

Association for Professional Observers Strategic Plan 2016-2020





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Association for Professional Observers (APO) Strategic Plan 2016-2020

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Executive summary

The deployment of well-trained independent observers is widely recognized as a key component of best practice in ocean resource management. Firstly, observers support science-based ocean resource management decisions, such as determining the assessment of the state of fish stocks and ecosystem impacts of marine resource extraction. Secondly, observers support compliance with conservation and management measures in fisheries, seismic research, oil and mining exploration and extraction, and dredge operations. Observer data is regarded as one of the best sources of data for use in marine resource conservation and management.

The Association for Professional Observers (APO) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that was originally established in 1995 to support the scientific integrity of marine resource monitoring – in particular, the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program in the United States, which continues to monitor the groundfish fisheries in Alaska, Washington and Oregon.

Since the inception of the APO, it has continued to grow internationally and conceptually to include other resource management monitoring, though primarily fisheries observers. This has increased the demands on its board members and resources. As a result, the APO board considered it timely to review the functions and priorities of the APO by developing the APO Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020 (Strategic Plan).

The Strategic Plan provides guidance for the administration, growth, and delivery of APO services for the five-year period, 2016-2020.

Background

Stewardship of living marine resources through independent science-based conservation and management, and the protection and restoration of healthy ecosystems are critical to the world's economy.¹ Independent and transparent monitoring is required for the management of publicly owned marine resources. Maintaining this independence and minimizing any potential bias requires adequately supported professional biologists to independently collect scientifically robust data necessary for managers to make informed decisions. The APO believes that addressing basic work environment issues – such as safety, worker rights, insurance, and other factors that increase the retention of professional observers - is imperative to the collection of accurate unbiased data that managers need in order to make informed decisions.

A number of key international instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), call for the use of observer programs as important fisheries management tools at both local and global levels. With the exception of the International Observer Bill of Rights (IOBR) and associated documents², no such international instrument exists to guide managers and industry regarding observer programs.

Observers and observer programs fulfill an important role in effective management of marine and aquatic resources through a number of means. These include, the collection of data for both science and compliance purposes, assisting with population stock assessment, and monitoring the environmental impacts of various resource extraction activities. Observers provide an important role in reporting on the compliance of conservation and management measures with regard to industry practices.

Observer programs can be small, using only a limited number of observers to join the platform or vessel on day trips (two or three times per month), and producing simple raw data sheets. Alternatively, observer programs can be large and complex, involving many highly trained observers collecting, processing and analyzing data, sending the results via satellite to a shore-based team of experts. The type of fisheries management system, the quality of the program and the infrastructural support influence the demands observers face. Support for fisheries observers and observer programs has varied over time and between different fisheries authorities. There continue to be critical gaps internationally regarding the protections for observers - their health, safety and the ability to do their jobs free from assault, harassment, interference or attempted bribery.

¹ See: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) National Marine Fisheries Service Annual Report 2008 U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USA. https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/Observer-Program/pdf/FY2008_Annual_Report_Public.pdf Accessed July 2015.

² See: IOBR/CCROP-HS/CCROP-SR documents: <http://www.apo-observers.org/billofrights>

Numerous names have been created for the role of ‘observer’ – fisheries observer, dockside monitor, at-sea monitor, endangered species observer, dredge observer, and marine mammal observer. All are engaged in providing independent data to ocean resource managers. However, there are increasing attempts by industries to have their own ‘observers’ monitor their operations in substitution for independent observers. The APO believes the independence of the observer is vital to the gathering of unbiased data.³ Therefore, for the purposes of the work covered in the Strategic Plan, the APO goal is for all observers to be well-supported by their employers in order that they can maintain their independence from the industry they are monitoring. The APO recognizes that there are still observers in certain programs who are financially dependent upon the vessels they monitor. However, we feel that this arrangement compromises the observers’ welfare, safety, and the veracity of the observer program.

