

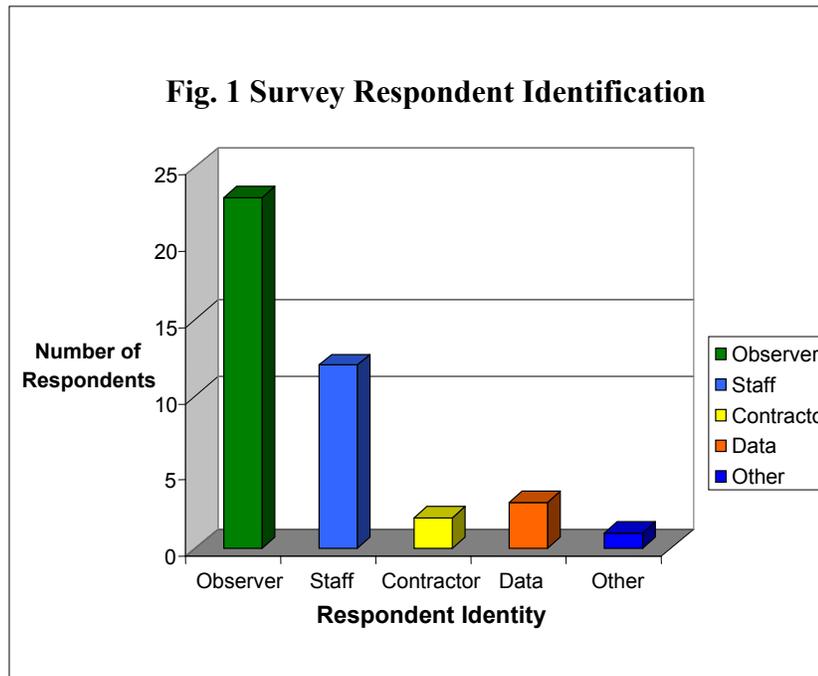
# 2008 Employment Standards Committee Findings

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 Wages and Benefits 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).



## Employment Standards Analysis Highlights

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

1. **Rules for Observers assisting Fishers (58%)** – The Observer / Fisher relationship is well defined with rules that outline how observers can and can not assist fishers
2. **Employee Retention Standards (58%)** – Observer programmes have standards that mandate how their observer employee force is retained

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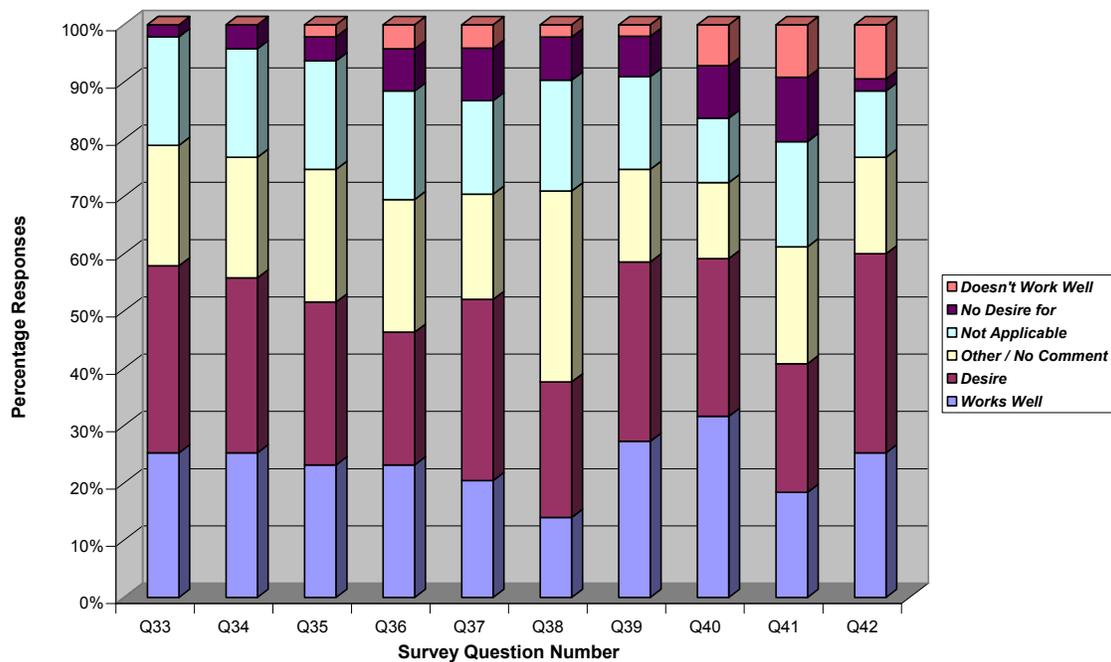
3. **National Training Standards (56%)** – A set of observer training standards that each observer programme in a nation adheres to
4. **National debriefing (data accountability) standards (53%)** – A set of observer Code of Conduct standards that each observer programme in a nation adheres to
5. **National Observer "minimum wage" (51%)** The guarantee of a fixed standard of income
6. **National data-form and species-code Standards (58%)** Standardisation of reporting protocols

