

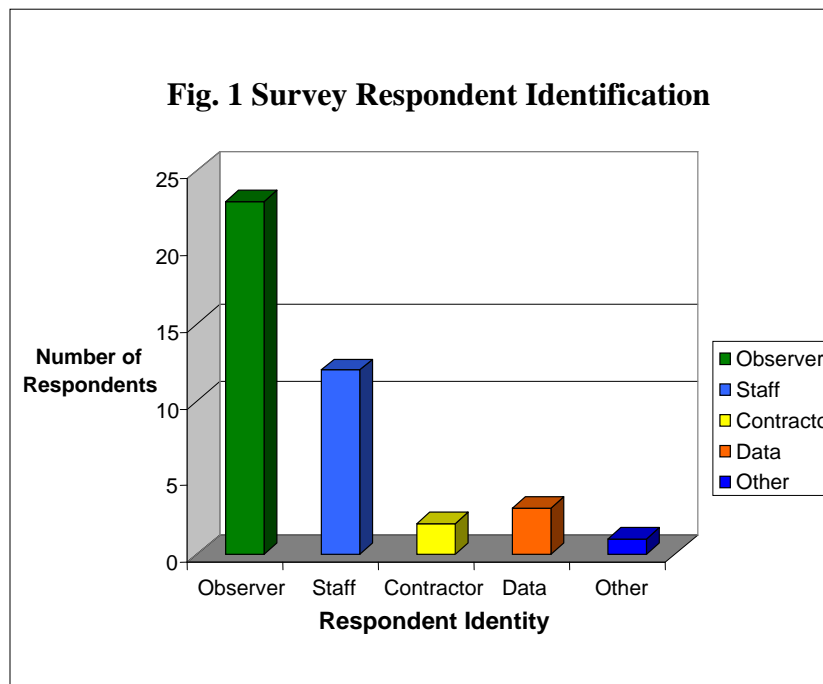
2008 Support and Opportunities Committee Findings

For a full report of all of the work of the OPWG up until July 2008, please navigate to the [2008 OPWG Report](#). This document holds only the work of the Support and Opportunities Committee of the OPWG up until July 2008.

2007 Survey Respondent Identification

We received 45 responses to the 2007 OPWG survey, with responses originating from 12 different countries. The scope of respondents' experience has been quite geographically broad, spanning across many of the world's seas.

Our aim was to reach the stakeholders with the most vested interests in observer employment practices, with our main emphasis on hearing from observers. Of the 45 responses, 61% were submitted by Observers, 30% from agency Staff members, 7% from Data Analyst /end users, and 2% from a source Other than these options (see Fig.1).



Support and Opportunities Analysis Highlights

The following were highlighted by 2007 OPWG Survey respondents (combined Works Well and Desire percentage), indicating a positive view:

1. **Other Scientific Opportunities (93%)** – Observers are provided with opportunities to participate in scientific ventures outside of observing duties.
2. **Vessel Profiles Provided (94%)**- Observers are provided with information that sketches a profile of the vessel that they will be deployed upon

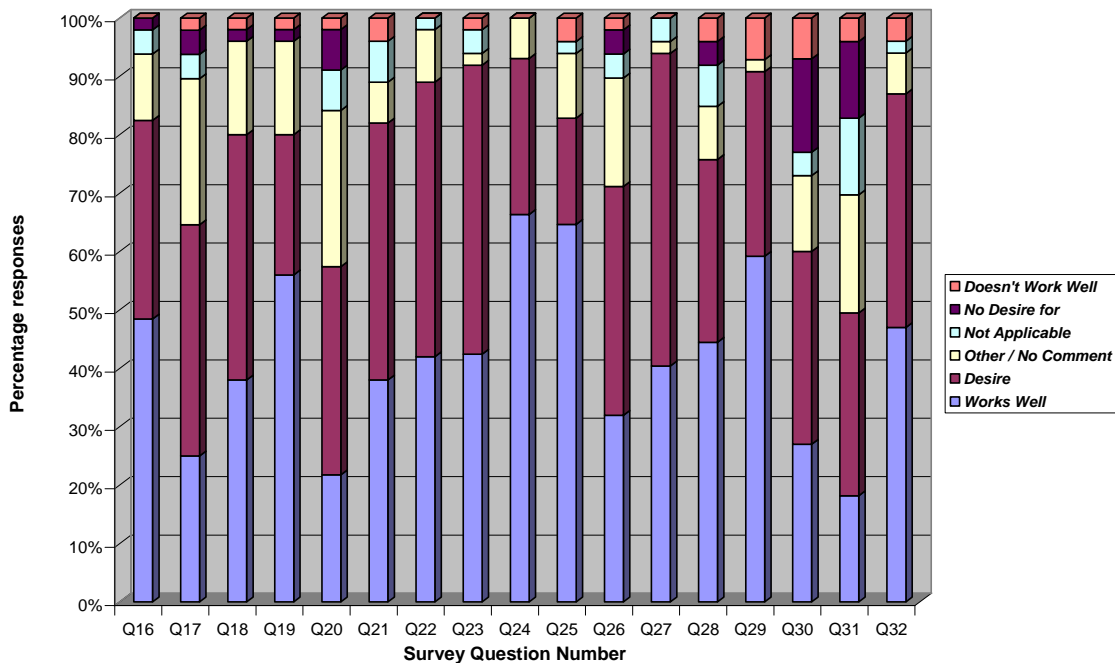
3. **Support to attend Professional Fora (91%)**– Observers’ attendance and involvement at professional fora (i.e. the IFOC) are supported
4. **Performance Evaluations (89%)**– Observers are regularly evaluated upon their performance and this information is fed back to the observers
5. **Career Advancement (82%)**– Observers are provided the opportunities and resources to advance their professional development and careers
6. **Prioritized employment, graded by experience (80%)** – Observers are paid and given assignments according to a scale based on experience. More experience equals more compensation.
7. **Publication Credit (69%)** – Observers are credited in final publications that use their data and these publications are available for observers

