

AGREEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROGRAM
50TH MEETING OF THE PARTIES (EXTRAORDINARY)

La Jolla, California, USA
March 25–26, 2025

DOCUMENT AIDCP-50-01

ON-BOARD OBSERVERS TASKS ANALYSIS

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) is responsible for the conservation and management of tuna, tuna-like species, associated species, and their ecosystems throughout the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). The IATTC also provides the Secretariat for the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP).

The AIDCP On-Board Observer program consists of the IATTC observer program and the corresponding approved national observer programs which provide observers for purse-seine (PS) vessels fishing for tuna in the EPO. Under the AIDCP, all class 6 PS vessels must carry an observer for 100% of fishing trips made in the EPO.

In response to the request made by the Parties in paragraph 5 of Resolution A-24-01, in this document the Secretariat analyses the tasks that these observer perform and their relevance to the work of the AIDCP and the IATTC.

5. To request the Secretariat to expand Document AIDCP-48-01 to include details of the work and tasks that AIDCP on-board observers carry out to comply with the instructions of the Parties to the AIDCP, differentiating it from the work and tasks they carry out to comply with the instructions of the IATTC, including to the extent possible the estimated proportion of time dedicated to each work and task, in order to facilitate the distribution of costs between the IATTC and the AIDCP.

Until now, the Commission has covered 30% of the costs of the AIDCP observer program as part of its own budget. The main reason for selecting this percentage was that 30% observer coverage was sufficient to meet not only the needs of scientific research but also the estimation of dolphin mortality in purse seine fisheries, as indicated by the then IATTC Director, James Joseph, in 1994:

“Beginning in 1979, IATTC observers were assigned to a limited number of trips on non-U.S. vessels. Table 1 shows the number of trips made beginning in 1979 by vessels fishing on dolphins and the number of such trips covered by observers from the IATTC program, as well as the total number of trips observed by all programs. However, it was not until 1986 that all nations with vessels capable of fishing for tunas associated with dolphins in the eastern Pacific were participating on a scale that would make possible the objectives of the IATTC program. Observers were placed aboard one-third of the trips made by vessels of all nations; at this level of coverage, mortality estimates with a higher degree of statistical precision could be calculated.”

However, the entry into force of the 2003 Antigua Convention on August 27, 2010, as well as numerous resolutions adopted within its framework, considerably expanded the role of IATTC observers to include a wide range of tasks aimed at ensuring and verifying compliance with these new obligations.

One particularly relevant example, among others, is the case of the assignment to vessels smaller than class 6 of an on-board observer, therefore not required by the AIDCP, in the case of the sealing of wells in accordance with Resolution C-12-06.

On the other hand, it is clear that only 100% observer coverage, achieved on Class-6 purse seiners thanks to the AIDCP, allows for full monitoring of the fishing operations and their compliance with the obligations established in the Antigua Convention and in the resolutions and other instruments adopted by the Commission. Even more so when Article VII, paragraph 1, establishes non-discrimination and transparency in the measures adopted as an essential principle:

“(v) adopt any other measure or recommendation, based on relevant information, including “the best scientific information available, as may be necessary to achieve the objective of this Convention, including non-discriminatory and transparent measures consistent with international law, to prevent, deter and eliminate activities that undermine the effectiveness of the conservation and management measures adopted by the Commission.”

This means that the Commission's own needs, which result from the exercise of functions that are no longer limited to scientific research per se, now go far beyond the 30% initially established as the basis for the 30/70 division between the IATTC and the AIDCP concerning the budgetary expenses related to the financing of the observer program.

With the purpose of carrying out an updated evaluation of a better aligned percentage distribution between IATTC and AIDCP activities, respectively, corresponding to the actual operation of the observer program, below, we provide an analysis of the tasks of the observers (Table 1), according to the forms they fill (List 1) and what percentage of those tasks are performed exclusively for the IATTC and the AIDCP or for both.