## Employment Standards Complete Analysis

The following is an analysis of responses to each question raised in the *Employment Standards* section of the 2007 OPWG survey and includes a summary of the response to Short Answer C of the survey.

The following figure graphically presents survey responses, in terms of percentages, per listed question in the *Employment Standards* section of the 2007 OPWG Survey:

Fig.3 Survey Analysis Results - Employment Standards Committee



### Question 33. National training standards:

This question was designed to gauge respondents' views on the existence, provision and application of training to the fisheries observer profession at the national level. Of 45 valid responses, 24% of respondents indicated that training *works well* in their experience and 31% indicated that they felt training to be a useful initiative in the development of the profession. Some 18% of respondents indicated that training standards was *not applicable*; each of these respondents were identified as observers.

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**Recommendations:** The OPWG should continue to define the training needs of the profession in terms of the types of training required, length of training courses and the frequency at which such training should be undertaken. The Group should also continue to elaborate thinking on the development of an international standard preparation course for those wishing to enter the fisheries observer profession.

**Discussion Points:** It appears strange that 18% of respondents should consider training standards to be *not applicable*. In a profession with all of the associated physical and psychological dangers inherent in fisheries observing, one would have thought that there would exist unanimity on the issue of training. The provision of effective, appropriate and ongoing training to the profession is fundamental to its continued development. The Group should examine this issue to determine why some observers might not agree that training standards are essential for the profession. Depending on the findings, there may be a need for appropriate follow-up.

**Question 34. National debriefing (data accountability) standards:**

The purpose of this question was to determine the views of respondents regarding debriefing practices in the programmes of their experience. Some 24% of respondents indicated that debriefing *works well* in their programmes, whilst 29% felt that debriefing is useful to the development of the profession. Similarly to question 33, some 18% of respondents indicated that debriefing is *not applicable*. Again, these respondents were all observers.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should consider the possibility of developing a core set of standards to be used in debriefing design. Whilst there will be certainly fisheries-specific elements which mean that each debriefing should be slightly different, it may be possible to identify a set of core elements which could be used to structure an internationally standardized debriefing design.

**Discussion Points:** It is again curious why observers might consider debriefings to be *not applicable* in this profession. A debriefing provides vital feedback to management on the performance of programmes, personnel, vessels involved in the fishery, and highlights any problems which should be addressed. The Group will look into this issue further to try to identify whether these results are a survey anomaly or do in fact reflect certain opinions within the profession. That 29% of respondents have indicated that they *desire* debriefings indicates that this has not been a feature of the experience of respondents. The reasons for this could also be looked into further.

**Question 35. National Code of Conduct standards:**

It is a matter of some debate whether or not the fisheries observer profession requires a 'Code of Conduct'. Some might argue that such a code is necessary to maintain and enhance the credibility of the profession; whereas others might take the view that the need for such a code is indicative of performance problems within the profession. This

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question then was designed to gauge attitudes and opinions on this issue on the basis of respondents' experience.

22% of respondents indicate that Code of Conduct standards *work well* in their experience, some 29% of respondents indicated a *desire* for such standards and 18% felt that this was *not applicable*.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should continue to define the need for a Code of Conduct for observers, and the overall view of the profession on this issue. A question to this effect could therefore be incorporated into the *focused interviews* planned for the next Conference as part of the ongoing work of the OPWG.

**Discussion Points:** Is there really a need for such a 'Code of Conduct' in the profession? If so, what should be laid down in the code, and who should be responsible for drafting it? Could an international code be developed, or should such codes remain at the national / programme level?

