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**REVIEW OF STRATEGIC ASPECTS: WHICH ROLE FOR FIRMS IN  
BROADENING GEOGRAPHIC/THEMATIC COVERAGE AND  
ENABLING MORE TIMELY INFORMATION**

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**Review of strategic aspects: which role for FIRMS in broadening geographic/thematic coverage and enabling more timely information**

FSC6 agreed that broadening FIRMS coverage is key to FIRMS success, and in this respect the Secretariat has worked on various directions. Such progress both brings new assets and raises new issues - points a) to e) below. Assets will be briefly reviewed for any comment by the Committee, while emerging issues should be matter for a more in-depth debate.

### **a) Enabling more timely information**

FIRMS is an opportunity for facilitating more timely updates and overviews of the State of World Marine Fishery Resources.

#### **Background:**

During the intersession, CCAMLR Secretariat conveyed to FIRMS Secretariat the issue highlighted by its Commission whereby the FAO Review of the State of World Marine Fishery Resources is out of date (and therefore is also the FIRMS corresponding section on the Southern Ocean) and that there are inaccuracies in this Southern Ocean section. Such situation would undermine CCAMLR's contribution to FIRMS.

As a FIRMS partner, FAO responded that the last publication of "Review of the State of World Marine Fishery Resources" was in 2005, based on data up to 2002. The update of this publication is planned for 2011 or 2012. Three factors have limited the update frequency to about five years: the limited resources available, the great scale and complexity involved in the global assessment, and the fact that at a global review level, the low pace of change doesn't really justify a more frequent update. Indeed for a specific region such as Southern Ocean, where an active RFB monitors and reports on a yearly basis on the state of resources and fisheries, the out-of-date summary in FAO's world review can be badly perceived.

FAO is willing to consider more efficient and timely ways to conduct updates of the regional sections of the world review which could build on synergies that the FIRMS partnership can offer and help to strengthen. In a web context, the update of the various regional sections of this review would not necessarily need to be synchronized, meaning that should a regional organization such as CCAMLR be willing to produce an overview of the state of marine resources within its area of competence, FAO would be willing to draw upon this in its preparation of FAO's global Review. This kind of agreement could indeed be discussed as part of FIRMS and involve other RFBs. In this context, FIRMS could assist in developing a relatively standard way for presenting Regional overviews which FAO could easily use for its own world publication, including, where applicable, references to more detailed and updated RFB's overviews.

### **b) Reporting on national fisheries and resources**

The experience gained with FAO RFBs (CECAF, SWIOFC, and RECOFI) during the intersession provided a number of responses to questions raised by FSC6 related to national contributions through RFBs. Representatives of FAO RFBs who were involved in such process are attending FSC7 and will provide these perspectives, including where FIRMS constitute an opportunity to support the goals of their organization.

**Background:** In addressing the NatFIRMS issue, FSC6 noted that nations may contribute information to FIRMS via RFBs. Recognising that RFB partners

already interact with national members with regard to information exchange on resources and fisheries, FSC6 noted that FIRMS process may contribute to information sharing mechanisms within RFBs while strengthening member country capacities. RFB partners that collaborate with National level organizations should convey to the FIRMS Steering Committee the guidelines or requirements for publishing information that originates from these collaborations.

Some questions remained to be answered:

- It was noted that in the case of FAO Article VI RFBs, if any of these bodies start to be active in channelling national data, the member States may like to be represented, and it was unclear how this would be worked out legally.
- When, and how often the data would be updated? What kind of control mechanism will exist?

During the intersession, the FAO RFBs in Africa and the Middle East (CECAF, SWIOFC, RECOFI) have made a substantial breakthrough in terms of provision and validation of information on marine resources and fisheries. Altogether, about 100 new marine resources and 300 new fisheries are currently in the process of validation/publication in FIRMS, many being defined at national level under these RFBs umbrellas. The participation of nations through these bodies:

- broadens the FIRMS coverage,
- contribute to improve the inventory guidelines,
- raise new issue of quality assurance (e.g. how to distinguish assessments through the application of models, and more empirical assessments7),
- contribute to capacity building at regional and national level, and
- promote the emergence of new organizational perspectives regarding mechanisms for national participation within RFBs.

