, such as fleet safety, increased outreach and education, and steps toward developing a Fishery Management Plan that is specific to the community of American Samoa.

The West Coast (USA):

Recruiting West Coast Groundfish Observers

David Edik; General Manager; Alaskan Observers Inc.

Alaskan Observers, Inc. (AOI) is currently recruiting observers for West Coast Groundfish Observer positions for 2007. Training will begin March 5 in Newport, OR; contracts will run from late March through October of 2007, and Observers will have an opportunity to apply for year-round positions that begin in November or to return to a 7-month position in 2008. Following training, observers will relocate to a port on the coast of Oregon or Washington. Vessels operating in this fishery range in size from 25 to 100 feet, and observers work with a variety of gear types (trawl, longline, pot, and stick gear). Trips are generally from one to five days in length, and Observers can expect to be at sea for an average of 12 days per month. Starting salary is $3450 per month, and medical insurance is provided. For more information, please go to www.alaskanobservers.com, or contact David Edick: by phone- (800) 483-7310 or 206-283-7310; or by e-mail- aoistaff@alaskanobservers.com .

[15] http://www.mragamericas.com

The North Pacific/Alaska Region (USA):

NMFS to Issue Personal EPIRBs to NPGOP Observers

Paul B. Wilkins; Mail Buoy Associate Editor and US Observer

*I*n keeping with many other observer programs in the USA, the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (NPGOP) has recently purchased Personal Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (P-EPIRBs) for issue to all observers in the Alaska groundfish fisheries. ACR Aquafix 406 GPS Personal Locator Beacon P-EPIRBs were chosen because of their small size and ease of use. Once they are manually activated, the batteries last for 24 hours. The P-EPIRBs use the standard 406 Mhz frequency, for position fixing within 2-5 kilometers. In addition, they contain an integrated GPS, which is uncommon in vessel EPIRBS, for increased accuracy to within 100 meters. The unit also includes a 121.5 Mhz homing signal to aid rescuers on the scene.

The P-EPIRBs will be registered to observer contractors because they would have the most up-to-date information as to which boat the observer is assigned to. If a P-EPIRB goes off, the contractor will be contacted and they will relay information about the observer's assignment to the U.S. Coast Guard for use in a potential rescue situation.

According to Greg Morgan, trainer at the Observer Training Center in Anchorage, issuance of the P-EPIRBs will cause some changes in the briefing and debriefing process: "Observers will be required to return their P-EPIRBs upon beginning debriefing. In addition, they must be registered at least two days before a briefing to ensure adequate supply of the P-EPIRBs."

OPINION COMMENTARIES:

Plenty of Time to Sleep When You're Dead

Jon Priest; Former Alaskan, Pacific Island, and Northeast Observer

I would like to preemt this story with a little information about my current state of mind. Two weeks ago my wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. At this tender age, two hours is a good night's sleep after which time she feels compelled to announce to the world that she is hungry and in need of a fresh diaper. At my age (2186 weeks), the two hour plan isn't so satisfying. I love my daughter more than anything else, but sleep deprivation will put anyone in a less than cognitive state. Therefore I ask the reader to allow me a little leeway if this comes off as a bit disjointed.

Our story begins in Hawaii in the Spring of I believe 2001. I had just finished a very pleasant tuna trip somewhere southwest of the islands and was looking forward to a few days in town. I had two or three weeks left on my Hawaii contract after which I thought I might travel for a bit. As it turned out, travel was indeed in my future.

On the last day of my debriefing I received a phone call at the Honoloulu office. Alaska was in desperate need of crab observers for the CDQ opilio tanner crab season. In short, they made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and I had to leave that night at eleven. That evening, I went to the beach with some friends and tried to fit three days of r&r into four hours. After all, “I have a six hour flight ahead of me with nothing to do but sleep,” I thought.

At this point I have to jump back several years and aquiant or re-aquaint everyone with the “bird lady.” When I started working in Alaska, everybody was required to sit through a bird seminar at the beginning of every major season. The first time, the whole experience was very enlightening. By the third or fourth time, it had taken on a punative nature.The bird lady never lost her focus though. She would forge ahead for two or three hours with all the enthusiasm of an acolyte. I tried and failed numerous times to avoid the whole spiel, and I'm sure I wasn't alone. In the end I would have to say that while most people admired the bird lady's conviction and passion, very few shared it.

