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**COVER NOTE INTRODUCING PWG-407: DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT ON PROTECTING
THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OBSERVERS IN ICCAT'S REGIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMS**

Submitted by the United States

Observers may spend days, weeks, or months aboard fishing and transshipment vessels. The work is intense, and conditions can be uncomfortable and even dangerous. Commercial fishing is one of the most hazardous occupations, and fisheries observers are often exposed to similar risks. The United States has noted with great concern recent incidents in other RFMOs where fisheries observers have been lost at sea.

Preparing observers for safe deployment requires an active partnership among fisheries managers, observers, observer provider companies, and the fishing industry. Current ICCAT observer-related measures do not include sufficient provisions on the health and safety of observers. Given the importance of regional observers to the work of the Commission and the often dangerous nature of observing fishing operations at sea, ICCAT must ensure that its regional observer programs (ROPs) uphold minimum standards to ensure the health and safety of observers placed on vessels while participating in ICCAT-mandated programs. This proposal seeks to codify such minimum standards for the health and safety of observers deployed by ICCAT in its ROPs.

The two current ICCAT ROPs are implemented through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between the ICCAT-contracted observer provider and each vessel to be observed. These MOUs contain some health and safety provisions and include a protocol for conducting a pre-deployment vessel safety check. But, as these MOUs are between private entities, currently neither the Commission nor flag CPCs or non-CPCs are directly involved in the definition of ROP health and safety requirements or their implementation. Changes in observer providers could result in changes to health and safety provisions of future MOUs. This proposal would create more certainty and consistency with regard to the content of such MOUs and the responsibilities of CPCs and non-CPCs, make compliance with observer safety and health requirements an ICCAT obligation, and address what should be done if an observer is injured, killed, or lost at sea. We consider that it is past time for ICCAT to adopt minimum standards for the health and safety of observers deployed in ROPs, a step that is both within the organization's jurisdiction and a critical responsibility.

In summary, adoption of this proposal would ensure that there is an unambiguous ICCAT requirement to protect the health and safety of observers deployed in the Commission's regional observer programs. It would also clarify the obligations of CPCs and non-CPCs to ensure that their vessels comply with such requirements and that procedures are in place to address emergencies.

Any increase in costs to the Commission resulting from formalizing these requirements in an ICCAT Recommendation is likely to be negligible, as the observer providers participating in ICCAT's ROPs are already training observers and issuing safety equipment to them in line with the provisions of this proposal.