### **c) Reporting on fisheries management**

FIRMS has set-up information standards for reporting on Fisheries Management, and reporting models have been developed. The value of these models should be reviewed, and partners should provide guidance regarding how such Management information should be exploited in FIRMS.

Background: During the intersession, a set of “management” fact sheets have been published by NEAFC: one overarching fact sheet presents the NEAFC’s management system, and introduces seven Fishery management unit fact sheets. CCAMLR and NAFO are also developing similar fact sheets at various stages of progress.

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#### **d) Which role for FIRMS regarding reporting on socio-economic status of fisheries**

Although socio-economic information is not specifically identified as being within the scope of the FIRMS partnership arrangement, reference to information which provides background to fishery management advisory reports gives insight that reporting on fisheries socio-economic information could further FIRMS objectives:

DG-Mare's expressed interest in cooperation by contributing aggregated socio-economic reports on the European fleets. Such positive intention might be an opportunity to kick-off a new reporting work stream, which FIRMS partners are called to consider.

Background: Willingness to provide socio-economic information was mentioned by Eurostat in Annex 2 of the partnership arrangement. This has however never materialized. Following the temporary freezing of EC's participation through Eurostat in the FIRMS partnership arrangement, DG-Mare has recently indicated (Sept 2011) its willingness to cooperate and contribute socio-economic data on the European fleet on the condition that member states agree and that similar data are provided by non-EU fleets. DG-Mare's participation in FIRMS could constitute a starting point to enhance FIRMS capacity on the Ecosystem Approach; it would boost the development of international Metadata standards in the socio-economic field.

An **issue** for FSC debate is how this condition of reciprocity can be met in a context where countries cannot be direct members of FIRMS. Therefore a confirmed interest could constitute a push towards NatFIRMS.

If requested, the FIRMS information system architecture is fit for such purpose. Case studies were developed through the World Bank-FAO Big Number Project (BNP) and one of these is disseminated through FIRMS (see Senegal fishery sector <http://firms.fao.org/firms/fishery/472/en> )

Excerpt of FIRMS partnership arrangement on scope of information:

Par. 4.1.2. To make available to the public, through dissemination channels referred to in Annex 2, information on fisheries status and trends in ways that provide background for, and facilitate interpretation of, fishery resources assessments and fishery management advisory reports.

#### **e) Practical steps towards NatFIRMS**

Some opportunities towards NatFIRMS will be presented and discussed. Guidance from partners is expected.

Background: Considering that NatFIRMS would constitute a vehicle towards more comprehensive coverage, FSC6 agreed that developing NatFIRMS will

provide an opportunity for countries that are not part of a RFB to strengthen collection and dissemination of fishery information and data at the national level; this is expected to lead to an increase in the geographical and thematic scopes such as social and economic data. FSC6 agreed that further steps to NatFIRMS development can be initiated, and provided overarching principles to such development. Arrangements for NatFIRMS could be made depending on opportunities, interest from stakeholders, and identification of funding sources.

One such opportunity stems from the **increasing interest from markets to access to information on state of stocks.**

MSC, Friends of the Sea, and FishBase: In 2010, FAO and ICES were involved in the formulation of an EU call for funding (KBBE) aiming at facilitating the access to stock status information for species consumed in Europe. Similarly MSC and Friends of the Sea constantly look at evaluating the status of stocks, and FishBase is involved in responding to such requests. As a matter of facts, FishBase has reported increasing requests for status of stocks, and has accumulated about 100 URLs pointing to assessment reports which are intended to be made available through the FishBase portal. These would also serve as an overview of the current view on delimitation of stocks. There would be scope for FIRMS to collaborate and join forces with FishBase, SAUP, and RAM II (Dalhousie university) on a distributed database, regularly updated, with URLs to all latest stock assessments. According to FishBase, such database could go up to about 300 stocks (Worm et al. came to about 350 stocks where reference points are available). Such updating could proceed within the FishBase team for about 12,000 Euro per year. This would proceed through agreeing on a joint data backbone for the different projects and would allow cross-linking.

