OBSERVER ONBOARD PROGRAM IN THAILAND
UNDER THE NATIONAL POLICY FOR MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Pattira Lirdwitayaprasit*, Aekkarat Wongkeaw and Prasit Luesrithavornsin
Deep Sea Fishery Technology Research and Development Institute,
Department of Fisheries, Thailand
* Corresponding author: Pattiral@hotmail.com

Abstract

The program of Thai Fisheries Observer Onboard has been established under the Marine Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) 2015-2019 in order to decrease the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing). The Fisheries Observer Onboard Program has been started with the development of observer onboard for fishing vessels operating on the high seas, which are the areas of competence of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) for the purpose of strengthening the monitoring, control and surveillance system (MCS) to be more effective.

This paper describes the process of the establishment of fisheries observers onboard for Thai fishing vessels. The process includes planning, management procedures, training course and workshops, working procedures and documents required for the operation onboard, data collection onboard, and the traceability of such data and information for their accuracy confirmation. These data and information will therefore be used to effectively manage resources for the most benefits.

Introduction

The amendments to the Fisheries Act B.E. 2558 (2015) recognizes the significance of sustainable management of the fisheries resources of Thailand and requires the development and implementation of a fisheries management plan. The Marine Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) 2015-2019 has then been developed. It outlines the nature of the management, challenges faced by Thailand, and details of what actions and management measures required for transforming an open-access fishery into a limited-access fishery. The FMP of Thailand is closely linked to the National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing, and the National Control Plan 2015.

The Establishment of Thai Fisheries Observer Onboard Program

This Fisheries Observer Onboard Program has been established for Thai fishing vessels and transshipment vessels, which only operate on the high seas. The program has begun by appointing a committee who sets up an action plan and develops the training course with the advises provided by the experts from Japan, the Philippines and the IOTC.

Working Plan for the Observer Onboard Development Program

1. Internal meeting between the working group and key persons from related organizations.

In July 2015, The working group initiated a meeting with related organizations in Thailand to define the scope and plan for the development of Observer Onboard Program. It was concluded that the main issue was the limited knowledge of staffs regarding observer onboard. As a result, the meeting's conclusion was to organize an orientation workshop in order to transfer knowledge and increase understanding of the DOF and SEAFDEC staffs on Observer Onboard. This is to allow these staffs to help on the development of the program.

2. Meeting on the Observer Onboard Development Plan of working group and staffs from related organizations

On 26th August 2015, the Observer Onboard Development Program working group and staffs from SEAFDEC had a meeting to discuss on the preparation of the observer onboard training course, and to define the standard requirements of candidate observers, as well as the approach used for application.

On 22th September 2015, the Observer Onboard Development Program working group and staffs of SEAFDEC had a meeting to discuss on the preparation of the observer onboard training course, course material, and law and regulations related the deployment of observer onboard.

3. Preparation of training course and course material for observer onboard

The working group submitted the first draft of the proposal for Observer Onboard Training Course to IOTC. The working group had a meeting via Skype with the IOTC Observer Onboard Coordinator on the training course structure and the course material preparation, as well as IOTC resolutions and requirements.

4. Establishment of THAI-FOC

The drafts was submitted to the committee on Development of Observer Onboard Program in Thailand for approval. The working group visited the Observer Program Office in the Republic of the Philippines. The working group had a meeting with the DOF executives on the process of communicating with the stakeholders on the Observer Onboard development plan.

5. Training for the Observer

the Observer Onboard Program for the 1st batch of observers (20 candidates selected from the DOF officers) was commenced in September 2015, whereas the program for the 2nd batch of observers (30 candidates) was commenced in April 2016. The first observer onboard deployment of the Thai vessels operating on the high sea was conducted in July 2016.

The Onboard Operation of Fisheries Observers

For the action plan for fisheries observer onboard of Thai fishing vessels, it is set up for the observers to collect data and information onboard of such vessels for at least five percent of their total fishing days on the high seas. However, for those fishing vessels who want to transship fish in the areas beyond the RFMO responsibility, the observer onboard will record data and informational of all transshipments conducted. At present, the DOF has requested IOTC the registration of a purse seiner. Documents required to made by the observer onboard are as follows:-

1. **"Pre-sea check list"** It is a document used to check the preparedness of the vessel in terms of, for instance, the safety equipment onboard, communication device, and a place

for an observer to stay onboard. In case the vessel does not meet such list required, the observer is able to refuse to go onboard. This pre-sea check list document must be submitted within 24 hours.

2. **"Five days status"** It is a document reporting about fishing activities or any activities onboard observed, as well as the current status of the observer. This document must be submitted every 5 days.

3. **"Fishing gear logbook"** It is a document reporting about fishing operations, the amount of fish caught, the amount of fish released and discarded, as well as the details of fishing gears and fishing support equipments.

(A)   (B)

Figure 1: Species identification handbook (A) Longline (B) Purse seine, Gill net

Such data and information recorded by the observers will be compiled and input into a database by the DOF, and will be submitted to the IOTC due to the resolutions concerned on resource management in the competent areas.

At the moment, the DOF has been requesting for the IOTC registration of a Thai purse seiner, namely Century 9 in order for it to operate in the IOTC area of competence. Fishing vessels operating on the high seas are required to record data and information on a fishing logbook, including the details of species and amount of fish caught. It is also required to have fish sampling from the catch in order to conduct length measurement on species of

tuna, sharks, and sailfish. The information with regard to the appearance of turtles, sharks and dolphins near FADs is recorded as well.

Figure 2: Purse seine fishing logbook

Figure 3: Size frequency logbook for fishing vessel

The Traceability Process of Data and Information

Currently, Thailand has implemented the traceability process of data and information obtained from Thai fishing vessels operating overseas, including other coastal States' jurisdiction. The process can be described by steps as follows:-

- Interview and record fish unloaded

The DOF officer interviews the fishing master or captain of the fishing vessel or transshipment vessel for the information in terms of the fishing effort for the total catch, days per trip, number of hauls, fishing grounds, sea depth, species composition, problems in fishing, and selectively check fishing vessels of the total number of unloaded. This data will be cross checked with the data from logbook.

- Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)

The fishing vessel tracking systems or vessel monitoring system (VMS) will be used to control and monitor the fishing vessels, which are larger than 30 gross tonnage. Based on the VMS installation, not only the real time system can be monitored by online application, but also the navigation data of the fishing vessel can be traced back to analyze its fishing behavior. Such data of the vessel will be automatically sent to the operation center in order for the DOF to monitor and examine the fishing operation of Thai fishing vessels concerned.