

## EII On-board Observers, Ghosts?

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A “heated discussion” took place at the recent Solomon Island’s Pacific Tuna Forum, questioning Earth Island Institute (EII) about its self-claimed vessel monitoring Program. In his presentation at the Forum, Paolo Bray, European Director of the EII Dolphin-Safe Project and also Founder and Director of Friend of the Sea (FOS) stated that the organization had a tuna monitoring program that included on-board observers on affiliated vessels.

Sylvester Pokajam, Managing Director of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Fisheries Authority (NFA) spoke out during the question time following Bray’s presentation, and said: “What you are saying is all lies.” Pokajam controls the fishery in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of PNG that accounts for around 20 percent of the global tuna catch. The NFA supervises the catch in these waters. This makes Pokajam a very influential person in the Pacific Island tuna community.

In its list of standards, EII Dolphin-Safe stipulates that “Each trip in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) by vessels 400 gross tons and above must have an independent observer on board attesting to the compliance with points (1) through (4) above.” In this same list of standards, EII does not make any reference to onboard observer-coverage of vessels in any other ocean regions.

In fact, in an interview with Radio Australia last year, Mark Palmer of EII confirmed that it is mostly the case that EII monitors do not go on board of the vessels, and their organization does not have the kind of resources to put observers on the “many thousands” of ships that are out there catching tuna.

Sylvester Pokajam told atuna.com: “I did not want to listen to all of the lies. I spoke on behalf of the public and said what you are saying is all lies, and he couldn’t say anything.

“EII was using its presentation to support its programs and support the organization, but what they were saying about its own observer program and observer coverage is all false, that’s why I challenged them. I got very angry because he could not confirm to what I was asking him.”

Pokajam stressed: “There are no EII observers whatsoever, I am 110 percent confident, I know they don’t have observers, they are telling lies. They don’t have any program in place. That’s why we say they are a self-certification organization. How can you have a captain himself agree or deny that he set on dolphins, how can you be 100 percent sure?”

Pokajam told atuna.com that Earth Island has no standard, and therefore no observers monitoring operations. He said: “They have an invoice book and they go around issuing invoices to companies. The company pays, and therefore complies, that’s it.”

He described the discussions as “heated” and even referred to them as growing into an “argument.” He explained that he felt he had support from the majority of the other people present, particularly from the world’s major environmental organizations, PEW, Greenpeace and WWF.

According to Pokajam, an environmentalist also confronted EII by saying: “look, what you are saying may have been applicable 25 years ago, but now it is not the case. MSC is the highest standard in compliance with FAO. So therefore why don’t you stop creating problems, stop making noise and let them get on?”

During the discussion, Pokajam said that Bray struggled to give a direct answer to any of the questions, and instead reiterated about observer programs on tuna vessels in other oceans.

Pokajam said: “Philippine vessels are licensed by us, the NFA, to fish in our waters as well as other PNA party waters. We place our own observers on those vessels.” To Bray he asked: “Now you are telling us that you place observers? Well who are they? Tell us.” Pokajam added: “He couldn’t say anything.”