**Question 36. National eligibility and competency standards:**

Eligibility (i.e. entry criteria) and competency are key issues to the successful development of a fisheries observer – whether scientific or compliance-based. What then, were the views of the survey respondents on this issue?

22% of respondents indicated that these standards in their experience *work well*, 22% expressed the view that such standards would be useful to the development of the profession and 18% felt that such standards were *not applicable*.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should continue to work on defining exactly what the eligibility and competency standards are for the profession.

**Discussion Points:** The 18% of responses which indicated that these standards are not applicable are thought to be anomalous, since for the profession, there will always be entry criteria and will always be competency standards. The OPWG should consider whether it is possible to work up a set of internationally recognized entry criteria and competency standards for the profession, or whether such criteria should remain at the national / programme level.

**Question 37. National Observer "minimum wage":**

The issue of a minimum wage is a thorny one. In many fisheries in which observer programmes feature, the managing company or agency is in the majority of cases appointed by a process of open tendering. By dint of sheer economics, those who are granted the contract are often the lowest bidders in the tender process. It is usual that such minimalist economic planning filters downstream to those who are charged with data collection at sea – the observers themselves. Whilst many observers would agree with

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minimum wage standards, economics dictates that this is often simply not possible – especially in the case of countries such as the ACP States. The survey results reflect this.

20% of respondents indicated from their experience that such standards *work well*, 31% indicated a *desire* for such standards, 18% had *no comment* to make and 16% felt that this issue was *not applicable*.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should continue to define what is meant by “Minimum Wage” in the context of the observer profession – both at the national level and internationally. The ultimate goal of this work should be to determine whether an international standard might be established, and in what form this could be expressed (as a percentage of the per capita mean income for the country in question, related to national legislation on minimum wages etc.).

**Discussion Points:** The reasons why 16% of respondents indicated that this issue was not applicable should be examined in greater detail. It could be that this is an expression of realism, or it could be that for those specific programmes, there are no minimum income provisions.

**Question 38. National observer programme database standards:**

The management of databases is usually a specialist area; the fisheries observer profession being no exception. Whilst fisheries observers themselves are charged with the collection of raw data, the collation, organization, analysis and interpretation of results is usually undertaken by the management companies / agencies. It may sometimes be the case that observers themselves can work on the data, but usually this work falls to specialists in the area of data handling. The somewhat ambiguous survey results may reflect this.

13% of respondents indicated that database standards *work well*, 22% indicated that such standards may be useful to the professional development of observers, 31% made *no comment* and 16% expressed the view that such standards were *not relevant*.

**Discussion Point:** Whilst database standards are clearly important, do they in fact fall within the wider realm of fisheries management itself; rather than being an issue with direct bearing on the development of the fisheries observer profession?

**Question 39. National data-form and species-code Standards:**

It makes sound sense to standardize the forms used for the collection of raw data, and the codes used to identify species caught and interacted with in the fishery. Such standardisation could be at the national level, or may be international. The survey sought to gauge the views of the profession at the national level.

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27% of respondents indicated that data form and species code standardisation *works well*, 31% of respondents felt this was useful to the development of the profession, 16% had *no comment* to make and 11% felt that it was *not relevant*.

**Recommendations:** Since standardisation of data forms and species codes is such an important and fundamental matter, it is recommended that the OPWG looks again in greater detail as to why some persons in this profession might not comment on this type of standardisation, and why some might consider that it is not relevant. This issue can be addressed through the planned *focused interviews* work for the 2009 conference. It is also recommended that the Group examine the possibility of developing international standards in this regard.

**Discussion Points:** The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), has already developed a coding system for the major species, which is available via the FAO Fisheries website. The many Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) have also developed standardised data recording formats and forms for the various international programmes in operation. Undoubtedly, there will be similarities in these formats which could be used as a basis for the development of international data form standards.

**Question 40. Rules for observers helping fishers with their duties:**

This is clearly another interesting issue, on which there might exist several camps of opinion. Some might argue that helping fishers may compromise the position of the observer, whereas others might say that helping fishermen gives access to excellent first-hand observations. Some observers (and indeed managers) might argue that there should not be rules, that observers should be able to make these decisions in the field, according to circumstances. Responses to the survey were in the majority positive (58%) regarding the establishment of rules regarding observers helping fishers.