Support and Opportunities Complete Analysis

The following is an analysis of responses to each question raised in the Support and Opportunities section of the 2007 OPWG Survey.

The following figure graphically presents survey responses, in terms of percentages, per listed question in the Support and Opportunities section of the 2007 OPWG Survey:

Fig.2 Survey Analysis Results - Support and Opportunities Committee



Question 16. Prioritized employment, graded by experience:

When considering the data from all respondents, it is evident that most of the respondent programmes either have such employment, or don't have it and want it. However, the picture becomes a little more interesting when looking at observers and staff members as separate respondent categories. The majority of observers (43%) tended to view their

programmes as *not* having prioritized employment (graded by experience), while the majority of staff members (61%) viewed their programmes as having it and it working well. Such differences may only be an artifact of the respondents coming from different observer programme, but in at least one case, observer and staff member respondents can be identified as coming from the same programme, and yet view their programme differently.

Recommendations: Observer programmes and service providers should work to implement prioritized employment, or if they have it, make sure their observer cadre is well informed as to such, and clearly told what kinds of experience they need in order to receive prioritized employment.

Question 17. Grievance procedures:

The responses to this question are much like question 16. The majority (62%) of all respondents indicate either already having grievance procedures, and that they work well, or desire grievance procedures. This seems to indicate that grievance procedures are an important programme aspect to most. However, once again disconnect exists among observers and staff; while 52% of observers who don't have grievance procedures desire them, only 31% of observer staff members desire them.

Recommendations: For programmes with formalized grievance, share information regarding how such procedures work with other programmes that desire them.

Question 18. Programme and contractor performance evaluations:

The majority (42%) of both observers and staff do not have, but desire performance evaluations, although a substantial amount of respondents (38%) indicate already having such programmes. Again it seems like an ideal opportunity for those programmes without evaluations to learn from those who have them. Again, there seems to be a different perception between observers and staff (42% desiring vs. 31% desiring).

Recommendations: Observer programmes and contractors should have in place a feedback and/or evaluation process for observers and staff to provide constructive criticism in order for fisheries observer programme to improve.

Question 19. Conflict resolution and harassment training:

The largest amount of respondents (56%) indicates having such training and it working well, but when examined separately between observers and staff, some differences are obvious. While only 46% of observers responded that they have a conflict resolution and harassment training programme that works well, 77% of staff members responded in the same fashion. Again, whether this is simply a result of the respondents being from different observer programmes, or represents a real difference in how these respondent groups value or perceive this type of training, is unknown.

Recommendations: Conflict resolution training should be included in observer training programmes.

Question 20. Counseling options:

Note: This question did not specify what kinds of counseling options are being discussed (i.e. Career, grief, substance, financial). This may be why there was a surprising number of no comment, N/A, and no desire for responses.