The forms that are used by both organizations are IB, ID, FCV and ROMMDL. And, while others appear to be exclusively of the IATTC, they are occasionally used in low proportion by the AIDCP and vice versa.

Table 1 of Appendix I shows a proportional summary of what was requested in paragraph 5 of Resolution A-24-01. Columns two and three of the table show the usefulness of records by organization IATTC Vs AIDCP. In the two central columns, the percentage of time spent by observers in the execution of their tasks was noted, according to the dominance of the regional fishery: fishery mainly on tuna associated with dolphins Vs fishery essentially on tuna associated with FAD and schools. And the two columns on the right reflect the overall weighting of the time spent by observers during their trips throughout the international fleet.

Likewise, the fleet's fishing effort was taken into consideration for this weighting. During the last ten years, the average number of sets on tuna associated with dolphins has been around 40% compared to the 60% differential on tuna associated with FAD and schools (Figure 1), while the number of trips per fishery has been relatively even (Figure 2).

At the level of complementary information, it is pertinent to note that the average coverage with IATTC observers in class 6 purse seine trips in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) in the previous 10 years has been around 59% (Figures 3 and 4), and the differential of 41% was covered by observers from the AIDCP national programs, and the Regional Observer Program of the WCPFC, according to a Memorandum of Cooperation for vessels fishing in the Convention Area of both organizations

(IATTC and WCPFC), plus trips that received an exemption from carrying an observer during the COVID-19 pandemic for health reasons between 2020 and 2022.

Figures 5 and 6 show the coverage of observers by program in the years 2023 and 2024, so that a comparative visualization can be made clearly. It is notorious that 2024 was an exceptionally good fishing year, and it is reflected by the difference between the number of trips in both years.

In conclusion, it is clear that the 30% contribution of the IATTC budget to the AIDCP, which is inherited from a distant past and, moreover, predates the entry into force of the Antigua Convention, no longer reflects the actual contribution of observers to the work of the Commission or to the implementation of the Agreement. Without prejudice to the consideration of this issue by the members of the Commission and the parties to the AIDCP and their possible selection of a more appropriate allocation, a 50%/50% allocation or, in any event, not less than 40% borne by the IATTC budget may be appropriate.

It should also be noted that this analysis only refers to the tasks of the observers. It does not consider another aspect that should also be analyzed: the percentage of the AIDCP budget in terms of time and effort of IATTC staff when they are engaged in work specific to the AIDCP.

Appendix I. Lists, tables, and figures.

List 1: Forms completed by observers:

- a) Vessel Record (IB)
- b) Daily Activity Record (ID)
- c) Marine Mammal Observations and Set Record (ROMMDL)
- d) Floating Objects and Schools Sets Record (RLCOF)
- e) Floating Object Details Record (ROF)
- f) Dolphin Sampling Record (FCV)
- g) Sea Turtle Record (RTM)
- h) Marine Fauna Record (RFM)
- i) Shark Registry (RDT)
- j) Billfish Record (RDP)
- k) Ray Record (RDR)
- l) Compliance Record (CR)
- m) International Review Panel (PIR)
- (n) Tuna Tracking Form (RSA)
- (o) Weekly at-sea report (IDM)

Table 1: Weighting of the Observer time to carry out AIDCP and IATTC tasks.

Observer forms (Spanish acronym)	Data form Utility: IATTC Vs AIDCP		% Observer Time by fishery: Dolphin-associated Vs non-dolphin-associated		Global time weighting Forms Vs Observer Time <small>This is in response to paragraph 5. The fishery was considered as a whole</small>	
	IATTC	AIDCP	Dolphin	FAD + School	IATTC	AIDCP
IB	80	20	2	2	1	1
ID	80	20	15	15	5	3
ROMMDL	50	50	35	5	5	20
RLCOF	100		2	2	2	0
ROF	100		3	30	25	0
FCV	50	50	2	1	1	1
RTM	100		1	2	1	0
RFM	100		5	5	3	0
RDT	100		1	6	3	0
RDP	100		1	3	1	0
RDR	100		1	3	1	0
RC	100		3	5	5	0
PIR		100	10	2	0	6
RSA		100	15	15	0	10
IDM	50	50	4	4	3	3
% Total:			100	100	56	44

