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para la
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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Seventh Session

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 14–16 May 2013

RECOFI participation in FIRMS

Executive Summary

The process of involving RECOFI in the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) framework was initiated at the Sixth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries in May 2011. During the period July 2011 to February 2013, developments occurred during five meetings, including the RECOFI-FIRMS fisheries inventory workshop, Fifth and Sixth Meetings of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management, and the Seventh and Eighth FIRMS Steering Committees. A comprehensive regional inventory of RECOFI fisheries consisting of 73 fisheries has been loaded in the FIRMS system, compliant with the policy jointly adopted by Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) and FIRMS. A proposal was made for sub-dividing FAO sub-area 51.3 in order to better geo-reference RECOFI fisheries. Three RECOFI delegates have attended two FIRMS Steering Committee meetings, learned about the benefits and obligations under this framework, and reviewed the proposed FAO/RECOFI Annex 2 which formalizes the type of information RECOFI would commit to contribute to FIRMS.

The Commission is invited to:

- endorse the proposed splitting of FAO sub-area 51.3 into divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2, and to endorse the proposed names for the two divisions.
- decide on endorsing this inventory and approving its publishing through FIRMS.
- decide on its level of participation in FIRMS, under one of two options:
 - i) as FAO associated partner in FIRMS (status quo), including validation of Annex 2;
 - ii) as full FIRMS Member, including validation of Annex 2 or proposed modification.

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this document is to provide the necessary information to the Seventh Session of RECOFI (14-16 May 2013, Islamic Republic of Iran) and therefore to enable its decisions on publishing of the regional inventory of RECOFI fisheries, and on RECOFI's level of participation in the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS), including a possible application of RECOFI as FIRMS full Member.

BACKGROUND UP TO WGF6

2. The Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) is an information partnership launched in 2004. It brings together 13 international organizations as members (more at <http://firms.fao.org/firms> and in Appendix 5). FAO is one of these organizations and RECOFI, as a FAO statutory body, has been invited on occasion of the fifth meeting of its Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGF6) to become part of FAO's activities in FIRMS. At the Sixth Session of RECOFI (May 2011, Rome, Italy), the Commission was introduced to the FIRMS partnership during a side event. The focus of the presentation was on FIRMS' objectives, information products, benefits for a regional fisheries management organization, and its mode of operation (see [meeting document](#)). A proposal for an initial RECOFI-FIRMS workshop on a regional marine resources and fisheries inventory was agreed by the Commission.

3. The workshop took place from 12 to 14 July 2011 in Cairo, Egypt, hosted by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa. It was successful in developing the skeleton of a harmonized regional marine resources and fisheries inventory¹. Appraising the potential benefits of the inventory approach in support to fisheries management in the RECOFI area, the participants agreed that the results of the workshop and follow-up activities should be conveyed to the fifth WGF6 meeting.

4. The WGF6, at the fifth meeting in 2011, reviewed post workshop progress on inventories, agreed upon inventory related policy aspects (see Appendix 2), set the development of the fisheries inventory as a priority, and recommended amendments to the existing FAO geo-referencing system in the RECOFI area. The WGF6 also agreed upon a roadmap towards RECOFI membership in FIRMS, including the participation of RECOFI representatives at the FIRMS seventh Steering Committee meeting (FSC7 – Rome, December 2011), and the completion of draft national fisheries inventories by the 6th WGF6 meeting.

5. The sixth meeting of the WGF6 (November 2012) was informed on the participation of Bahraini and Iranian representatives at FSC7 (and its two follow-up virtual technical meetings in 2012) and the progress made on inventories since the previous WGF6 meeting, and discussed the main issues related to the harmonization of inventories at regional level. The WGF6 recommended that the final inventory product (i.e. the consolidated inventory of RECOFI fisheries) should be comprehensive in order to be published in FIRMS and that the Seventh Session of RECOFI should make a decision regarding formal endorsement of this inventory and its publishing in FIRMS, on the basis of progress achieved.

