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**TO ALL COMMISSION MEMBERS, COOPERATING NON-MEMBERS,  
PARTICIPATING TERRITORIES AND OBSERVERS**

**Circular No.: 2020/19  
Date: 30 March 2020  
No. pages: 03**

**FFA Decision for the Temporary Suspension of Observer Coverage on Purse Seine Vessels**

Dear All,

I hope you are all well and taking all necessary precautions to safeguard yourselves and loved ones from the COVID-19 virus.

I enclosed a self-explanatory letter dated 27 March 2020 I received from the Chair of the Forum Fisheries Committee, the governing body of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) conveying the FFA members' decision to temporarily suspend the requirement of observer coverage on purse seine vessels in their national waters until 31 May 2020. The FFA CCMs are also seeking the urgent temporary suspension of the provisions contained in CMM 2018-01 and CMM 2018-05 on observer coverage and seeking cooperation of other CCMs to adopt compatible measures in waters beyond FFA members' national jurisdiction.

I wish to advise CCMs, that I am currently considering a response by the Commission to the FFA's letter and the proposal for compatible measures throughout the Commission Convention Area. I am also mindful of the impact of the COVID-19 virus on the broader spectrum of the WCPO fisheries in the response by the Commission.

I am hoping to circulate a proposal from the Chair shortly.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Jung-re Riley Kim  
**WCPFC CHAIR**



27 March 2020

Jung-Re Riley Kim  
CHAIR  
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
PO Box 2356, Kolonia  
Federated States of Micronesia

Dear Ms Kim,

### **Temporary Suspension of Observer Coverage on Purse Seine vessels**

I write on behalf of the 17 members of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. This is without prejudice to long-standing positions by FFA members individually or collectively.

We all recognise that these unprecedented times with the covid-19 pandemic present unforeseen challenges of complying with requirements contained in our Conservation and Management Measures.

Of immediate concern to FFA Members is the requirement for 100% observer coverage on all purse seine vessels as contained in CMM 2018-01 and CMM 2018-05. Our priority concern is the health and safety of our observers with several of our observer programmes calling for their repatriation. This is compounded by the strict travel restrictions and border closures imposed by our member governments in response to the global health crisis.

It has progressively become very challenging for our observer programmes to provide observers for trips which in turn creates significant difficulties for flag States to continue to comply with this requirement. However, we recognise the importance of minimising disruption to the operation of the purse seine fishery in the WCPO.

FFA Members have been actively considering a way to address these challenges, in the context of our national, subregional and regional regulatory frameworks. Consistent with those discussions, I write to advise that we have adopted the following decisions which are to take **immediate effect** as follows:

- 1. The temporary suspension of the requirement of observer coverage on purse seine vessels within our waters, until 31 May 2020, unless otherwise advised.**

2. The temporary suspension will apply to new trips after a vessel operator has met any requirement for repatriation of observers currently on board a vessel. Repatriation, in this context, means returning the observer to his/her home port, in consultation with the observer provider.
3. **Priority is to be given to ensuring the repatriation of observers.** Repatriation is to be expedited by the vessel operator and the relevant flag State, in close consultation with the relevant national Observer Provider. The observer's costs will continue to be met by the vessel operator until such time as the observer is returned to his/her home port.
4. When vessels are not carrying observers, they shall comply with the following additional conditions:
  - a) A vessel that is not able to report Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data electronically and automatically, shall immediately return to port<sup>1</sup>.
  - b) Any additional management measures that may be advised from time to time.
5. **Steps are to be taken to expedite the implementation of this decision** through our respective national, subregional and regional regulatory frameworks.

Through you Chair, we seek the urgent temporary suspension of the provisions contained in CMM 2018-01 and CMM 2018-05 on observer coverage. We also seek the cooperation of our fellow Commission Members in adopting measures compatible to those adopted by FFA Members and PNA Members for areas outside of FFA Members' national jurisdictions, as set out in paragraphs 1 to 4.

We also underline the need for a swift decision to be taken by the Commission in this force majeure situation. We look forward to your guidance as to how this can be achieved.

Yours sincerely,



Eugene Pangelinan,  
Chair  
Forum Fisheries Committee

CC: Feleti Teo, WCPFC Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> the provision of position data manually (hourly), as well as electronically and automatically by AIS for up to 72 hours, will meet the requirement of this paragraph