

AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

46th MEETING OF THE PARTIES

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AIDCP BUDGET

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1. BACKGROUND

The [Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program](#) (AIDCP) is a legally-binding multilateral agreement that entered into force in February 1999. The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) provides the Secretariat for the Agreement¹, and performs certain other functions set forth in the Agreement, its Annexes, and other decisions taken by the Parties. In this document the IATTC staff, as Secretariat for the AIDCP, present the 2022 accounting of AIDCP funds, the 2023 financial activity forecast, a recommended AIDCP budget for 2024, and the reasons for some significant increases in select categories.

The principal source of IDCP costs is the On-Board Observer Program, which accounts for approximately 90% of the AIDCP budget. The remainder corresponds to the costs of meetings, administration, and other categories described in [Figure 1](#).

The AIDCP mandates 100% observer coverage of fishing trips by large purse-seine vessels² in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) and stipulates that at least 50% of such trips may be covered by the IATTC observer program. The IATTC program provides observers for 100% of trips made by vessels of Parties that do not have a national observer program (currently El Salvador, Peru, and the United States³). The national observer programs of the seven Parties that currently have them (Colombia, Ecuador, the European Union, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela), typically cover 50% of the trips by their respective fleets, except the Ecuadorian national program, which covers 33.3%. The remainder of the observer coverage is provided by the IATTC observer program.

The cost of the IATTC observer program is divided between the AIDCP, which pays 70%, and the IATTC, which pays 30% (see Document [CAF-09-01](#)). The IATTC's 30% contribution, agreed at the inception of IATTC's Tuna-Dolphin Program in 1977, reflects the minimum level of observer coverage required for the data collected to be statistically reliable.

The Parties provide funding for the IDCP, primarily through the collection of vessel assessment fees. The current vessel assessment rate is US\$ 14.95 per cubic meter (m³) of well volume. All assessment income is shared with the national observer programs that participate in the On-Board Observer Program in proportion to their rate of coverage for relevant trips, up to 50%.

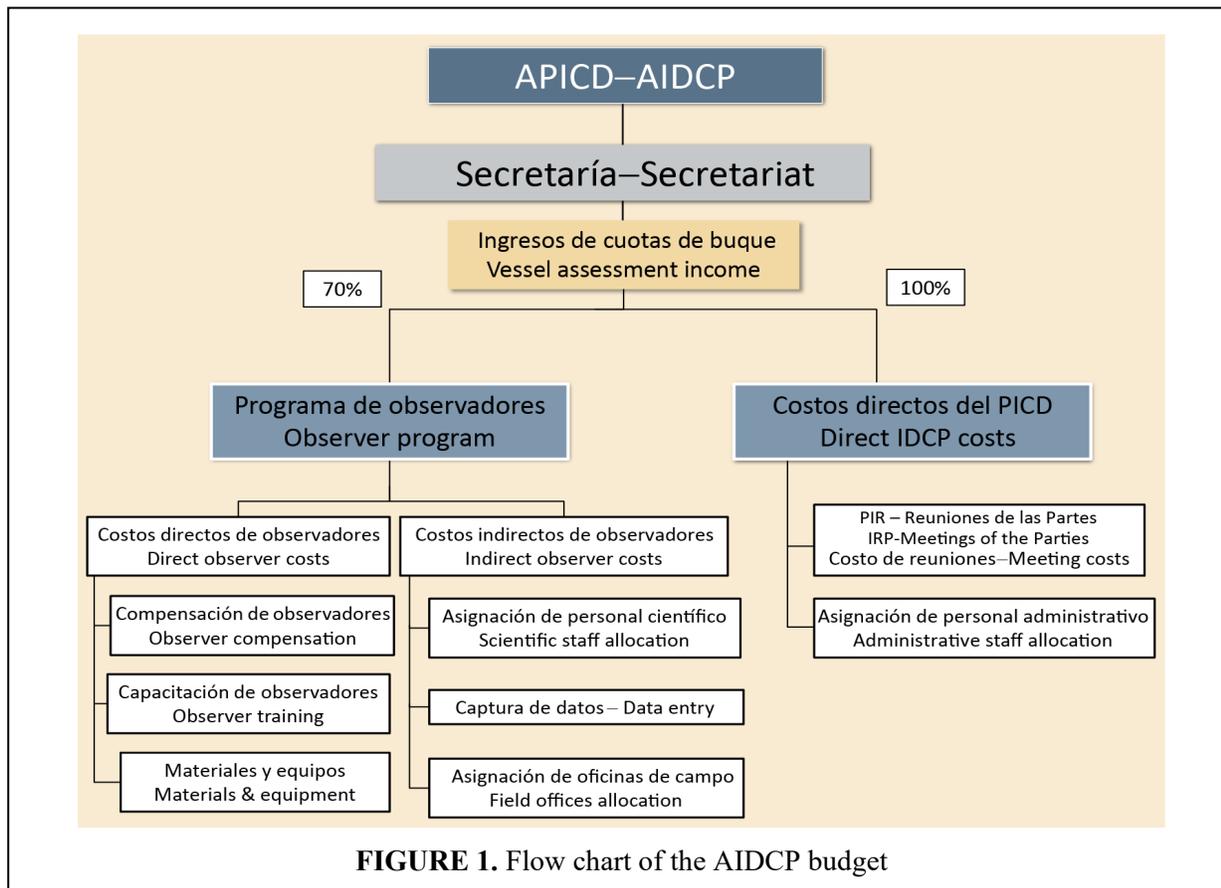
¹ Pursuant to Article VII, paragraph 1(t), and Article XIV, paragraph 3, of the Antigua Convention