6. The sixth meeting of the WGF6 also reviewed the proposed statistical boundary between new candidate divisions 51.3.1 "Oman Sea" and 51.3.2 "Arabian Sea, South Western" and acknowledged that this proposal was made in close consultation between Islamic Republic of Iran and Sultanate of Oman to address the FIRMS requirement to distinctly geo-reference fisheries taking place in the Oman Sea and in the Arabian sea (see Appendix 1). Final decision for endorsement was forwarded to be taken at the Seventh Session of RECOFI.

¹ Reference to the report of the RECOFI-FIRMS Workshop on Resources and Fisheries Inventories (Cairo, Egypt, 12-14 July 2011) and it is available at: http://www.fao.org/fi/oldsite/eims_search/1_dett.asp?calling=simple_s_result&lang=en&pub_id=295787

7. The WGFM decided that delegates of Member countries should report back and discuss with the relevant authorities on the matter of recommending RECOFI to become a full member of FIRMS, and for this to be decided at the Seventh Session of RECOFI. The sixth WGFM meeting however recommended the participation of a RECOFI representative to the FIRMS SC8 as a milestone towards this decision.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE SIXTH WGFM MEETING

FIRMS eight Steering Committee meeting (FSC8, Rome, December 2012)

8. A RECOFI representative (Mr Yaqoob Salem Al Jabri) attended FSC8. He presented the inventory of fisheries occurring within RECOFI Omani waters and the meeting acknowledged progress on RECOFI inventories as presented in the next paragraph. The RECOFI representative also commented that the proposed [FAO/RECOFI Annex 2](#)² is valid and compliant with the latest data contribution within RECOFI. He stated that this Annex 2 will be reviewed and discussed at the Seventh Session of RECOFI as a possible model should RECOFI decide to become fully fledged partner in FIRMS.

Development of fisheries inventories and their uploading in FIRMS

9. The draft inventories of Bahraini and Iranian fisheries presented at FSC7 have been completed during the course of 2012 through close collaboration with the FIRMS Secretariat. These inventories contain 26 fisheries for Bahrain and 15 fisheries for Iran. Inventories for Oman and Qatar have been finalized in collaboration with the FIRMS Secretariat during the first months of 2013 in correspondence of the FSC8. These inventories include respectively 28 and 4 fisheries. Work is in progress regarding the inventory of Saudi Arabian fisheries.

10. FSC8 also acknowledged progress on the Marine resources inventory: Oman and Qatar delivered a national contribution to the RECOFI Regional marine resources inventory. Saudi Arabia is starting to provide data.

Overall status of the fisheries inventory by the 7th SESSION OF RECOFI:

11. Seventy-three fisheries of four RECOFI Members have been uploaded in the FIRMS system and are ready for publishing. The coverage of these four national inventories is estimated to be about 80 percent of the total RECOFI fisheries (~80 percent of total RECOFI water area, and ~80 percent of 2010 total catches in the RECOFI area). Access to this inventory is restricted and members are invited to ask for user credentials at FIRMS-secretariat@fao.org.

ACTIONS REQUESTED FROM SEVENTH RECOFI SESSION

12. Considering:
- WGFM5 and WGFM6 agreement in principle that the FAO statistical sub-area 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions: 51.3.1 for the “Oman Sea”, and 51.3.2 for the “Arabian Sea, South Western” (see Appendix 1);
 - WGFM6 proposal that the formal decision would have to be made by the Commission at its next meeting;
13. Considering:
- the “Policy aspects regarding management of RECOFI fisheries and resources inventories in FIRMS”, set out by the 5th and 6th meeting of the WGFM (see Appendix 2).

