



<b>FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting</b>
<b>Fifth Session</b>
<b>Halifax, Canada, 7-9 July 2008</b>
<b>FINAL REPORT</b>
<b>Author: FIRMS Secretariat, with input from SC members</b>

## **1. Opening of Session and the Welcome Address**

The Fifth Session of the FIRMS Steering Committee (FSC5), held at NAFO Headquarters, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, was opened by the Chairperson, Johanne Fischer, at 9.00 hrs on Monday July 7, 2008. She welcomed the participating FIRMS FSC representatives of 9 of 13 current Partner agencies: CCAMLR, CCSBT, EUROSTAT, FAO, IATTC, ICES, NAFO, NEAFC, SEAFDEC. Partners not present were, GFCM, ICCAT, IOTC, and SEAFO (refer to Annex 1 of Revised Partnership Arrangement). The list of participants is included in Annex 1.

The FIRMS Secretariat listed as important targets of FIRMS: software development (mostly concluded), information contributions, and fostering enhanced input from recent partners and training in system use (focus of the current agenda), with thought to reaching these targets to address strategic directions for the next five years (an emerging aspect). The importance of fostering more general public interest, garnering a wider usership, was also noted.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The Chairperson presented the agenda with some changes to the order of business to deal with informative items first, more substantive parts later, which was adopted. The aim is to adopt the meeting report on Wednesday July 9 2008.

## **3. FIRMS membership**

### *(i) Progress on the development of FIRMS Partnership*

One Partner has joined FIRMS since the last Steering Committee. The Chairperson and the FIRMS Secretariat welcomed the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), thirteenth FIRMS member.

It was noted that during the intersession, FIRMS had granted status of Observer to the forming South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO). With CPPS, IWC, SPC, and WCPFC, this brings to five the number of observer organizations.

It was recommended that the FIRMS Secretariat formally invite the organizations identified at the last steering committee (NAMMCO and NASCO).

It was agreed that the FIRMS Secretariat circulate a short summary on FIRMS to potential partners and participants to the RSN (Regional Secretariats Network).

A presentation on the operation of EUROSTAT (DG ESTAT) with respect to their internal partnership agreement with DG MARE provided context for its FIRMS membership agreement. The European Commission (EC) contribution included updating the fact sheets on the EU fleet and provided regular updating on the economic performance of the EU fleet. A Partnership agreement signed between the two EC DGs, the co-operation on several fields will be improved including: sharing the work on statistical information in a more efficient and appropriate way and re-organising the international involvement of the EC in several external organizations.

*Given an internal re-organisation of both EUROSTAT and DG MARE, the following is being done:*

- *Approach FIRMS to ask additional information on the exact scope, contents and objectives of the FIRMS project, about rules for data uses (e.g. transmission, access, protection), financial aspects (EU contribution in regard to contributions from other participants, costs sharing with other Countries, possible double funding as EU is already financing FAO, ICES and the RFMO's), the needs for future developments of the project, and other specific questions (e.g. management role of DG MARE in area 27);*
- *Inviting FIRMS leaders to DG MARE in order to discuss these issues.*

*The following issues for discussion were proposed by FIRMS:*

- *fisheries socio-economy assessment*
- *fisheries management*
- *information management, including linkages with fishery statistics;*
- *funding support;*
- *resources assessment*
- *wrap-up with coordinating unit*

Following this presentation, considerable discussion ensued. It was explained that EUROSTAT was the link to socio-economic data held by the EU through DG MARE. It was further noted that DG MARE, through EUROSTAT could become the leader in the FIRMS partnership. The FIRMS Secretariat was invited by DG MARE to discuss various issues in order to have a smooth transition in leadership to the FIRMS partnership.

The Chairperson indicated that while FIRMS is not open to national agencies at this point, EUROSTAT is a partner because of the nature of the information that they maintain (umbrella organization). In this regard, one suggestion was a pragmatic approach in finding the most effective ways to communicate data that needs to be disseminated and EUROSTAT serve this purpose well.

There was discussion concerning soliciting for and bringing in new partners at this time. It was agreed that at this point, the focus should be on final steps of the development of the system and populating the database rather than expanding partnerships. However, at some time in the future (2 to 3 years), it was agreed that it would be appropriate to look into expansion with regard to new members.

### **Decisions:**

- Further discussion about national partners vs. RFBs will take place during FSC6 (refer also to Sect. 5 below for further discussion of potential national partners).
- At FSC6, identification of potential users of the FIRMS system should be addressed.