A majority of respondents (58%) desire or have counseling options that are working well. There are a higher percentage of those that desire this than those that have it working well in the overall responses as well as in the observer responses. With staff it's about even. This may be the result of the respondents not understanding the question fully, or that counseling options that observers have in their programme are not clearly conveyed to them. This misunderstanding of counseling options might also be supported by the 12% of observers who responded that it was not applicable to their programme while no staff answered that way. There is also a high instance of no comment answers (27%) which also may be a product of vague wording and them not understanding exactly what the question is asking. 16% of staff responded that they either had no desire for it or had it and didn't want it. No observers answered this way. This may also support the idea that observers didn't understand it well enough to answer effectively (but didn't want to miss counseling opportunities) or that some may not know that counseling opportunities exist.

Recommendations: Implement counseling options in observer programmes, whatever they may be, they are desired. Clearly convey to observers the types of counseling options that they have available to them in their observer programme. In future research, the OPWG should rephrase the question to increase understanding by respondents, defining what types of counseling opportunities are being discussed.

Discussion Points: What are counseling options? What particular options are most desired by observers? Should these services be supplied in-house by staff or outsourced?

Question 21. Career-advancement opportunities for Observers:

There is no surprise that an overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) have opportunities and like them or desire to have career-advancement opportunities for observers. Observer and overall responses had more *desire* answers than *works well*, while staff had more *works well* than *desire* answers. Here again we may be seeing a issue in observers knowing what their programme has to offer as far as advancement or a disagreement in what is considered an advancement opportunity. There was also a 15% staff response of *doesn't work well* while no observers responded in this manner. This may also indicate that staff have opportunities they believe are career-advancing while observers don't see it that way or aren't aware of them.

Recommendations: Career-advancement opportunities should be available within observer programmes. Research and determine how observers define "career-

advancement opportunities”, and push for those types of offerings. Clearly convey what options are currently available in existing programmes with career-advancement opportunities.

Discussion Points: What is career-advancement to an observer? Is there a difference between what observers desire for career advancement? For example what does an observer desire for career-advancement that is using observing as a “stepping-stone” versus that of someone who desires observing itself a career? How much focus should be placed on advancing observers given the current high-turnover rate? Would more opportunities reduce turn-over, or possibly create more turn-over? Is it cost-effective for programmes to help their observers move on to other careers, maybe not even in the observing realm?

Question 22. Professional development and training opportunities:

This question is similar in scope and responses to question 21. The vast majority, 89%, of respondents, as well as observer and staff only respondents think development and training opportunities are a positive. This is not surprising as this is a common desire in any field. Of the majority, roughly half respondents were in a programme with these opportunities and half desired them. So it looks as if this is being implemented and observers are taking advantage of this in some programmes.

Recommendations: Using the OPWG definition of “Professional Observer” coming from the survey, opportunities should be offered to observers that help them achieve a professional status. Professional Observers should also be offered opportunities that help them become more effective and well-rounded.

Discussion Points: What kinds of opportunities are available to those observers wishing to use observing to get another job or to stay in observing for the long term? Are career-advancement opportunities for those observers wishing to move beyond observing and professional development for those observers wishing to have observing as a career available? Would both avenues benefit from both types of training?

Question 23. Support for observers to attend professional fora:

Overwhelming majority of respondents have or would like to see support for observers to attend professional fora (91%). The interesting point here again is the difference between staff and observer responses. 46% of staff responded that there is this type of opportunity and it works well and 46% desire it. Observers responded with 50% desiring this support and 38% said it worked well. Maybe there are opportunities missed out on by some observers. IFOC as an example offers monies via the WFT, NOP and / or the APO for funding to attend but the response rate is generally very low.

Recommendations: Observer programmes should offer support to attend professional fora for their observers. Determine why observer support / interest in professional fora may be low.

Discussion Points: How can observers be encouraged to participate in professional fora? Does a high-turnover rate affect the willingness and interest in professional fora for observers? More generally, how do we get more observers to participate in any and all types of groups and fora that affect their field directly? Other than IFOMC, what other professional fora are available for observers to attend? Should there be more?

Question 24. Observer provided with vessel profiles:

Based on this assumption, 67% of the respondents feel that their programmes are doing a good job providing them with vessel profiles, and the remainder have a desire to receive vessel profiles.

Recommendations: Programmes / Observers compile a database of vessel profiles for each vessel in the fleet. Programmes supply Observers with complete vessel profiles for all assignments as part of briefing. OPWG develop some general standards for what constitutes a “vessel profile”.

Discussion Points: What is a vessel profile? What needs to be included in the profile (i.e. vessel deck layout, work areas, processing procedures, historic crew cooperation, specific safety issues)?

Question 25. Policy to allow observers to refuse a vessel:

The majority of responses (64%) indicated that the policies set out work well for allowing Observers to refuse a vessel. The remainder of respondents (who provided an answer) have the desire to have policies that would allow them to refuse a vessel.