² In the FIRMS partnership arrangement, the Annex 2 indicates the data contribution which the FIRMS partner commits to. The current FAO/RECOFI Annex 2 can be accessed at ftp://ftp.fao.org/FI/DOCUMENT/FIGIS_FIRMS/2013/2dFAORECOFI_annex_2.pdf

- the consolidated regional inventory of RECOFI fisheries currently loaded in FIRMS compliant with the above policy, which consists of 75 fisheries contributed by four countries (Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, Oman, Qatar) and which represents an estimated coverage of about 80% of RECOFI fisheries;
- WGFM6's recommendation whereby a comprehensive inventory should be available for publication in FIRMS;

14. Considering:

- RECOFI's current status of FAO associated partner in FIRMS, including the proposed Annex 2 (see Appendix 3).
- the "Benefits and obligations to RECOFI" under a status of full Member in FIRMS (see Appendix 4), presented at the 6th WGFM meeting;
- WGFM delegates to report to their national authorities regarding RECOFI membership in FIRMS;
- the report from the RECOFI representative(s) who participated to FSC7 and FSC8 on any relevant information regarding benefits and application of RECOFI to a full membership in FIRMS;

Appendix 1

Proposal for splitting of FAO subarea 51.3 into divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2

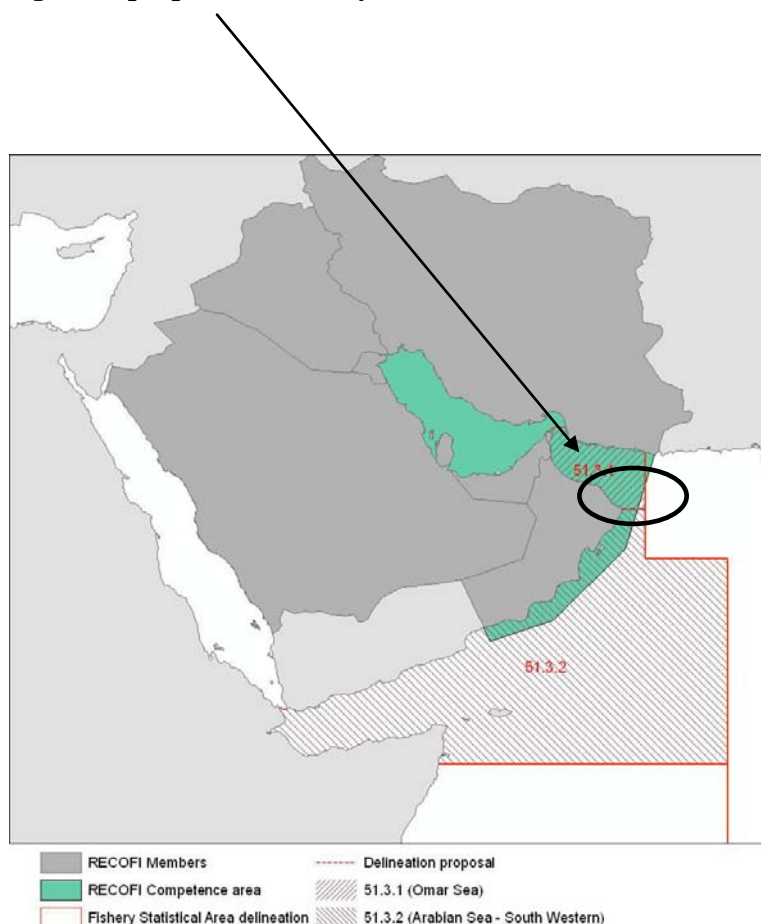
In order to properly geo-reference marine resources and fisheries in the RECOFI area, and in particular for distinguishing the fisheries operating in the Oman Sea, and those operating in the South Western part of the Arabian Sea, RECOFI fifth WGFM (Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of) 9-12 October 2011) agreed that FAO statistical subarea 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions:

- 51.3.1 - “Oman Sea”,
- and
- 51.3.2 - “Arabian Sea, South Western”.