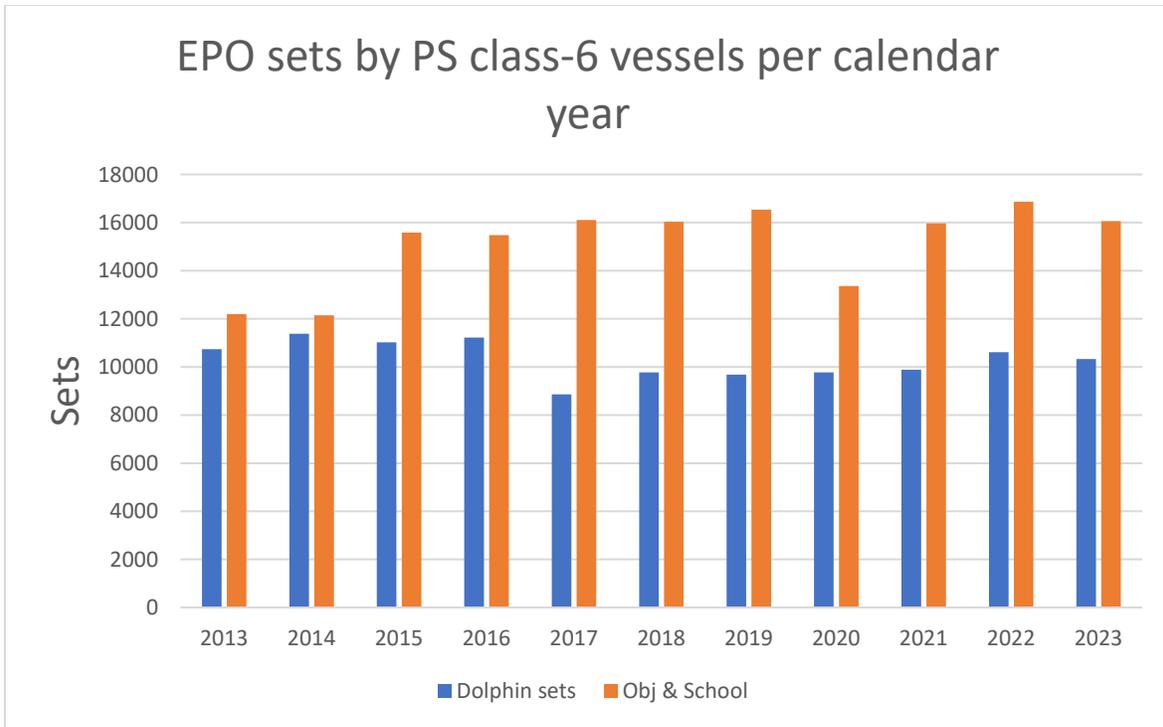


Figure 1: Fishing effort of the international purse seine fleet class-6 in the EPO