² Carrying capacity greater than 363 mt (IATTC Class 6).

³ Vessels fishing in the EPO but departing from ports in the WCPO are usually covered by cross-endorsed observers from the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Regional Observer Program (WCPFC), with which the IATTC has a Memorandum of Cooperation.

2. STRUCTURE OF PROGRAM COSTS

As shown in **Figure 1**, AIDCP expenditures are grouped into two general categories: costs related to the On-board Observer Program, and costs associated with other functions under the Agreement.



A. ON-BOARD OBSERVER PROGRAM COSTS (70% covered by AIDCP budget)

Direct observer costs:

Observer compensation and benefits includes all wages, bonuses, and insurance for AIDCP observers. To create and maintain adequate pools of observers, the Secretariat continues to monitor and review observer compensation, recommending increases as needed. Observer compensation was last increased in 2014, and in the years immediately following observer retention rates improved. However, as explained in section 5.2.1, the Secretariat maintains its recommendation to increase the observer pay rates which is not reflected in the recommended 2024 budget.

Observer travel costs include transportation, off-vessel lodging and meals while observers are on duty status.

Observer supplies and equipment include data forms, equipment such as observer safety equipment, binoculars and calipers, and related maintenance.

Observer training includes costs related to the training venue, travel expenses for instructors, training materials, and room and board for both participants and instructors- all of which vary from year to year depending on the number of trainings needed and their corresponding location. Because the number of courses offered in any given year reflects observer attrition and demand, as well as other circumstances that are sometimes not easily forecasted and which can result in significant variation from projected budget needs.

Indirect observer costs:

Indirect observer costs include costs associated with IATTC staff located both at headquarters and field offices and a portion of the field office operating expenses. **IATTC HQ scientific/technical staff** monitor observer placements, and gather, process, edit, and analyze observer data. They also prepare reports for the Parties based upon the information that is compiled; and guide **IATTC field office** personnel in proper execution of policies, procedures, and resolutions established by the Parties.