WGFM6 validated the specification of the limit between the two new divisions. The dividing line is set as follows (See figure 1):

“a horizontal line passing through the point Latitude 22 26N and Longitude 59 50E which determines in the Rasol - Had region the coastal border between the Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea, and extending eastward up to the vertical limit of FAO sub-areas 51.3 and 51.4”

Figure 1: proposed boundary between new divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2



Appendix 2**Policy aspects regarding management of RECOFI fisheries and resources inventories in FIRMS
(from the fifth and sixth meetings of the WGFM and WGFM)****1. FIRMS general information management Policy aspects**

FIRMS is an information partnership framework that implements principles of best scientific evidence and of transparency promoted by the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO Strategy for improving information on the status and trends of capture fisheries (Strategy-STF). A fundamental FIRMS rule is that the information contribution and publishing process is under the control of partners. As a FIRMS partner, RECOFI would decide what information it commits to regularly contribute (to be defined in Annex 2 of the FIRMS Partnership arrangement) as well as which content and when is actually published.

2. Additional Policy principles agreed within RECOFI

More specifically, the following policy aspects have been agreed upon within RECOFI at the fifth meeting of the WGFM. There is a necessary distinction between the Fisheries inventory, and the Marine resources inventory, both in terms of primary ownership and development priority:

- Primary ownership of the fisheries inventory lies with countries, while that of the marine resources inventory lies with RECOFI. In both cases, RECOFI retains the corporate ownership and as such decision making responsibility regarding publishing in FIRMS.
- In the RECOFI context, the first priority should be for the development of the fisheries inventory, while the Marine resources inventory should develop consistently with the findings of regional scientific working groups.

Fisheries inventory:

- Primary and Corporate ownership: the inventories of fisheries developed at national level will eventually be aggregated at regional level according to the harmonized framework. Accordingly the countries retain primary ownership (and control) over the content which they supply while RECOFI, as corporate owner of the aggregated inventory, ensures in close collaboration with the FIRMS Secretariat that agreed conventions and harmonization rules are applied. Without RECOFI's sign-off of information under their corporate ownership, no information can be published in FIRMS.
- The inventories harmonization process at RECOFI level will be achieved as follows: national delegates will develop the inventory content through the FIRMS excel template, while referring to the harmonized framework set out by FIRMS-RECOFI workshop (3-D diagrams). During this process, any harmonization issue which cannot be resolved will be recorded. The next meeting of WGFM will examine the regionally aggregated inventory, and discuss and make decisions on the reported outstanding harmonization issues.
- The decision making process for publishing the RECOFI inventory in FIRMS: a successful outcome of the procedure described in the above paragraph will allow RECOFI to proceed with such publication. A regional inventory aggregating a minimum of three to four countries was deemed acceptable for such decision.

Marine resources inventory:

- Unlike the fisheries inventory, the primary (and corporate) ownership of the Marine resources inventory lies with RECOFI. In this respect, the regional priority is for developing an inventory focusing on the priority species. Countries are encouraged to seek inputs from competent biologists' scientists in order to compile scientific knowledge regarding those priority species. Opportunities such as "Working group on Spanish mackerel" should be taken for consolidating subsets of it.
- The FIRMS Marine resources inventory template is available as an "information collection mechanism" which countries are encouraged to use for compiling information about any additional species in the regional inventory. These nationally contributed inventories will be

used, amongst others, as sources for decision making regarding the inclusion of more species in the priority list.

Translation in Persian and Arabic:

- FIRMS can disseminate the material related to the inventories in Arabic and Persian, provided guidelines, controlled terms and labels are translated. RECOFI would have to support the translation of these assets.

Amendments to the existing FAO geo-referencing system in the RECOFI area:

- FAO statistical sub-area 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions: 51.3.1 for the “Oman Sea”, and 51.3.2 for the “Arabian Sea, South Western”. This modification request is to be transmitted by the RECOFI Secretariat to the CWP Secretariat for formal endorsement by CWP, including specification of the limit between the two new divisions, the proposed codes and names, and the rationale for their creation.