Now, returning to my northern flight, I borded the plane in Honolulu with my only concern being life-giving sleep. I found my wonderful window seat and very nearly shut my eyes when who should appear but... the bird lady. I'm still not sure why I said anything- perhaps it was my guilt for drifting off during those redundant past sessions. Maybe it was some sort of comraderie - we had certainly shared many hours of what was at least difficult times for me. Whatever the case, rather than just pretend I was asleep, which is what I really needed and wanted to do, I introduced myself. And, we spent the next six hours talking about blue-footed boobies and frigate birds.

When I arrived in Anchorage, someone met me in the airport with all of my sampling gear, and I was on another flight headed for Dutch Harbor within the hour. After one and a half hours of sleep, I briefed and hopped on a boat headed for the Pribalof Islands in the Bering Sea. I didn't unpack anything - my sleeping bag and I melted into my rack. When we got to St. Paul Island, the skipper found me crashed out. The first thing he said to me... “You guys are all the same. All you ever do is sleep.”

Ask Uncle Blobbo: "What Could Go Wrong Now?"

Mark Wormington; North Pacific Observer and APO Board

Dear Uncle Blobbo:

This June, the ocean commissions filed a joint report "From Sea to Shining Sea[16]" and in December, Congress reauthorized the MSFMCA[17]. I even hear that NOAA might be getting some kind of big promotion from Congress by way of the NOAA Organic Act[18] It sounds to me like we are finally getting serious about advancing healthy oceans. With all these ducks in a row, what could go wrong now?

-- Shirley A. Strawman

Dear Shirley:

To set the proper mood, let us first picture US Vice President Dick Cheney shooting ducks. Because creating good policy can be like shooting sitting ducks. Implementing good policy requires that it does not compete with bad policy for priority and adequate funding (i.e. US$563 billion for current military expenditures vs. $US107.6 million for ecosystem management[19]). This in turn requires open, honest and truly representative policy deliberation as well as courageous leadership, both constantly adapting to inevitable changes in the facts on the ground, or more to the point, the facts in the biosphere.

[16] http://jointoceancommission.org/press/press/release0613_assets/seareport.pdf
[17] http://thomas.loc.gov
[18] http://www.agiweb.org/gap/legis109/ocean_cont.html
[19] http://www.warresisters.org/piechart.htm and http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~nbo/FY07_BlueBook/PDFs/NOAAOnePagerFeb7.pdf

Mr. Cheney's fancy shotguns, fine hunting dogs and togs, and storied adventures are, as a matter of record, no guarantee that his hunting plans won't blow up in someone's face. It follows that our best laid political plans should select appropriate tools for capable people approaching the right targets as if government work really matters. **"Missing the targets," calls for altering the plan, beginning with admitting our misses (immediately) and peer reviewing the circumstances of each misfire.** I say "peer review" to emphasize the need for a rational process, as opposed to the campaign-in-the-rear tactics of our great black and-white hopes of partisan law marketing.

It's up to us, Shirley, to address our own shortcomings as ingredients in a half-baked resource management pie. We helped to choose the leaders who chose the leaders of the agencies that employ or certify us. Every marine biologist worth her salt today should be taking personal responsibility toward moving our old economy into our new (degraded) ecology. You, Shirley, have the opportunity to be among a new generation of Founding Mothers who could effect this unavoidable revolution minus the revolutionary war traditions of the yanky-er gender. **The key will be promoting scientific principles and method over pop ideology and corporate P.R.** Perhaps the times are getting a bit riper for not scaring people into needless wars.

Onward Founding Mothers,

Uncle Blobbo

******This is only an excerpt of Uncle Blobbo's complete commentary. For Uncle Blobbo's full-length contribution, please follow the following link:*** ***http://www.observernet.org/obsforum/forumdisplay.php?f=2*** .

Redundancies and Wasted Resources in the North Pacific

Wolfgang Rain; North Pacific and AMLR / CCAMLR Observer

The Archaic Data Entry System and Redundant Data Collection:

The archaic data entry system currently used by the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (NPGOP) can only accept data on a haul-by-haul basis. When this shortcoming was discovered *almost two decades ago*, NMFS personnel in Seattle developed the "proportioning" sequence of calculations as a temporary bandage so that prohibited species plant delivery data could at least be recorded. Unfortunately, no one can use these data as they are presented- we still collectively spend many hours performing and

checking simple but tedious chains of calculations, making sure that the falsified origins of the prohibited species data correspond to haul numbers that observers are required to collect on several various forms.