Oceans Trust: the “Science and Sustainability Forum” (Feb 2012) organized by Oceans Trust, a US based NGO which supports markets awareness of sustainable fisheries, would constitute another concrete opportunity for presenting FIRMS and its framework to a group of potential national partners. See FIRMS FSC7/2011/Inf.9 for related documentation.

FAO-Fisheries and Aquaculture Country Profiles (FACP): From a reporting framework view point, FAO is proposing to articulate NatFIRMS (ie contributions received on stocks and fisheries status by countries outside of the FIRMS framework) with its Fisheries and Aquaculture Country Profile programme. Inputs there could include voluntary contributions from specific countries (e.g. Malaysia, USA, Australia, Canada, ...), or collaborations with groups such as FishBase.

Below are excerpts of FSC6 report on NatFIRMS:

82. Based on all the above considerations, the Chairperson and Secretariat proposed a scenario which was tested by the meeting on a number of examples., Agreement was reached on the concept as a way forward, and the following principles would constitute a basis for the development of NatFIRMS

- NatFIRMS is understood to be a separate entity, while obviously many interactions with FIRMS have to be catered for in its implementation

- The meeting agreed that developing NatFIRMS will provide an opportunity to strengthen collection and dissemination of fishery information and data at the national level, which is expected to lead to an increase in the geographical and thematic scopes such as social and economic data. This would lead to a strengthening of capacities for enhanced information sharing and fisheries management in developing countries.
- In recognizing the potential value of NatFIRMS, the Steering Committee noted that nations may contribute information to FIRMS via RFBs, and it reiterated the overarching principles under which FIRMS was constituted and exists, including the principles of primary competences and of information ownership enjoyed by Regional Fishery Bodies. “Competences” are here understood to derive from institutional mandates. The many such mandates may be described in terms of geographic areas; assessment and/or management of living resources; and considerations of socio economic concerns.

83. The meeting agreed that the operational context of NatFIRMS will require close coordination and interoperability with FIRMS and will include the following:

- NatFIRMS would be expected to facilitate the collation and furnishing of information relevant to FIRMS activities from nations that are not a part of a RFB;
- Recognising that RFB partners already interact with national members, with regard to information exchange on resources and fisheries, and that NatFIRMS may contribute to information sharing mechanisms while strengthening member country capacities;
- RFB partners that collaborate with partners of NatFIRMS should convey to the FIRMS Steering Committee the guidelines or requirements for publishing information that originates from these collaborations;
- In the case of a new RFB partner to FIRMS, responsibility for the publishing of information formerly posted in NatFIRMS for which competency is now held by the RFB will be handled under the overarching principles recalled above;
- Recognition that the maximum benefit of NatFIRMS would likely be realized by developing high flexibility to respond to the needs of NatFIRMS partners, and under the following priorities: by maintaining high levels of support for FIRMS; and by focusing capacity building in developing regions, which would be expected to strengthen national and regional information-dependent processes, particularly in regard to the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF).

84. Decisions

- Members not present at this meeting will be notified of this proposal regarding NatFIRMS.
- The meeting agreed that under the principles and operational context outlined in paragraphs 64-72, and providing that this proposal is adopted by consensus of all the partners, further steps to NatFIRMS development can be initiated. This would include considering modifications to Rules of Procedures as needed, developing a Map of Operational areas, and developing guidelines for Partners.
- COFI is the appropriate forum to present both FIRMS progress and the NatFIRMS concept, in order to gain further insight regarding State interest and to receive their guidance.