B. DIRECT IDCP COSTS (100% covered by AIDCP budget)

IATTC HQ administrative staff needed to oversee the AIDCP program as well as IATTC field office staff represent a direct cost, 100% chargeable to the AIDCP. The various areas of HQ administrative support afforded to the AIDCP include policy and compliance, accounting, logistical support in coordination of meetings, information technology, website support, translation, and global oversight by the Director and Coordinator of Scientific Research. Local field office staff provide the program with logistical support when the observers are debriefed obtaining AIDCP observer data to then be input, reviewed, and finally edited locally in some cases supporting the preparation of AIDCP reports for the Parties.

The AIDCP meetings held in the fall, and **other AIDCP direct costs** such as bank fees, postage, printing, and reproduction also support the AIDCP program directly and are therefore included as expenditures 100% chargeable to the AIDCP.

3. PROGRAM EXPENDITURES, 2018-2022

Table 1 illustrates AIDCP expenses during 2018-2022, broken down by the two expenditure categories (*On-board observer costs* (A) and *Other costs* (B)) and are further detailed by their respective cost components.

TABLE 1. Expenses, 2018-2022 (US\$)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	AIDCP -39-01	AIDCP -41-01	AIDCP-43-01	AIDCP-44-01	AIDCP-46-01
A. ON-BOARD OBSERVER COSTS⁴					
Direct costs:					
Observer compensation and benefits	1,556,161	1,519,790	1,303,168	1,415,276	1,543,687
Travel	54,966	69,160	16,548	33,949	63,802
Supplies and equipment	15,252	11,037	11,769	9,652	70,631
Training	7,782	14,983	-	-	9,730
Subtotal	1,634,161	1,614,970	1,331,485	1,458,878	1,687,851
Indirect costs:					
IATTC HQ staff: scientific/technical	713,090	744,014	827,298	894,350	631,467
IATTC F.O. staff	230,152	259,923	239,874	242,888	271,656
IATTC F.O. operating costs	93,034	86,135	68,272	68,464	74,847
Total on-board observer costs	2,670,437	2,705,041	2,466,929	2,664,579	2,665,821
B. OTHER COSTS⁵					
IATTC HQ staff: administrative	305,610	318,863	349,994	383,293	727,742
IATTC Field office staff				104,080	116,352
AIDCP meetings	90,462	50,282	2,200	-	34,052
Captain's seminars	-	4,525	1,673	-	-
Other AIDCP direct costs	1,029	33,753	11,040	22,963	21,223
Total, Other costs	397,101	407,423	364,907	510,336	899,369
Total, AIDCP Program costs	3,067,538	3,112,465	2,831,836	3,174,915	3,565,190
Resolution A-19-01	-	-	-	-	94,515
Total, AIDCP Program costs	3,067,538	3,112,465	2,831,836	3,174,915	3,659,705

⁴ Covered 30% by IATTC, 70% by vessel assessments

⁵ Covered 100% by AIDCP

4. PROGRAM INCOME, 2022

Table 2 summarizes AIDCP income and expenses in 2022.

TABLE 2. AIDCP sources and uses of funds, 2022, in US\$		Actual
1	Vessel assessments – Current class 6 (US\$ 14.95/m ³)	2,416,911
2	IATTC portion of observer program (30%)	799,746
3	Inactive and sunk vessels (US\$ 1.00/m ³)	4,451
	Total operational income	3,221,108
	Total AIDCP Program expenses	3,565,190
	Excess of expenses over revenue	(344,082)
4	Vessel Payments- Classes 4 & 5	2,441
5	Class 6 Vessel assessments from prior years	26,038
6	Late fees	39,924
7	Vessels fishing outside of the agreement area	-
	Deficit	(275,679)

1. Assessments paid by all Class-6 vessels on the IATTC [Regional Vessel Register](#) for the 2022 program year
2. The IATTC general budget, which covers 30% of observer program costs.
3. Assessments paid by sunk and inactive Class-6 vessels.
4. Assessments paid by smaller purse-seine vessels required to carry an observer.
5. Size class 6 vessel payments received from prior year assessments.
6. Late fees paid by all vessels on the IATTC [Regional Vessel Register](#) for the 2022 program year.
7. Expenses reimbursed by the vessel owners when the vessels operate west of the 150°W Meridian.