Appendix 3

**FIRMS FAO/RECOFI-Annex 2, under the current FAO associated partner status for RECOFI
(see also published as [FSC8 meeting document](#))****Information to be contributed to FIRMS by
the Regional Commission on Fisheries (RECOFI),
a FAO associated partner**

The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) will contribute to FIRMS along the following lines:

1. *Data and statistical information:*Types and scope of information to be contributed**Reports on fisheries:**

As a first priority, Fishery inventories developed under the leadership of RECOFI-FIRMS national focal points, validated at national level and further endorsed by both the RECOFI-SC and the FIRMS Secretariat will be structured for uploading and maintained in FIRMS. References to bibliography used to structure and update the inventories will be provided.

Reports on marine resources:

In a later stage, the list of “key species supporting main reference fisheries” identified during the RECOFI Workshop on Fishery Stock Indicators and Stock Status will be considered as a starting point for structuring and uploading a regional marine resources inventory that would eventually be maintained in FIRMS.

Data:

Regional Catch and Effort statistics for the RECOFI area will be provided at available public domain resolution as determined under the policies of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department.

Biology, ecology, fisheries and other information:

Fisheries inventories will be provided at national level with focus mainly on fishing activities including inputs, outputs and management information. Marine resources / stocks inventories would be provided at regional level within the RECOFI area, with information on their exploitation, assessment methods and state and trends descriptors if available.

Regulations and management:

Information on fisheries management will be furnished where possible with focus on management regime and status. Fishery Management Units, where formally established, will be created as entities embedding links to the fishing activities covered under such management.

RECOFI has mandated responsibility on FIRMS related matters, inter alia:

- to keep under review the state of the resources, including their abundance and the level of their exploitation, as well as the state of the fisheries based thereon;
- to formulate and recommend appropriate measures for the conservation and rational management of living marine, applying the precautionary approach and based on the best scientific evidence available;
- to keep under review the economic and social aspects of the fishing industry and recommend any measures aimed at its development;
- to assemble, publish or disseminate information regarding exploitable living marine resources and fisheries based on these resources;

2. Metadata and information management:

Ownership and responsibilities

Fisheries:

As agreed by the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM), Member countries retain primary ownership (and control) for the content of the fisheries inventory and retain accordingly primary ownership of national inventories. The national inventories are eventually aggregated at regional level according to the harmonized framework set by the RECOFI WGFM which ensures, with the support of the FIRMS Secretariat, that agreed conventions, reporting norms, standards and overall consistency for the region are applied. Such role confers to the RECOFI WGFM the corporate ownership of the aggregated fisheries inventory, without which sign-off no information can be published in FIRMS. As FAO article XIV body, RECOFI is a FAO associated partner in FIRMS and as such, overall responsibility for the published information resides with FAO. This arrangement will be indicated in each fact sheet with the following statement “*This document provided, and maintained by RECOFI and owned by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is part of RECOFI Fisheries Reports – <country x> data collection*”.

Marine resources:

The information contributed to FIRMS will be elaborated under the aegis of the RECOFI-WGFM. Accordingly, primary ownership of the marine resources inventory lies with RECOFI. As above, overall responsibility for the published information eventually resides with FAO. This arrangement will be indicated in each fact sheet with the following statement “*This document provided, and maintained by RECOFI and owned by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is part of RECOFI Stock Status Reports data collection*”.

Standards to be used in this Partnership Agreement.

The information to be contributed by RECOFI will conform, where possible, with the Information Management Policy established by the FIRMS Steering Committee.

Methods of collection and processing

Fisheries inventory:

The inventories harmonization process at RECOFI level will be achieved as follows: RECOFI-FIRMS national focal points will lead the development of the inventory content using the FIRMS excel template and inventory guidelines. During this process, any harmonization issue which cannot be resolved will be recorded. The RECOFI-WGFM will examine the regionally aggregated inventory, and discuss and make decisions on the reported outstanding harmonization issues.