The APOs current primary goal is to facilitate the exchange of fisheries information while providing an important source of fisheries observer program and fisheries observer data-use information. It is the APO’s intention that the results of its activities encourage the recruitment, retention, and safety of professional observers and foster the best quality observer data for the purposes of conservation and the responsible management of marine living resources. As such, the APO is committed to the interests of the men and women who serve as observers in various observer programs throughout the world.

Development of the Strategic Plan

Over the years, the diversity and membership of the APO has grown, placing additional demands on its board and resources. The growth has made it necessary to develop the Strategic Plan. The aim of the Strategic Plan is to identify, develop, and enhance a strategic approach to the APO’s involvement and in its participation in fishery management organizations and governmental processes at the national, sub-regional, regional, and international level.

The objective of the Strategic Plan is to achieve a comprehensive and targeted plan that will assist the APO in achieving its goals.

A strategic plan is a document used to communicate an organizations vision, mission and goals, along with the actions needed to achieve those goals and the other critical elements developed during the planning exercise.

In order to prepare this Strategic Plan, a cross section of the APO’s leadership and membership, including current and past board members, were canvassed for their views and comments to

³ See: IOBR/CCROP-SR documents: <http://www.apo-observers.org/billofrights>

identify issues, determine priorities and provide any other important information that may be useful for preparing the plan. This material has been used to develop this Strategic Plan along with desktop research of like associations and web resources.

Acknowledgements

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This document honors and pays tribute to Keith Davis, former APO board member and international observer who was reported missing 10 September 2015 while on duty as a transshipment observer for the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). Keith was an unwavering advocate for observer professionalism, rights, safety and welfare. Keith's dedication to and support of the observer community is reflected in the goals and objectives of the APO and the content of this document.

Association for Professional Observers (APO) Strategic Plan 2016-2020

The Strategic Plan provides guidance for the Association for Professional Observers (APO) operations and administration for the five-year period 2016 - 2020.

The plan commits the APO to uphold a set of values and enunciates a vision, mission and purpose, along with goals and objectives. The Strategic Plan will be used to systematically coordinate and align resources and actions with the vision, mission, and strategy throughout APO operations.

The rationale behind the Strategic Plan is that it is important for the APO to have a positive agenda during what may be a challenging time over the next several years.

As challenges arise, the APO will need to respond accordingly to advocate, support and defend its members, their jobs and the services they provide. The Strategic Plan will support the APO to deal with these changes and support more effective involvement in Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) and national agencies.

The Strategic Plan:

- Identifies the vision, mission and purpose, goals and objectives of the APO for 2016 - 2020; and
- Establishes a framework to assist in the determination of priority projects for the annual plan cycle.

The framework will enable the APO to identify and prioritize the critical strategic initiatives and activities that will help make the strategy actionable and can be used to review and guide ongoing refinement and evaluation of the performance of the APO.

The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually during the 2016–2020 period and will be comprehensively revised for each ensuing five-year period. The enactment of the Strategic Plan will be guided by a detailed implementation plan. Through this iterative approach, a focus will be maintained on the Strategic Plan, ensuring that it continues to meet its purpose and remains appropriate to ongoing changes in the external environment and issues that arise over time.

Vision

Independent professional observers are globally valued, respected and securely employed to support the conservation and management of marine living resources.

Mission

The Association for Professional Observers (APO) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization whose mission is to strengthen observer programs through advocacy, education and the encouragement of best practices among stakeholders.

Our goal is to encourage the recruitment and retention of professional observers and foster the best quality observer data for the purposes of conservation and the responsible management of marine living resources.

The APO strongly supports robust, transparent and scientifically based fisheries monitoring programs that adhere to the principles of scientific integrity, welfare of human rights, and unbiased independent observer data and information.

The APO:

- Engages with national and international fora to advance the safety and welfare of observers and their worker rights;
- Advocates for transparency and effectiveness of observer program management; and
- Acts as a liaison between observers and their respective observer programs and observer employer when issues arise.