#### **4. Review of Annex 2 of new Partners**

NEAFC made available its Annex 2 to the meeting.

#### **5. NatFIRMS, an initiative for fostering FIRMS like processes at national level (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/4)**

The FIRMS Secretariat provided a proposal on planning for NatFIRMS, including project objectives. A summary of this presentation follows.

*As informative item aiming at receiving feedback from FIRMS partners, the FIRMS Secretary introduced NatFIRMS, “an initiative for fostering FIRMS-like processes at national level”. This document reflects the NatFIRMS project concept note elaborated by FAO for on-going contacts with potential donors such as France, the USA or Canada.*

*The decision taken by FSC4 to defer expansion of FIRMS membership to national institutions until after FIRMS has been consolidated enough was recalled. At the same time, through discussions taking place i) as part of FIRMS partners meetings regarding validation of resources or fisheries inventories, and ii) with potential donors for supporting FIRMS mechanisms, the need for the availability of a FIRMS like process at national level is tangible. Such initiative of direct interest to donor countries could foster financial support and be launched as a 4 to 5 years project to test the feasibility of FIRMS like processes at national level. While institutionally disconnected from the FIRMS Partnership arrangement, this project would strive for information flow synergies between countries and RFBs on a case by case basis, and should benefit FIRMS Partners from higher ability to exchange information on fisheries status and trends, and from the additional toolkit developed. The actual interest of countries in such initiative could be assessed through an international workshop to be organized by FAO, and would anyhow be tested based on actual funding support received.*

Different opinions were expressed concerning the usefulness of the NatFIRMS project proposal. These concerns included that NatFIRMS would be a parallel process to FIRMS independent but coordinated and it was not clear who would be the audience for NatFIRMS websites taking into account that the national agencies already have their own outlets and audiences. Furthermore, there were concerns that NatFIRMS could slow down the progress of FIRMS. Also, proceeding with NatFIRMS would impact the future strategy of FIRMS, e.g. with respect to FIRMS membership.

#### **Decision:**

- The topic of NatFIRMS will once again be addressed at FSC6.

#### **6. Metadata standards for georeferenced information**

The FIRMS Secretariat introduced a presentation dealing with geographic data.

*Geonetwork Opensource is an initiative providing answers to the following needs:*

- *sharing knowledge about existing spatial information bases through a common library;*
- *easing identification of existing GIS layers in support to fisheries information;*
- *sharing naming conventions and geo-spatial standards so to enable interoperable GIS layers, and distribution of GIS development and maintenance;*
- *getting access to performing tools for web mapping;*

It was noted that there was an increasing number of requests for spatial data and analyses, such as analyses of VMS and habitat data. Therefore spatial planning and GIS tools will become a central issue in the future.

*Geonetwork opensource is a standards based, free and open source catalog application to manage spatially referenced resources through the web. It provides powerful metadata editing and search functions as well as an embedded interactive webmap viewer with a google-maps extension. It is entirely based on international geospatial standards, is widely used, and has a formalized governance process for its open source software development community. FIRMS mapping tools are being successfully rebuilt on Geonetwork-Geoserver set of tools.*

*The FIRMS Secretariat suggested that FIRMS could be linked to the GeoNetwork especially since FIRMS is already using GeoNetwork in its architecture.*

Discussions ensued in regard to: types of data, how FIRMS links to products of the GeoNetwork, needs for standards, concepts of sharing information, building bridges among data types and integration into the FIRMS Information Management Policy.

It was agreed that partners are free to amend their Annex 2 if they are considering using geo-referenced data. The group, however, did not see a need to include GeoNetwork standards in the Information Management Policy.

The chairperson thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and encouraged FAO to disseminate Partner's information in a useful way.

## **7. Review of FIRMS activities during the past year (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/2a)**

A presentation was given by the FIRMS Secretariat reviewing FIRMS activities for the past years and on the outlook for the future.

