NPFC-2021-TWG CMSA04-WP13 (Rev. 1)

**Members’ views on an observer program for chub mackerel**

The TWG CMSA03 meeting “discussed the potential establishment of an observer program for chub mackerel and requested the Secretariat to work intersessionally to compile TWG CMSA members’ views regarding the necessity/objective of such a program and potential issues”. The Secretariat reached out to members with the following questions:

* Is it necessary to develop a regional NPFC Observer Program for chub mackerel fisheries?
* If yes, what is the objective of this Observer Program?
* Are there any potential issues associated with the establishment of this Observer Program?

To date, four members provided feedback to the Secretariat.

**CANADA**

We do support the development of an observer program for the chub mackerel fishery. This would be useful for the ongoing stock assessment process (as has been shown by the value of the collections of biological data collected by members already). It is also useful for collecting data on the other priority species that are captured as bycatch, especially as the entry of trawlers into the fishery has the potential to increase catches of non-target species. Finally, Canada is particularly interested in other species captured in the chub mackerel fishery, particularly salmon and other bycatch species. Thus, we would encourage members to consider an observer program for this fishery (and others).

**CHINA**

For the time being, we think it’s not that necessary or urgent to develop a regional NPFC observer program specific to the Chub mackerel fisheries.

From a scientific perspective, the objective of an observer program is to collect data necessary for conducting stock assessments. Before that, the available data should be reviewed whether they are enough or substantial to perform a stock assessment. Right now, there are well-known structures for collecting Chub mackerel data mostly based on logbooks, ports surveys and other ways for the members. Therefore, we think the current available data can meet the demand of stock assessments and other scientific research.

The development of Observer Program is much complicated, with high cost and concerns over compliance-related issues. There are also many issues and work for TCC and Commission, out of our scientists’ reach. In the TWG CMSA04, we think it’s best to follow the work plan adopted by TWG CMSA03 and SC05. The observer program is not the priority issue of TWG CMSA, as we consider it to be out of our work plan. At this stage, we should still focus on developing operating model for the Chub mackerel stock assessment.

With considerations for all the above-mentioned issues, we think it’s presently not necessary or too early to develop an observer program.

**JAPAN**

Q: Is it necessary to develop a regional NPFC Observer Program for chub mackerel fisheries?

A: Partially yes. If my understanding is correct, at first, we need to start discussion on necessity of the observer program for CM fisheries.

At this moment, we are not in the development phase.

As for the scientific aspects, what tasks are required for the observer program? In order to know them, the TWG CMSA should recognize what kind of data are missed at the present stage toward the implementation of the benchmark stock assessment. Moreover, we need to know whether those data are expected to be obtained through the observer program.

Q: If yes, what is the objective of this Observer Program?

A: From scientific view based on the TWG CMSA's TOR, the observer program is expected to fill/meet the data gaps and the missing data to assess the CM stock. This could be the objective of the observer program which should be underscored by the TWG CMSA.

The TWG CMSA is now on the way to totally recognize the data gaps and the missing data towards the benchmark stock assessment. After the recognition, we can move to discussion about the necessity to develop the observer program in case where this program is expected to be an effective procedure to fill the gap in crucial input data such as catch by species and catch at size/age.

Q: Are there any potential issues associated with the establishment of this Observer Program?

A: The TCC may need to initiate the discussion on the observer program from compliance aspects, because the observer program involves not only scientific functions but also compliance ones. Discussion on the observer program only among scientists seems to be out of balance.

**USA**

Q: Is it necessary to develop a regional NPFC Observer Program for chub mackerel fisheries?

A: Yes, an observer program should be initiated. I think we should discuss the merits and trade-offs of both human at-sea observers and electronic monitoring type programs (or some combination of both types).

Q: If yes, what is the objective of this Observer Program?

A: There are two primary objectives to any observer or monitoring program- scientific data collection and compliance monitoring. From a science perspective, the observer program would be a reliable source of data on chub mackerel catch, a method for biological sample collection (otoliths, genetic material if needed for ID of chub vs spotted mackerel, length data, etc, if using at-sea observers and not EM), as well as identification of and data collection on bycatch species or other non-target incidental catch (particularly salmon - ID species, collect samples for genetic analyses if desired). The TCC should weigh in on the compliance component of the objectives, but in general, an observer program would help to ensure that all vessels engaged in harvesting chub mackerel in the Convention Area are authorized by the NPFC and are adhering to all Conservation and Management Measures. The Scientific Committee can discuss the merits of improved fishery data quality stemming from observed fisheries.

Q: Are there any potential issues associated with the establishment of this Observer Program?

A: Cost of the observers, or EM systems (and video review) is a barrier to development. Concern or disagreement over compliance-related issues could also be a barrier to development and approval of an observer program. While this is largely an issue for the TCC to consider, it is worth noting that a multi-lateral agreement to observers onboard by all Flag States that have vessels engaged in the chub mackerel fishery would be important, not just an agreement between NPFC member nations. It may also be important for carrier vessels (transshipment vessels) to participate in the observer program if transshipping chub mackerel from NPFC permitted fishing vessels.

For reference, we may wish to consider this guidance document (http://www.fao.org/3/Y4390E/Y4390E00.htm) from FAO regarding development of at-sea fishery observer programs (if we choose to move forward with an observer program in general. There are similar resources available for EM development as well.)

**TWG CMSA CHAIR**

Q: Are there any potential issues associated with the establishment of this Observer Program?

One question appears to be important regarding the necessity to split Chub and Blue mackerel in the catches. It is not an easy task for fishermen.

Therefore, could we ask about the necessity to generalize observer program for pelagic fisheries with sections for different pelagic species including Chub mackerel.

I am thinking about it because Chub and Blue mackerels, Japanese sardine and Japanese flying squid could be targeted with the same gear (e.g. midwater trawl) from the same vessel. Thus it would be much easier for one observer to follow one general observer program for pelagic fish instead of 4 different programs. Moreover our observers have already noticed switching of the dominant fish in the catch during one operation especially when it takes many hours. So, in the end of a long tow it is not so easy to say what was the target, e.g. Chub mackerel or Japanese sardine or Japanese flying squid or Walleye pollock.

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For reference, this is a link to a [working paper on the existing observer programs of NPFC Members and those of other RFMOs](https://www.npfc.int/system/files/2018-04/NPFC-2018-SC03-WP03%28Rev%201%29%20Report%20on%20existing%20Observer%20Programs.pdf) drafted by the Secretariat for SC03 in 2018.