4.1. Accumulated surplus

As shown in Table 3, the AIDCP accounts reflect an accumulated surplus of US\$ 2,154,813 as of 31 December 2022.

TABLE 3. Status of AIDCP funds on 31 December 2022	US\$
Surplus on 31 December 2021 ⁶	2,430,492
2022 deficit	(275,679)
Surplus on 31 December 2022	2,154,813

Although the vessel assessment rate has not been increased for over a decade and the budget is prepared based upon the number of active vessels with a reasonable expectation of costs using historical data, mitigating circumstances such as changes in the utilization of IATTC observers by vessels fishing in both the EPO and the western and central Pacific and reduced trips due to unforeseen circumstances affect the year-end balance.

4.2. Outstanding vessel assessments

As shown in Table 4, as of 30 June 2023, thirteen vessels currently have outstanding assessments from 2012-2023 totaling US\$ 638,851, of which US\$ 382,200 pertains to the IATTC observer program, with the remainder of US\$ 256,652 due to two national programs (US\$ 41,619 (ECU) and US\$ 215,033 (VEN)).

⁶ See Document [AIDCP-44-01](#), Table 3.

Vessel		Arrears	
Flag	Name	Years	US\$
ECU	<i>Alize</i>	2023	12,614
ECU	<i>Delia</i>	2023	16,363
ECU	<i>Don Ramon</i>	2023	28,285
ECU	<i>Vicente</i>	2021-2023	82,902
VEN	<i>Albamar I</i>	2012-2023	159,245
VEN	<i>Atlántico</i>	2019-2023	8,309
VEN	<i>Carmela</i>	2022-2023	29,874
VEN	<i>Cayude</i>	2023	18,830
VEN	<i>Curimagua</i>	2023	22,382
VEN	<i>Guayacan</i>	2020	12,745
VEN	<i>Las Aves</i>	2019-2020	4,700
VEN	<i>Rocinante</i>	2014-2023	104,666
VEN	<i>Tunapuy</i>	2012-2023	137,938
Total			US\$ 638,851

5. RECOMMENDED BUDGET, 2024

Projecting future AIDCP budgetary needs and making allowances for unpaid assessments requires the Secretariat to rely on the previous year's fiscal results to forecast future needs; however, direct on-board observer costs can fluctuate greatly depending on the number and duration of trips made, the cost of travel, local observer availability, the use of cross-endorsed observers, *etc.* Similarly, revenue can vary according to how much capacity is active each year, assessments paid in a timely manner, vessels changing flag, prior year assessment payments and late fees paid.

[Table 5](#) presents actual costs for the 2022 fiscal year, the Secretariat's best estimate of anticipated income and expenditures in 2023, and the 2024 recommended budget.

⁷ Payments made after 1 July will be presented at the Meeting of the Parties.