A successful outcome of the procedure described in the above paragraph would enable decision by RECOFI to publish the inventory in FIRMS. The WGFM agreed that the consolidated inventory of RECOFI fisheries should be a comprehensive one for being published in FIRMS. The RECOFI commission will eventually decide on its formal endorsement and publishing

Marine resources inventory:

The Marine resource inventory will be aggregated and validated under the aegis of RECOFI upon recommendation of the WGFM.

The FIRMS Marine resources inventory template is available as an “information collection mechanism” which countries are encouraged to use for compiling information about any additional resources in the regional inventory. These nationally contributed inventories will be used, amongst others, as sources for possible recommendation by relevant RECOFI working groups regarding the inclusion of more marine resources in the RECOFI inventory.

Bibliographical sources

Bibliographic sources will be clearly listed in the Fisheries fact sheets and links provided to the electronic sources when available. Links to source RECOFI reports will be provided in the Marine resource fact sheets, while relevant bibliographic sources are contained in these reports.

Transmission protocols and dissemination channels.

Fisheries:

National fisheries inventories on which fact sheets are based are elaborated according to Excel or Word templates, stored within dedicated folders and periodically updated through review sessions of the RECOFI-WGFM. Their public dissemination occurs only through the FIRMS fact sheets, while dissemination of the Excel or Word sources might occur through specific requests to RECOFI-WGFM.

3. *Data and Information security*

All contributions from RECOFI will be in the public domain.

Transparency of the information and results on status and trends of fisheries, stocks, and resources and presented by RECOFI are documented in the course of the scientific peer-review process followed to obtain the results (contacts with RECOFI-FIRMS focal points and Workshops), and the various public RECOFI meetings (WGFM) at which the results, and various options for management and resource conservation, are presented and discussed. Details on these meetings and processes are available at FAO-FI web-site.

4. *Other entitlements*

As FAO associated Partner, the FIRMS representative of the RECOFI-SC is entitled to participate in the FIRMS meetings (FSC, and TWG). In both the TWG and in the FSC, FAO attends as a single Member and accordingly the RECOFI-FIRMS representative will be part of the FAO delegation, and consult with the FAO representative in FIRMS on strategic matters eventually requiring a voting mechanism.

Appendix 4

Benefits and obligations for RECOFI Member States in FIRMS**1. Anticipated benefits**

RECOFI6 and WGF5 have recognized that the involvement of RECOFI in FIRMS could enhance Members visibility in the international arena regarding their efforts to promote sound and more responsible fisheries management, the FIRMS initiative providing one of such opportunities.

At a political level:

FAO member countries through COFI, and UN members through the UN General Assembly, have made commitments to the Strategy-STF³ and their willingness to adhere to principles of good fisheries governance based on the best scientific knowledge available. Reporting status and trends of resources and fisheries demonstrates countries' compliance with such commitment, and FIRMS offers an enabling framework.

As well, the 2006 UN Review Conference on Straddling and highly migratory Fish Stocks recommended that States individually or collectively through RFMOs should cooperate with FAO in the implementation and further development of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (par. 18j)"

At a strategic level:

The FIRMS information framework provides methods, structured approaches, standards, tools, i.e. a comprehensive backbone to:

- develop a comprehensive knowledge on fisheries and marine resources based on authoritative information at regional level;
- support processes of regional harmonization of fisheries Status & Trends information;
- enable reporting capacity from Member states in a regional framework, and a monitoring capacity at both national and regional levels;
- enable more visibility;
- and various information management services to its contributors. Fact sheets are multi-purpose communication products:
 - Convey the essential information for fishery management or policy making; full details are accessible through link to electronic sources
 - Can be easily enriched with other authoritative sources
 - Provide across time for a time series of reporting
 - Partner can "recycle" in its own website the fact sheets it contributed to FIRMS.