31% of respondents indicated that the application of such rules *works well*, 27% indicated that this would be useful to the development of the profession, 13% had *no comment* to make and 11% felt that such rules were *not relevant*.

**Recommendations:** It would be interesting for the OPWG to further examine the issue of observers helping fishers via the planned *focused interview* procedure. Whilst it would be useful to gather more information regarding this issue, at this stage it is felt that such rules should remain at the level of the programme. Local conditions will determine whether such rules are necessary and if so, what they should specify.

**Discussion Points:** From an international perspective, whilst it is not practicable to develop a general standard on this issue, it might nevertheless prove possible to develop policy guidelines for managers.

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**Question 41. Rules for vessel owners hiring their own observers:**

In most fisheries observer programmes, the hiring of observers is undertaken by Government departments and agencies, or private companies contracted with the management of given programmes. Circumstances may arise in which vessel owners might offer or express a wish to hire their own observers. Whilst such situations may seem attractive to policy makers from an economic viewpoint, caution should be exercised and rules should exist to deal with this. Depending upon the reasons why vessel owners might seek to hire their own observers, it is clear that the observers' independence might be seriously compromised by this practice. The observers' ability to make objective observations and collect data which truly reflect the fishery could easily be affected by the fact that their salary is paid by the vessel owner. Since this is a situation which does not occur often, one would expect there to be a balanced range of views on this issue across the fisheries observer profession. The survey results reflect this.

Of 45 respondents, 18% indicated that in their experience such rules *work well*, 22% felt that such rules might be useful to the development of the profession, 20% made *no comment*, 18% felt that such rules were *not relevant* and 11% felt that such rules were not needed for the professional development of observers.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should try to gather specific information regarding the practice of vessel owners hiring their own observers. It is recommended that the OPWG devote some time to determining the types of fisheries in which vessel owners hire their own observers, the extent of this practice, the specifics of rules governing this practice and the employment conditions under which observers work in such cases.

**Discussion Points:** Under what circumstances might vessel owners seek to hire their own observers? What are the reactions of policy makers to this practice? What are the details of any rules which exist to regulate this practice?

**Question 42. Employment retention standards and evaluations:**

The terms "profession" and "career" as applied to the work of the fisheries observer imply some sense of work continuity which in term suggests that retention is an issue of importance. This survey question was designed to obtain an overview of the views of the profession regarding employment retention standards.

24% of respondents indicated that such standards work well, 33% felt that retention was useful to the development of the profession, 16% had no comment to make and 11% felt that the issue of retention was not applicable.

**Recommendations:** The OPWG should continue working to identify the specific policies that programmes have in place to ensure employee retention. This work should be undertaken with a view to identifying common elements, which may then be used to work up a strategy for retention in the profession on an international level.

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**Short Answer C. Prioritize your top three eligibility and competency standards, when considering the recruitment and retention of “professional observers” (i.e. education level and experience level)?:**

To analyze this question, a general approach was taken - all eligibility requirements were first listed and then the number of responses was tallied according to the ranking given by the respondents. There were 29 total respondents for this question; 19 observers, 10 staff members, 2 data users and 1 contractor.

Overall the biggest requirement given by respondents was the need for education. This had the most #1 requirement answers and tied for the most #2 requirement. This was obviously believed to be very important. The question of whether or not education standards for the profession need to be university level, which comes up in many discussions, was observed here as well. Many of the respondents listing education in their top 3 requirements believed that a degree qualification was not needed to be an observer. In fact the message from many of the responses was that observers should or should not be required to have a science degree. This will be an important discussion point in the future, especially internationally where the best workforce available may not be those with science degrees.

After education, experience was the next most common response with a lot of respondents listing it somewhere in their answer. The experience needed was not limited to observer fields but was mostly referring to some type of vessel, at-sea, and fisheries type experience. Personality and ability to deal with stress and specifically fishers and the life at sea was also mentioned a few times. Physical and mental fitness also got some attention as well as passing training and receiving good performance / evaluation reviews. Seaworthiness, flexibility in assignments and schedule, longevity, independence and an interest/passion for the field all received more than one mention. Ability to do paperwork, willingness to improve, covering at least one deployment per month, literate, speaking English, and work ethic all received one mention as well.

*Note: It should be pointed out that the survey listed education and experience as examples in the question and this may have skewed the responses.*