APO Core Values

Independence:	The APO provides advice that is objective and based on the best information available. It is not unduly influenced by stakeholders, ideological groups, political pressure or by economic or financial interests.
Integrity:	The APO applies the highest ethical standards to all its operations and dealings with people.
Relationships:	The APO will develop, internally and externally, constructive and collaborative relationships built on trust.
Cooperation:	The APO values and encourages the participation of all its members, acting through collaboration and cooperation to cultivate a diverse set of expertise and to promote best practice.
Commitment:	The APO is committed to providing the best advice for observers and observer programs to support effective science-based fishery management.
Transparency:	The APO encourages the participation of observers in its operations and will ensure non-confidential information, analyses and APO organizational documents are easily accessible to all interested parties.

Overall Strategic Goals of the APO

Strategic Goal 1

The APO is a resilient, financially secure and functioning organization.

Strategic Goal 2

Observers are supported and respected in their working environment and activities.

Strategic Goal 3

The APO positively influences and informs fisheries management organizations and other international fora to embed standard requirements of all stakeholders into official policies.

Strategic Goal 4

APO membership and participation is vibrant and active.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1

Maintain and improve APO operations

Objective 1.1

By 2020 the APO will have improved as a professional association and network for exchanging information and expertise, and fostering contacts within the various observer programs, fisheries management personnel, the general public and organizations throughout the world.

Objective 1.2

The APO will be compliant with standard non-profit management practices by 2018.

Activities

Create organizational documents, policies and practices that reflect standard non-profit organizational management.

Develop a new Internet server and build a new website and information portal for the public about fisheries, fisheries management and fishery monitoring programs.

Increase the board to 6 people by December 2016; include individuals with diverse skills, not necessarily with observer experience but dedicated to the vision, mission and goals of the APO.

Update APO bylaws and add/update other organizational documents.

Create an international news listserv (where members can choose regions or topics).

Create a paid executive director position.

Secure funding for key positions.

Create APO affiliated regional chapters and establish a central international office.

Create a template for an annual report, minutes and records (board meeting minutes).

Create an annual report of activities, finances and management.

Decide on the required organizational documentation, and develop processes for their preparation, online storage and access.

Diversify content and delivery to optimize use of digital media and increase interactivity.

Optimize online presence to allow observers to acquire and share best-practice knowledge.

Enhance the Grassroots Network to ensure active representation of all

regions' professional observers.
Develop a strong volunteer base.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 2	Support fisheries observer improvements in working environment and activities
Objective 2.1	Observers are supported to be independent and professional (including their rights, health, safety and stakeholder-support structures) and advocacy is provided by the APO to observers when needed.
Objective 2.2	International collaboration and cooperation is fostered to better leverage observer program initiatives, resources and knowledge.
Objective 2.3	Members and non-members are educated concerning the uses and value of observer data.

Activities	<p>Create a format for interviewing observer programs to monitor their adherence or applicability to the International Observer Bill of Rights (IOBR) and Code of Conduct for Responsible Observer Programmes - Observer Health and Safety (CCROP-HS) and Stakeholder Responsibilities (CCROP-SR) criteria.</p> <p>Gain recognition of the IOBR and CCROP documents through the International Labour Organization (ILO).</p> <p>Monitor and report on trends of observer assault, harassment, interference and bribery.</p> <p>Provide a safe, anonymous platform where observers can report abuse and violations. Research setting up a crisis line for observers.</p> <p>Conduct regular on-line surveys of conditions observers are facing.</p> <p>Scope near-term and mid-term potential changes to industry and observer program operations, and observer responsibilities to identify what advances in technologies may offer monitoring programs.</p> <p>Create an inventory of observer programs according to their current status of implementing electronic monitoring (EM) in place of observer placement and continue ongoing monitoring of challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption of electronic technologies in fishery monitoring programs.</p> <p>Finalize and distribute the APO Electronic Monitoring Position Statement, and determine the most suitable avenues and methods to</p>
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assist with the implementation of policy.