*The Secretariat presented a list of issues that it considered to be important. Specifically, various chapters in FSC5/2008/2a, listed below, were reviewed.*

- 1. Development on inventories of marine resources, and of fisheries*
- 2. Reporting on Status/Trends of Marine Resources, and of Fisheries*
- 3. Development of Applications*
- 4. Status of FIRMS Website*
- 5. Training or Skills Development*
- 6. Promotional Activities*
- 7. Secretariat Resources in Support of FIRMS*
- 8. Difficulties Encountered during the Intersessional Period*

*Inventories: during the intersession, it was noted that FAO RFBs substantially contributed to inventory growth with newcomer SWIOFC, and with the decision of CECAF to request national validation then regional consolidation of 343 listed fisheries.*

*Software: most of FSC4 requests were implemented, and it is expected that all planned features will be available by the end of 2008. A major effort was directed to the improvement of the software, in order to alleviate bottlenecks to information contributions. The CMS is now considered stable and its simplification is on-going; Partners now have a direct access through login to all FIRMS material in the restricted area; streamlined solutions and interoperability mechanisms have been worked out and implemented at request of NAFO, ICCAT, GFCM and ICES. Other features include short URLs, a French version of the site, dynamic mapping of stocks location, and the fishery module ready for release.*

FIRMS data base: the FIRMS marine resource inventory amounts to close to 1000 Marine resources units. 80% of inventoried units have been loaded in the system, while 50% are published with status and trends information. The turn over regarding updates is weak on average but highly variable depending on partners. Most RFBs concerned with Marine resources do update S&T information on a regular basis, while three did not update since the FIRMS website launch in May 2006. The Fisheries module has been populated tentatively with 28 case studies in close collaboration with Partners, and these were used as a basis for the validation of the module by TWG2.

Training: the effort to encourage information contributions was also by training. In addition to two specific training sessions with ICCAT and ICES, all partners who attended TWG2 were trained to the FIRMS workflow management system.

Promotional activities: the Secretariat deployed significant efforts (including through 6 travels) in order to promote FIRMS, with a reasonably satisfactory return on investment. The promotional activities concerned four RFBs (CECAF, SWIOFC, SEAFDEC, SPC coastal programme), two conferences (APEC, OBI 2007), and three donors (France, Japan, Norway).

Secretariat Resources in support to FIRMS: the resources at disposal of FIRMS were 1/4th of those available in the previous period and the FAO Regular Programme has compensated the defection of expected project support. With the end of the core software development, these resources are significantly redirected to support to information contributions and to promotion. The FIRMS Secretary insisted that although the FAO Regular Programme will ensure baseline functioning support, fund raising becomes a critically important issue for any further significant development of FIRMS. It was noted that a modest budget could be raised in support to FIRMS information contributions in 2008-09 including through skills development. More is expected and will be sought during the next months.

Under Reporting on Status and Trends, it was noted that there are gaps in updates due to various reasons e.g. timing of assessments; and technical difficulties that in the meantime were addressed by the TWG.

It was discussed whether there was a need to link to other systems e.g. FishBase to include local names of species (trade and common names) in the FIRMS systems. This was not felt to be an urgent matter.

**Decision:**

- Inclusion of local names will be addressed at the next FSC6 after the end users of the system are better identified.

The preliminary inventory of fisheries was reviewed. The Chairperson asked that for the near term, all partners focus on submitting their complete inventories in the proper format.

Under Development of applications, it was noted that as the Content Management System (CMS) is now more complete, the FIRMS Secretariat can give more support to the partners in terms data submission and work flow.

**Decision:**

- Under Status of the FIRMS website, the look and feel of the website was briefly discussed. It was decided to postpone any decisions on alterations until such time as the end users can be better identified.

The FIRMS Secretary presented Jan-June 2008 web trends with an analysis including a comparison with the previous period. *The site is twice more visible and one can note the influence of referring sites on the number of visits. There are more visitors, but mainly visitors with direct links (probably experts) really spend time on FIRMS, while unique visitors getting to FIRMS*

*for the first time seem to browse immediately accessible pages then leave the site. FIRMS at this stage is probably too technical to non-scientific users. The high specialization of the site and its lack of comprehensiveness and update ness might explain these observations.*

*In conclusion, the actions which were proposed to enhance the use of the site are:*

- *continue to make FIRMS more comprehensive, and foster timely updates from Partners, in order to make visitors coming on a regular basis to check the status of monitoring and management of marine resources. Encourage timeliness by direct links from the home page of last 3 updated fact sheets.*
- *still 40% of FIRMS partners have not drawn links from their website to FIRMS (8 out of 13 have drawn links). All FIRMS partners should draw these links, while encouraging their constituency to do so.*
- *services for synoptic understanding should be improved: with the implementation of FIRMS status and trends standard descriptors, outputs of S&T summaries should be downloadable in csv and pdf formats.*
- *develop new synoptic interfaces in order to facilitate the understanding and the dissemination of information available on FIRMS*

It was noted that links from Partners' web sites is an effective way to enhance the visibility of the FIRMS site and all Partners were highly encouraged to create such links on their websites including making their FIRMS factsheets available as part of their website.