2. Obligations of RECOFI as FIRMS member

By becoming a FIRMS member, RECOFI will have to fulfil its commitments, at its own expenses:

- contribute to FIRMS information on fisheries and/or resources status and trends as per the signed Annex 2 of the FIRMS partnership arrangement⁴;
- participate to the FIRMS decision making process, by regularly attending FIRMS Steering Committee meetings (these meetings are generally organized back to back with CWP meeting, on average once every 1.5 year),
- participate to the FIRMS Technical Working Group meetings, which now meet virtually twice a year through video-conferencing, and can exceptionally hold physical meetings.

³ FAO Strategy-STF: FAO strategy for improving information on status and trends of capture fisheries

⁴ FIRMS partnership arrangement: <http://firms.fao.org/firms/about/en#Org-LegalFoundation>

Appendix 5**Current FIRMS membership****FIRMS Partners**

Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)
Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)
European Union (EU) - Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - Fisheries and Aquaculture Department (FI), including associated Partners CECAF, RECOFI, SWIOFC, WECAFC.
General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)
International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)
International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)
Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO)
Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)
Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC)
South-East Atlantic Fisheries Organization (SEAFO)

FIRMS Observers

Benguela Current Commission (BCC)
Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS)
International Whaling Commission (IWC)
North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)
North Atlantic Salmon Commission (NASCO)
Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

Other organizations which participated in FIRMS Steering Committee meetings

South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO)

Figure 1: FIRMS membership - Area and species coverage

Figure 1a: current list of non tuna-RFBs contributing information to FIRMS

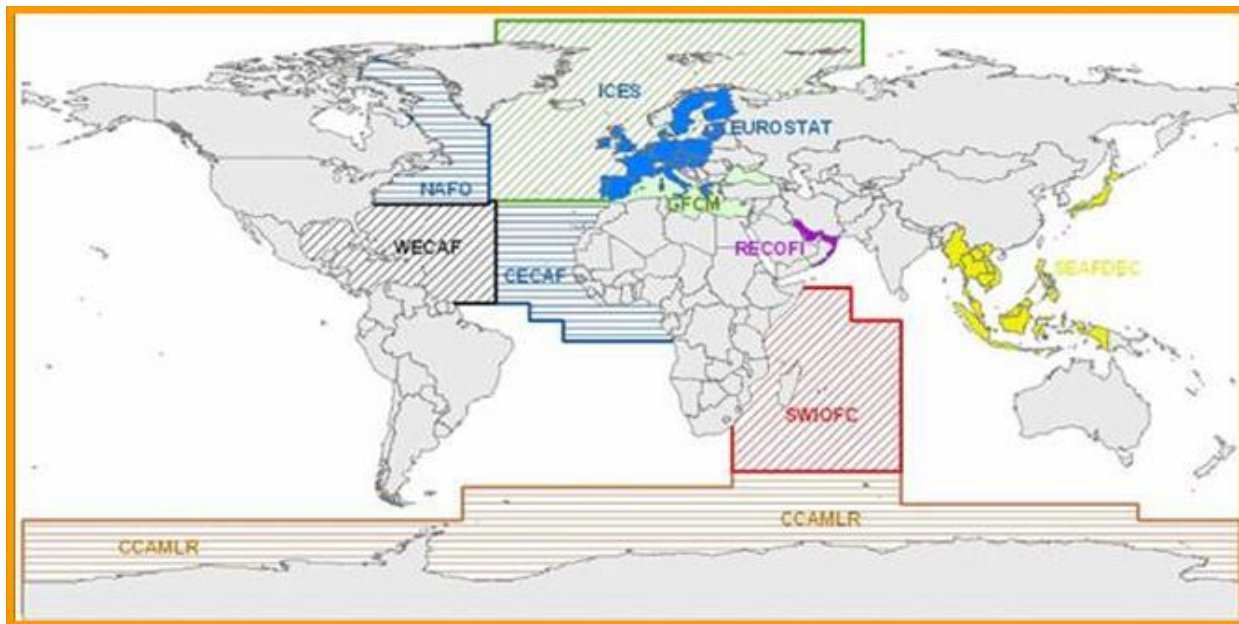


Figure 1b: current list of tuna-RFBs contributing information to FIRMS