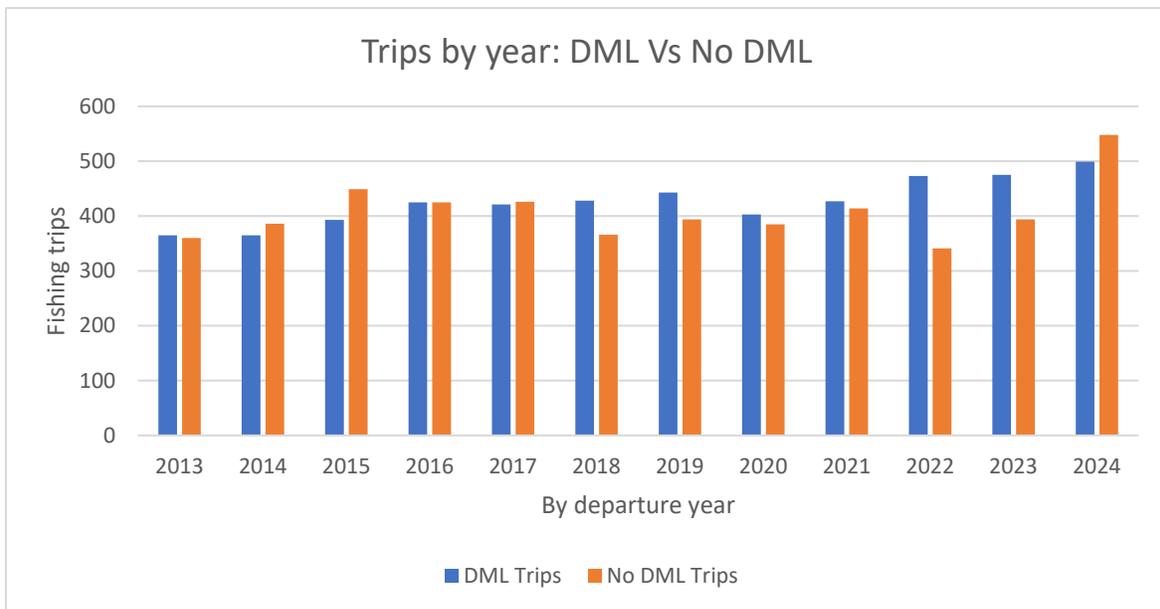


Figure 2: Trips of the international purse seine class-6 fleet in the EPO by type of fishery.

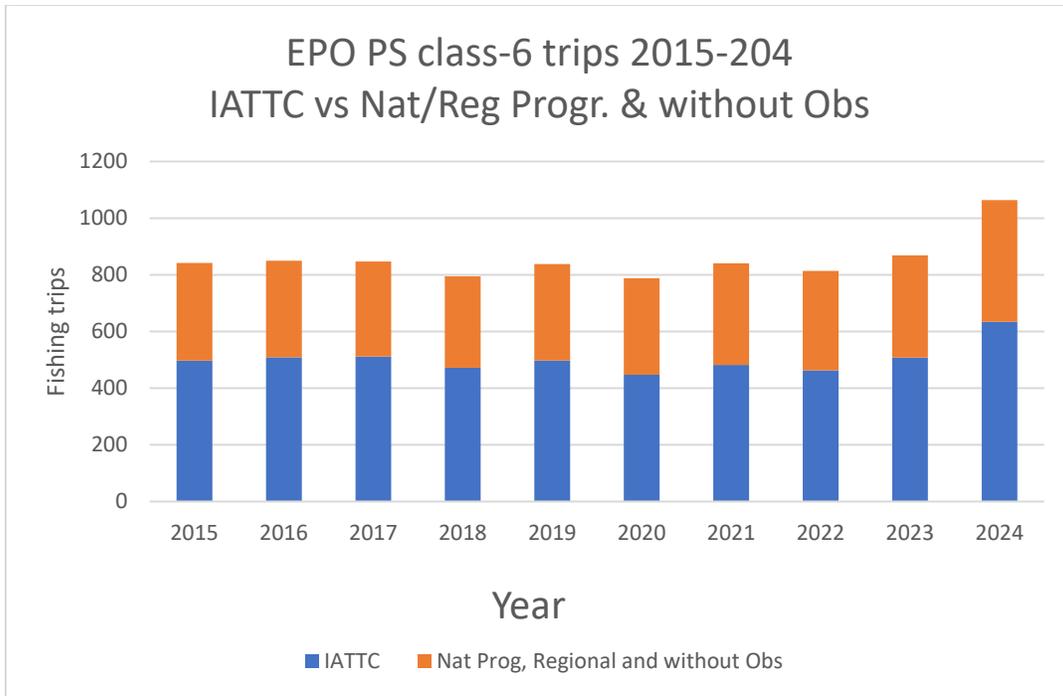


Figure 3: EPO class-6 international purse seine fleet trips for period 2015-2024: IATTC Program Vs national observer programs.