Recommendations: Programmes need to establish and implement policy and procedures for Observers to refuse vessels. OPWG develop some general reasons why / how Observers should be allowed to refuse a vessel.

Discussion Points: What are the guidelines for vessel refusal? These of course will vary programme to programme, but there are a number of common elements that should apply to all programmes.

Question 26. Observers credited in final data publications:

70% of the respondents either felt they were either being credited or desired to be so, in final data publications, and only 7% of the respondents indicated *no desire* for credit. This would suggest that recognition is an important part of the profession. 23% of the respondents expressed either *other / no comment* or *not applicable*, which may suggest that they have not had the opportunity to participate in a programme that has resulted in a final publication.

Recommendations: Programmes should strive to properly credit Observers for their contributions / efforts in any final publications.

Discussion Points: How should Observers be credited and have their efforts acknowledged in final publications?

Question 27. Other scientific opportunities:

40% of the respondents felt they had good access to other scientific opportunities, and 53% had a *desire* to have access to other opportunities. This indicates that having access to different areas of work and other opportunities is important for, and sought after by Observers (as supported by observer responses to short answer “D”). A greater variety of work opportunity allows for further professional development, and also helps to relieve boredom and / or apathy.

Recommendations: Programmes should identify Observers who have the necessary skills, and also the desire to work on other scientific projects. Programmes should be encouraged to seek out opportunities for observer staff to be utilized on other scientific opportunities and should be encouraged to do so.

Question 28. Data-generated reports provided back to observers:

44% of the respondents answered that providing data generated reports *works well* and 31% have a *desire* for these reports. This indicates that the majority of observers and programme staff think that it is important for observers to see how the data they are collecting is being used and to see the results.

When splitting the responses between staff and observers only 45% of the observers that responded felt that they had access to these reports while 54% of staff members replied that their programmes provided reports. When comparing response between observers and staff from the same region there was different responses among several programmes.

This could be the result of two issues: there may be a communication issue in some programmes. This could be due to the high turnover rate of observers or due to the fact that most observers spend much of their time out at sea and do not take the time to look at what is available when they are on land.

Recommendations: Programmes should look into ways to provide reports on data collected back to observers. Programmes that do provide these reports may want to look into making it more accessible to observers. Smaller programmes may be able to mail reports to observers' addresses. Have a link on a website where all articles relating to observer data is posted. Provide observers with reports during briefings.

Question 29. Observer Performance Evaluations:

89% of all respondents felt that having observer performance evaluations *works well* or they *desire* it for their programme. 69% of staff that responded to this question said they have performance evaluations and that they *work well* and the remaining staff said that they have a *desire* for evaluations. The response was slightly different among observers. 58 % said it *works well*, 31% said they *desire* it, and 12% said that their programme has it and it does *not work well*.

Recommendations: Observer programmes should provide feedback in the form of evaluations for observers in the field.

Discussion Points: How specifically should an observer performance evaluation be conducted and fed back to the observer?

Question 30. Observers encouraged to help out in “the office”:

60% of respondents felt that this *worked well* or that they *desire* it for their programme. 7% of all respondents said that their programme has this and it does *not work well*, and 16% had *no desire* for it.

15% of observer respondents said that they were encouraged to help out in the office and that it worked well while 54% of staff respondents felt that their programme encourage observers to help out and that it worked well. 53% of observer respondents have the *desire* to help out in the office.

Recommendations: Observers should have access to some type of office and/or land based duties to offer a more complete role in fisheries science.

Discussion Points: Gives observers another perspective and more experience - may help to limit burnout factor. Observers become more invested in the programme and have a greater connection.

Question 31. Drug and alcohol education / training:

49% of all respondents responded that they have this and it *works well* or they *desire* it for their programme. 15% of observers stated that this works well in their programmes while 27% said they desire it for their programme. 23% of staff respondents stated that it works well while 31% expressed the desire for this type of training.

Recommendations: Programmes should provide the option for drug and alcohol education.

Question 32: Support to encourage observer communications

47% of all respondents answered that there is support to encourage observer communications while 40% answered that they would like this type of support. 38% of

observers responded that they have this support and 42% answered that they desire this kind of support. 61% of staff respondents answered that their programme provides this type of support while 31% showed the desire for this type of support.

Recommendations: Programmes should look into ways to encourage observer communications. Web or phone based communications probably will work best. Utilize and encourage use of already in place online observer resources such as www.ObserverNet.org and www.apo-observers.org