TABLE 5. 2022-2024 budgets (US\$)	2022	2023	2024
	Actual	Forecast	Recommended
ON-BOARD OBSERVER INCOME			
Vessel assessments - Class 6	2,416,911	2,400,000	2,481,451
IATTC portion of observer program (30%)	799,746	810,640	810,640
Inactive and sunk vessel assessments	4,451	10,000	10,000
TOTAL OPERATIONAL INCOME	3,221,108	3,220,640	3,302,091
ON-BOARD OBSERVER COSTS⁸			
Direct costs:			
Observer compensation and benefits	1,543,687	1,550,000	1,560,000
Observer travel	63,802	85,000	85,000
Observer supplies and equipment	70,631	75,000	75,000*
Observer training	9,730	20,000	40,000*
Subtotal	1,687,851	1,730,000	1,760,000
Indirect costs:			
IATTC HQ staff: scientific/technical	631,467	540,000	558,000*
IATTC F.O. staff	271,656	310,000	310,000*
IATTC F.O. operating costs	74,847	85,000	85,000
Total, On-board observer costs	2,665,821	2,665,000	2,713,000
OTHER COSTS⁹			
IATTC HQ staff: administrative	727,742	460,000	420,000*
AIDCP meetings	34,052	50,000	50,000
Captain's seminar	-	5,000	10,000
Other AIDCP direct costs:			
Field office operating expenses	9,083	16,000	16,000
Purchase and maintenance of computer equipment	459	1,000	1,000
Printing, postage, and publication	1,785	1,000	1,000
Staff travel	483	2,000	2,000
IATTC Field office staff	116,352	80,000	80,091*
Field office local accounting and legal	2,251	1,000	1,000
Field office vehicle purchase and maintenance	5,961	10,000	7,000
Bank and other fees	1,201	1,000	1,000
Total, Other costs	899,369	627,000	589,091
TOTAL AIDCP PROGRAM COSTS	3,565,190	3,292,000	3,302,091
Revenue over/(under) expenditures	(344,082)	(71,360)	-
Other income	68,403	50,000	-
Surplus/(Deficit)	(275,679)	(21,360)	-

* Budget items with significant increases are explained in [Section 5.1](#).

⁸ Covered 30% by IATTC, 70% by vessel assessments

⁹ Covered 100% by AIDCP

5.1. Explanation of significant fluctuations for select categories

Two items in the recommended 2024 budget (asterisked in [Table 5](#)) reflect significant increases from previous years with a shift in allocation between four others. The reasons for these fluctuations are explained in detail below.

5.1.1. Supplies and equipment: observer safety equipment and subscriptions

In October 2018, the 38th Meeting of the Parties adopted Resolution [A-18-02](#), which specified that observers be provided with (1) an independent two-way satellite communication device, and (2) a waterproof personal life-saving beacon. The Secretariat identified the InReach SE+ and ResQLink 400/406 as the most suitable devices ([MOP-36 INF-A](#)).

All InReach devices were successfully purchased and distributed in 2020 to all AIDCP programs. 2021 was the first full year where deployment of devices was completed, with annual service plans purchased and budgeted for in the amount of approximately US\$ 60,000 through 2024. Table 6 shows the number of deployed devices compared to the number of deployed observer trips. As with many of the issues on this report, deployment of devices was sometimes hindered by restrictions derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 6. No. of safety devices deployed by program during 2022

Flag	Trips/units deployed by program			Total trips	% Trips assigned
	National program	IATTC	Total		
Colombia	23	18	41	43	95
Ecuador	117	216	333	334	100
EU-UE (ESP)	6	2	8	9	89
Mexico	98	92	190	190	100
Nicaragua	6	12	18	20	90
Panama	37	48	85	100	85
El Salvador		17	17	17	100
United States		38	38	41	93
Venezuela	13	25	38	47	81
Total	300	468	768	801	96

5.1.2. Observer training

With the reactivation of its normal activities following the suspension of all restrictions that had been imposed by the pandemic, the Secretariat was able to resume the cycle of training courses that it has been conducting since the establishment of the observer program. Likewise, in June 2023, the Secretariat held a training course at Panamá City with 13 participants, including one for the Panamanian Observer Program. Of these, 11 participants were selected to be observers on the purse-seine fleet, four of whom are women; indeed, it was the first time in the entire history of the program that the training course had been open to female candidates and not only to male candidates as in the past.

The Secretariat is expecting to conduct observer training in 2024; therefore US\$ 40,000 has been added to the 2024 budget to cover the cost of these planned training sessions.

5.1.3. IATTC staff

After further consideration of the work performed by both headquarter and field office staff charged to this budget, it was determined that the allocations did not properly reflect the work performed within each

category and a reallocation was made effective at the onset of fiscal year 2022 within the Observer Program and AIDCP listed expenditures. The impact of this reallocation can be seen within **Table 5**, affecting both the 2023 forecast as well as the 2024 recommended budget.