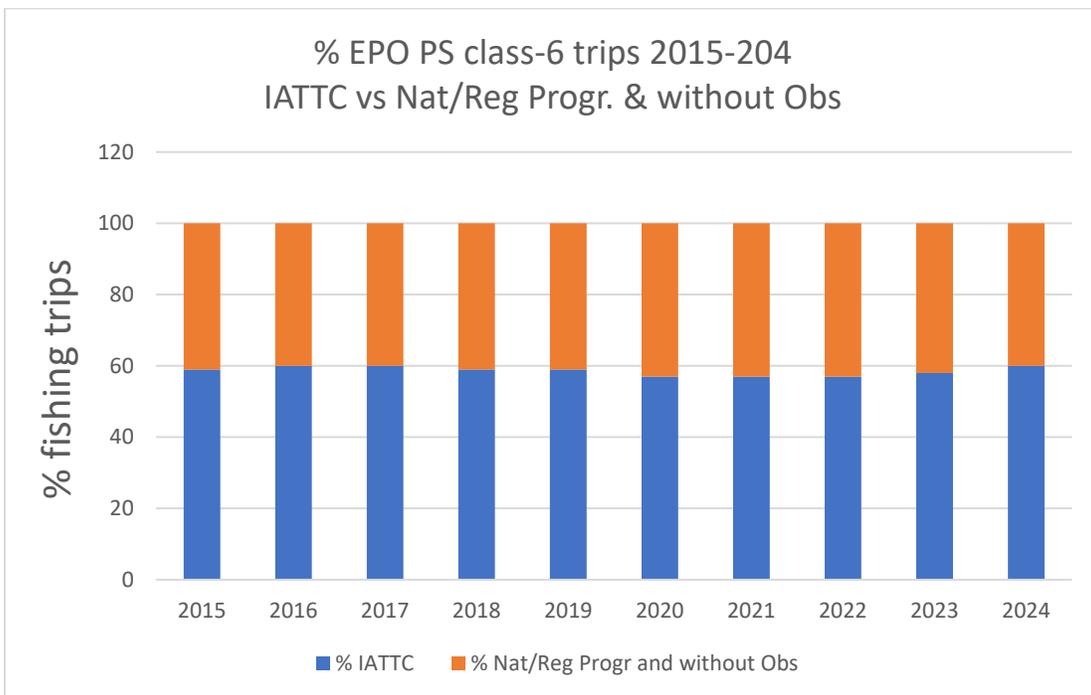


Figure 4: EPO sampling percentage of the class-6 purse seine international fleet 2015-2024. IATTC Program Vs national observer programs.