A further waste of time is when simple transcription errors from proportioning are flagged during debriefing, which necessitates re-calculating data that are meaningless in the first place. It's as much a waste of the debriefers' time as it is observers'. Everyone agrees it is a waste of time and is not scientific. Unfortunately, few people appear to think that this is something that needs direct attention. Personally, I do not appreciate having hours of my life wasted for a bureaucratic oversight that has now become canonized.

This problem could be resolved were the NPGOP to adopt a simple, ubiquitous and highly supported data management program such as Microsoft Excel[20], which is very adaptable to scientific needs, is understood by many different peoples, and can be used in a variety of specialized, automated ways. Further, it can eliminate the need for keypunch checks and other redundancies. For example, the CCAMLR and U.S. AMLR protocol for data entry use Excel for their scientific observers[21]. It is simple, universally accessible and wastes no one's time- leaving our "human resources" to focus on accurate sampling methods, improved species identification, understanding of respective life-histories and habitat requirements, and better data collection that can truly benefit the management of fisheries and marine ecosystems.

Observers are not Secretaries for Economists:

In my opinion, the new "Trip Form," brain-child of NOAA economists, has no direct relevance to the NPGOP. Attentive professional observers already collect or track all of the required information via the OHF, VHF and logbook entries. Using biologists as cheap pencil jockeys to record further redundancies of data that have no bearing on fisheries biology or ecosystem management is absurd. A "Trip" can now mean a month of fishing at sea, or simply a ten-minute move of a vessel from the plant dock to the fuel dock, and observers are given the task of tracking these minutiae. Valid fisheries are indeed all about "economics," but making observers the secretaries for economists is a misuse of observer program resources. In my opinion, the "Trip Form" may be valid as a Special Project, but to now include it in the canon of transcription redundancies required to be completed by all observers is, in a sense, overboard.

Please Don't Waste Our Time:

It can be said that Alaska's fisheries are the best managed and most lucrative in the world. I'm quite sure that without the NPGOP, this would not be the case. But since the passage of the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act, the presence of observers and at-sea collection of high-quality data that focuses on pelagic and benthic biology and Catch Per Unit Effort has only supported the true reason for the relative sustainability (so far) of Alaska's fisheries- *Limiting of fishing effort and reducing habitat destruction.*

[20] http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel/default.aspx
[21] http://www.ccamlr.org

Using the efficacy of observer programs in general as an excuse to create more format complexity and further stiffen a rapidly ossifying bureaucracy is a most counterproductive motive—good only for job maintenance, funneling of ex-vessel landing taxes and other fees on fishermen. Government hiring freezes and budget cuts are often held forth as the reason the NPGOP cannot improve the efficiency and accuracy of data protocol. While there are no resources in the strangled budget to resolve a silly, decades-old waste of time such as prohibited species proportioning, there appears to be plenty of time to establish new forms and put the onus on observers.

Perhaps we might one day look forward to disposing of scientific concerns altogether and learn to remember we're just here to find "job security in a changing fishery." I'd love to help effect some positive and evolutionary change in the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program, but for the moment, enough of my valuable, personal human resource has been wasted.

Wolfgang Rain, "Observer from another Planet"

APO BOARD UPDATES:

2006 Annual APO Board Meeting

APO Staff

The Association for Professional Observers had its 2006 annual Board Meeting in Seattle, Washington on November 14th-15th. The Following APO Board members were all in attendance: Elizabeth Mitchell, Mark Wormington, Keith Davis, Kim Dietrich, and Brad Justin. Paul Wilkins had met with other members the week before this meeting, but could not attend because he was deployed in Alaska. Dave Wagenheim was traveling, but was able to correspond with some members by phone on the 15th. Many decisions upon the future direction of the APO and upon projects we will continue to be working on were finalized during this meeting. Steve Copps, a current NOAA employee who was one of the original founders of the APO, was kind enough to meet with all attending members on November 15th. All members agree that it was an absolute pleasure to have Steve visit us- he gave us a historical perspective of the APO. If you would like to receive a full report of the 2006 APO Board meeting, please contact us at: apo@apo-observers.org.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS AND WEBSITES:

APO website	www.apo-observers.org
ObserverNet Forums	www.observernet.org
International Observer Conferences	www.fisheriesobserverconference.com
National Observer Program	www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop
AMSEA (Marine Safety Instruction)	www.amsea.org
NOAA jobs	www.usajobs.gov
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**** **Mail Buoy** submissions for the next newsletter are due by the middle of **March 2007.***