Under Promotional activities and Secretariat Resources in Support of FIRMS, funding issues were addressed. It was noted that FIRMS can function, without substantial development, at the present low level of funding over the next year.

#### **Decision:**

- The FIRMS Secretariat will concentrate, in close collaboration with FIRMS partners, on populating the site i.e. loading and managing data rather than development of new modules and utilities.

However, participants encouraged the Secretariat in its ongoing efforts to seek additional funding, particularly with a view to future development. Partners were asked to develop ideas to promote FIRMS and attract additional sources of funding. Some preliminary ideas included networking with educational institutions, environmental organizations and institutions having a project outside of FAO which uses FIRMS information were put forward during the meeting.

It was noted that funding is expected for the Spanish translation of the site (currently in French and English).

Annex 1 of FSC5/2008/2a, i.e. the status of implementation of FSC4 recommendations was reviewed. In most cases, implementation of the recommendations was completed or is ongoing.

#### **8. Report of the technical working group (TWG2, April 2008) (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/3)**

The report of TWG2 was reviewed with focus on aspects requiring decisions by FSC5. The modifications related to Marine Resources revised standards, and Fisheries Modules topic tree were described by the FIRMS Secretariat. In particular, FSC's attention was called to:

- A proposal for a composite code mapping the graphical presentation of the stock status adopted by Tuna RFMOs, with the FIRMS descriptors (par.25). It was felt that there was no endorsement needed by the FSC for this proposal. It was recognized that this was information that helps some partners address their FIRMS reporting requirements.

- Regarding of stock status descriptors, Par. 26-29 and 31 were adopted without comment.
- Par. 30 regarding Status and Trends reporting of multiple sub-components was deferred to FSC6.
- TWG2's response to Reference Year and Reporting year (Par.35, complemented by Annex 4b) was endorsed.
- Par. 53 and 54, dealing with fisheries module layout issues were supported.
- Under Par. 63, TWG2's recommendation for release of Fisheries module was discussed. There was some discussion surrounding how the module should be structured. A proposal by CCAMLR proposal (contained in FSC5/2008/2c) was discussed. Sub-topics addressing the presentation of measures such as Conservation, Compliance, Environmental, Trade and MCS measures could be standardized. The consideration received strong agreement, however, the group felt that such standardization is too early at this stage and for now, a more flexible structure would give partners the option to develop their submission and propose structural changes.

The FIRMS Secretariat advised that changes to information contributions may be manageable. Partners and in particular SEAFDEC, CCAMLR, NAFO and IATTC will work intersessionally to populating their Fisheries module.

There was discussion concerning moving Ecosystem Assessment to the Marine Resource Module. It was agreed that it does not belong there. Ecosystem Assessment will be deferred until future development of the system takes place. There was no agreement as to where this topic should be placed and the matter was deferred.

- The suggestions to create a new module entitled “Ecosystem module”, (par. 65, complemented with Annex 5) was not adopted at this meeting although it was considered important and will be placed on agenda at a future meeting.

#### **Decisions:**

- It was agreed that the Fisheries module can be released to the public.
- It was agreed to proceed with publishing a limited number of fact sheets just to allow possible modifications to a more refined structure. Partners are encouraged to develop and/or review their submissions.
- “Ecosystem module”, (par. 65, complemented with Annex 5) was not adopted but will be placed on agenda at a future meeting.
- Preparatory work to determine how partners categorize their management measures will be coordinated by the Chairperson for presentation at FSC6.
- FAO and ICES will present some examples where there are subcomponents of stocks.

### **9. FIRMS Information Management Policy (IMP) – FSC4 version (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf3)**

The changes to the Information Management Policy were reviewed. Changes are noted in Annex 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of FSC5/2008/Inf3 as highlighted text.

#### **Decision:**

- Data definitions in Annex 1.1 were accepted.

In Annex 1.2, questions arose regarding some descriptions.

#### **Decisions:**

- It was agreed that SEAFDEC would coordinate a review, in close cooperation with the

FIRMS Secretariat and partners, with a view, to modify only if necessary the Annex 1.2 of the IMP (reference terms for Marine resources) will be discussed at FSC6.