Complete an annual review of EM advancements.

Survey the APO Facebook membership to improve knowledge of membership program representation and their values; review observer laws and regulations internationally; and to organize observer Facebook group members according to their region.

Disseminate information concerning observers, marine conservation, biological and inter – and intra - agency issues via newsletters (as well as a website and listserv for up-to-date information between newsletters).

Develop guidelines that explain laws and procedures pertaining to better access to observer and observer program data and information.

Advocate for the periodic published observer program and observer employer reviews that gauge their efficacy and management practices.

Advocate transparency in contracts between observer program/agency and observer employer; observer program/agency and observers; observer program/agency and fishing industries; observer employers and fishing industries; observer employer and observers and observer unions and observers.

Encourage and promote observers to attain positions of leadership within the APO and other organizations.

Help secure funding to support observers to participate in observer program workshops, conferences and meetings of fishery management agencies and councils, for the purpose of improving fisheries monitoring programs.

Compare and assess observer programs. Work with stakeholders to help establish best practice, share information, and demonstrate the efficacy of observer programs. Start with well-established programs and work toward helping improve developing programs or those that are considered to be functioning less well. Possibly develop a 'score card' for programs.

Partner with an NGO specialized in facilitating government transparency and accountability to facilitate whistle-blowing and grievance procedures for observers while ensuring their rights are protected.

Encourage closer engagement with relevant stakeholders (government, observers, observer employers, industry, observers, NGOs and the public) to better inform APO priorities and activities. Increase public awareness of the observer profession and its vital role in sustainable fisheries.

Undertake analysis of the level of resources required to support and respond to an individual fisheries observer's needs/requests in order to determine prioritization of APO focus areas and resources that are needed to support these activities.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 3 **The APO influences and informs fisheries management organizations and other international fora to embed standard requirements of all stakeholders into official observer program, observer employer and agency policies**

Objective 3.1 Best practices for observer programs are to be acknowledged, accepted, promoted and implemented by all fisheries management organizations by 2025.

Objective 3.2 Professional fisheries observers are to be recognized as an essential component of all RFMO and national fisheries management agencies.

Objective 3.3 The APO is recognized as a credible and international association providing valued and trusted input into fisheries policy and management development at international fora.

Activities

Provide linkage between effective fishery monitoring programs, sustainable resource management, and public acceptability of fisheries.

Scope out venues to provide input into policies and papers being developed in relevant international conventions and treaties to ensure APO has a voice in their development and can progress issues that impact observer programs and observers.

Scope out venues to obtain formal recognition of IOBR and CCROP documents in order to move agencies toward their implementation.

Improve access to observer data to support greater use of data for different purposes (e.g. develop a Freedom of Information Policy that can be adopted by RFMOs).

Scope out suitable avenues and methods to support capacity building in observer programs, including that of enforcement.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 4	Increase total membership and participation of observers
Objective 4.1	The regional, national and international growth of the APO membership continues and healthy membership is achieved by 2020.
Objective 4.2	Inspire fisheries observers to be connected with the APO, as the organization that represents them and to realize their important role in sustainable fisheries.
Objective 4.3	The APO becomes financially secure through financial membership fees and specific grants by 2020.

Activities	<p>Reach out to a wider cross section of observers and developing programs in order to encourage membership and participation.</p> <p>Promote a linkage between effective fishery monitoring programs, sustainable resource management, and public acceptability of fisheries.</p> <p>Scope suitable funding sources and grants for specific projects and opportunities.</p> <p>Prepare project proposals for specific grants.</p> <p>Continue to build relationships with similar associations and activities (e.g. International Fisheries Observer and Monitoring Conference), and various Electronic Monitoring working groups and observer advisory committees.</p> <p>Improve fishery monitoring programs worldwide through sharing of practices and development in new methods of data collection and analysis.</p>
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