5.2. Recommendations not incorporated into the 2024 recommended budget

5.2.1. Observer compensation and benefits: increase of observer pay rates

The success of the IATTC observer program relies upon the Secretariat's ability to maintain a pool of observers with an appropriate level of education and training, so that they can perform their duties successfully and collect high-quality data. In view of the nature of these duties, a fundamental requirement for AIDCP observers is a university degree in biology or its equivalent. To attract and maintain an adequate number of qualified observers, the program must offer competitive salaries, considering the time away from home and the working conditions that are part of the job.

During 2022, as the Parties and their fishing sectors emerged from the COVID pandemic and operations started to normalize, the observer exemption was discontinued. Offering competitive compensation has become key once again in terms of attracting enough qualified, new biologists in order to avoid situations where vessel have to wait for extended periods in port for observers to become available since operating with an exemption is no longer an option.

Observer daily pay rates were last increased in 2014 from a range of US\$ 39-45 to US\$ 48-55 to address low retention rates, and before that had not been increased since 2006. So, in effect, compensation for IATTC purse-seine observers has only been increased once in the last 17 years and not at all in the last 9 years. Additionally, at the time of the raise that was approved in 2014, IATTC staff noted that experienced IATTC observers were still earning less than their counterparts in the WCPFC observer program, even though they have to meet more stringent requirements to be qualified. This situation was recognized both in 2016 by the 33rd Meeting of the Parties, which noted *"the urgent need to offer fair, competitive salaries to observers in order to have an observer pool large enough to meet the demand, retain experienced observers, and to reduce incentives for possible corruption,"* and again more recently at the 45th Meeting of the Parties held in La Jolla in October 2022. Although a majority of the Parties did acknowledge the need to increase the observer compensation rates and to finance this increase in observer remunerations with part of the surplus for three years and subsequently increase the contribution per vessel to maintain the costs of this increase, a consensus on how to address the increase was not reached, and the pay disparity with their counterparts continues to increase.

The Secretariat believes this situation is, in some instances, leading to a lack of interest among qualified biologists and high rates of attrition of trained observers. As the Parties and their fishing sectors emerge from the COVID pandemic and operations start to normalize, the observer exemption was discontinued 31 December 2022. Offering competitive compensation may be key in terms of attracting enough qualified, new biologists in order to avoid situations where vessel wait for extended periods in port for observers to become available if operating with an exemption is no longer an option.

The Secretariat remains concerned that working as an IATTC observer is becoming a less-attractive option for college graduates in Latin America. Not only does the pay compare unfavorably with other jobs requiring similar qualifications (an experienced observer who spends six to nine months per year at sea earns about US\$ 10,000-14,500, a bare subsistence-level income for a family), but observers have to spend long periods away from home and family, in sometimes difficult conditions, with no guarantee of continued employment and no benefits such as paid vacations.

Observer shortages not only result in delayed departures for vessels, but also increase program costs, because observers need to travel from other areas to cover trips from ports where shortages occur, and additional training courses must be held for new observers. The Secretariat therefore considers it necessary to again increase IATTC observer pay to remain competitive with other international observer programs in the region and other opportunities available for qualified individuals.

5.2.2. Proposed increase

For the reasons outlined above, the Secretariat continues to recommend that the compensation for IATTC observers needs to be increased as follows:

Current and planned observer pay rates, in US\$/day			
Observer experience (days at sea)	Current (2015-2023)	2024	2025
0-200	48.00	55.00	65.00
> 200	55.00	65.00	75.00

In 2022, IATTC observers were deployed for 23,133 days. Assuming a similar level of activity in 2024, an increase of US\$ 10 in daily pay would increase observer compensation costs by approximately US\$ 231,000, or about US\$ 260,000 including taxes and other benefits. The Secretariat also proposes to increase IATTC observer base pay by a further US\$ 10 in 2025, to US\$ 75, to improve the competitiveness of these positions.