

Call for independent and comprehensive investigation into human rights abuses in the convention area of the WCPFC fishery

Observers play a crucial role in ensuring that fishing takes place legally, sustainably, to regulations established by national and international authorities and conventions. However, observers on tuna and other industrial vessels are vulnerable at sea because they have an obligation to report illegal activities such as shark finning and the retention of protected species, and the data they collect can affect stock assessments, access and certification processes, leaving them potential targets for intimidation and abuse.

The recent findings published by Human Rights at Sea in their report [Fisheries Observer Deaths at Sea, Human Rights and the Role and Responsibilities of Fisheries Organisations](#) have exposed the ongoing occurrence of human rights abuses and deaths of fisheries observers at sea. The report highlights the worrying number of cases within the Western and Central Pacific fishery and raises questions about the roles of vessel owners, government authorities, certification schemes and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in safeguarding observers and dealing with cases of human rights abuse.

The report highlights the tragic death and suspected murder of Kiribati fisheries observer Eritara Aatii in March 2020 on board the fishing vessel *Win Far No.636* that was fishing for tuna in the Central Pacific at the time. The 40-year-old father of four, who had previously faced bribery attempts and intimidation in his role as a fisheries observer, was found dead in his cabin with a fatal blow to the head. Eritara Aatii is the eighth known fisheries observer to die in the region since 2009.

Fisheries cannot be regarded as sustainable when examples of serious human rights abuses continue. Certification schemes assessing environmental sustainability and firms across the supply chain must also be able to assure buyers, including consumers, that such product is not tainted by any human rights abuses.

A thorough and transparent investigation and reporting of these cases would help authorities and the public better understand the circumstances that lead to these instances, facilitating their prevention, as well as play a crucial role in implementing sanctions and deterring future abuse.

We therefore call on the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to immediately commission a comprehensive and independent investigation of all observer deaths, disappearances, threats, and intimidation that have occurred in the fishery.

We request that the findings of this investigation be made publically available in order to rectify the concerning lack of transparency in cases of human rights abuses as set out clearly in the recent [Human Rights at Sea Report](#).

Signed,