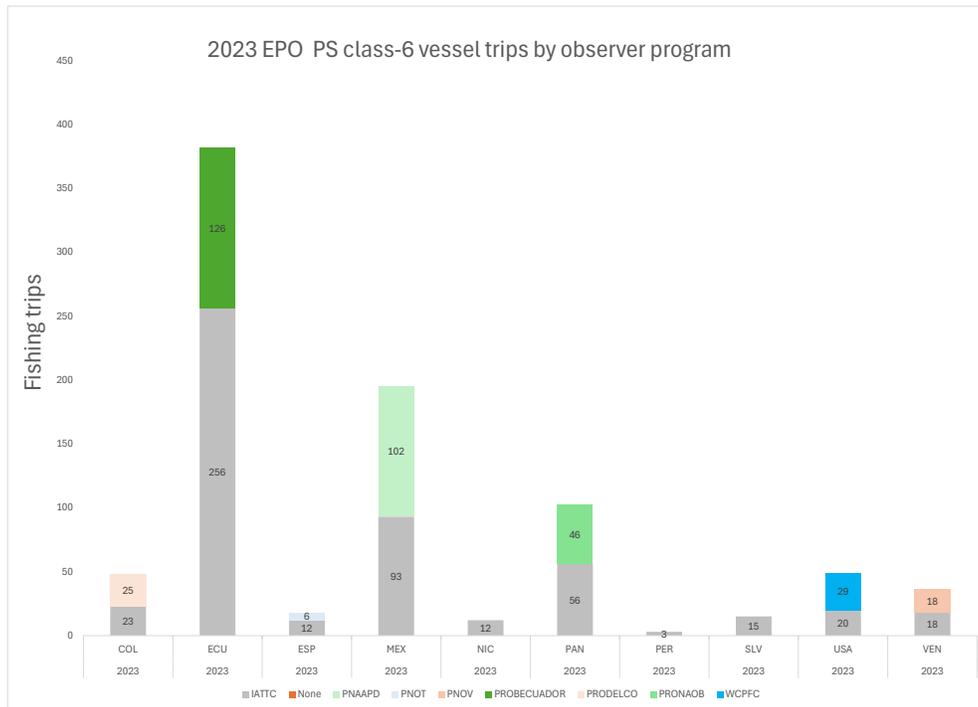


Figure 5: 2023 EPO trips coverage of the class-6 international purse seine fleet by flag and observer program.

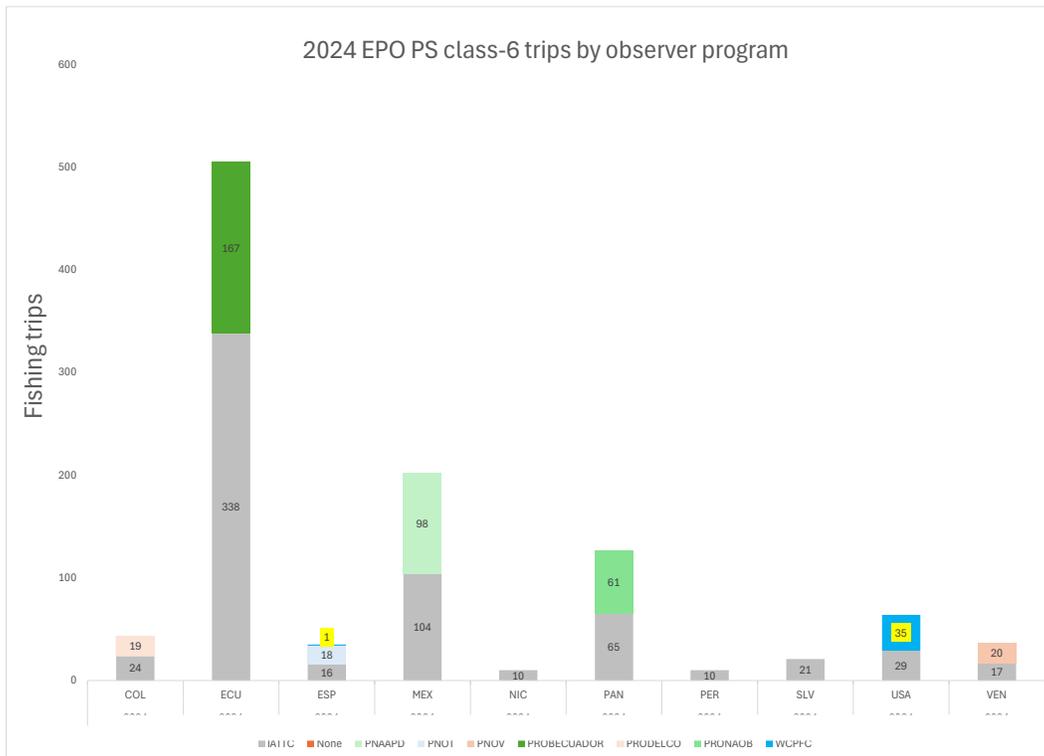


Figure 6: 2024 EPO trips coverage of the class-6 international purse seine fleet by flag and observer program.