- In reference to Annex 1.3, it was agreed to remove mapping in item 3.
- The FIRMS Secretariat was tasked with developing the next version of the Information Management Policy in particular management concepts and data dictionary of the Fisheries Module, to be circulated to Partners before the next meeting.

## **10. Intersessional work plan**

With reference to chapter 9 of document in FSC5/2008/2a, the FIRMS Secretary identified tasks to be worked in the intersessional period:

- *Finalize the content management system*
- *Public release of the Fisheries Module*
- *Marine Resources: full implementation of FIRMS standard descriptors and Reference Year*
- *Complete summary reports of status and trends*
- *Improve mapping capabilities*
- *Complete content by populating database*
- *Undertake promotion of the system*
- *Provide assistance to partners on workflows*
- *Continue to investigate potential funders*
- *Encourage Partner to make links to FIRMS or make dynamic queries*

The FIRMS Secretary highlighted that the efforts of the next 8 to 10 months will aim at completing all outstanding software aspects, and at ensuring that all Partners have published and up-to-date information in either the Marine resource or fisheries module. It is expected close and active collaboration with Partners and the FIRMS team will be dedicated to provide training and information contribution assistance to Partners. The next RSN meeting is considered an important milestone for presenting a positive status of FIRMS in order to attract new partners. FIRMS will be presented to the EU in mid-September and the participation of EUROSTAT and ICES is expected. A process of fund raising is also being engaged with GEF.

### **Decision:**

- Have Chair and Secretariat prepare presentation to COFI

## **11. Planning for the sixth session of FSC (FSC6)**

In terms of a meeting occurring in conjunction with COFI as previously suggested, concerns were voiced that this did not leave sufficient time between FSC meetings. The FSC6 will be held in Hobart Australia in Feb 2010 in conjunction with the CWP meeting following the invitation of CCAMLR.

## **12. Any other business**

There was no other business.

### **13. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson**

A new Chairperson, David Ramm (CCAMLR), and Vice chairperson, Pouchamarm Wongsanga (SEAFDEC) were elected for the coming session and inter-sessional period.

### **14. Adoption of the Report 14**

The report was adopted on July 9 2008 at 6.00pm. The Meeting was adjourned.  
The participants expressed their thanks to NAFO staff for a nice meeting organization and welcoming

## Annex 1

### List of Participants

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## **Annex 2**

### **Meeting agenda**

**Monday, 7 July 2008** (all day: 09:00 hours to 18:00 hours)

1. Opening of session and Welcome address
2. Adoption of agenda
3. FIRMS membership
  - Progress on the development of FIRMS Partnership
  - Review of new perspective Partners
4. Review of Annex 2 of new Partners
5. NatFIRMS, an initiative for fostering FIRMS like processes at national level (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/3 )
6. Metadata standards for georeferenced information
7. Review of FIRMS activities during the past year (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/2x)
  - Review of the status of FIRMS web-site and workflow management system
8. Report of the technical working group (TWG2, April 2008) (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/3)
9. FIRMS Information Management Policy (IMP) – FSC4 version (cf Doc. FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf3)

**Wednesday, 9 July 2008** (afternoon)

10. Intersessional work plan
11. Planning for the sixth session of FSC (FSC6)
12. Any other business
13. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson
14. Adoption of the Report

### Annex 3

#### List of FSC5 Meeting Documents

<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/1</b>	Provisional Annotated Agenda and Timetable
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/2</b>	Review of the FIRMS activities during the past year
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/2a</b>	Secretariat report on Progress and Issues
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/2b</b>	Partners reports - CCSBT - CCAMLR - IATTC - SEAFDEC
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/3</b>	Report of the second Technical Working Group (TWG2)
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/4</b>	NatFIRMS, an initiative for fostering FIRMS like processes at national level
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/5</b>	NEAFC: Annex 2 to FIRMS Partnership Arrangement

<b>Information Documents</b>	
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.1</b>	Provisional List of Documents
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.2</b>	Provisional List of Participants
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.3</b>	FIRMS Information Management Policy (IMP) - FSC4 version
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.4</b>	FIRMS Partnership Arrangement
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.5</b>	Standard template for reporting on FIRMS activities
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.6</b>	Report of the FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting – 4 <sup>th</sup> Session (Rome, Italy, 26 February – 2 March, 2007)
<b>FIRMS FSC5/2008/Inf.7</b>	Web trends – FIRMS – January 2008 - June 2008