



FISHERY RESOURCES MONITORING SYSTEM (FIRMS)
First Session of the FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting
Rome, Italy, 2-5 February 2004
Final Report
Author: FIRMS Secretariat

1. Opening of Session and the Welcome Address

The First Session of the FIRMS Steering Committee (FSC) was opened by Dr Richard Grainger (Chief, FIDI) at 9.30 hrs on Monday 2 February, 2004. He outlined the conduct of the inaugural meeting to participants (see [Attachment 1](#)) and noted the contents of the agenda (see [Attachment 2](#)) and the List of Documents (See [Attachment 3](#)).

In his welcome address (see [Attachment 4](#)), the FAO Fisheries Department's Assistant Director-General, Mr Ichiro Nomura, noted that there has been significant progress with achieving the numerous aims of the international community to develop a clear understanding of the status of global fisheries resources.

2. Appointment of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

Dr Robin Allen (IATTC) was appointed as Chairperson.

3. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted (see [Attachment 2](#)).

4. Initial membership of the FIRMS Partnership

The meeting participants noted that the following six international fisheries institutions were signatories to the Partnership Agreement:

- 1. Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)*
- 2. International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)*
- 3. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)*
- 4. Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)*

5. *Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) [signed but not present]*

6. *FAO Fisheries Department (FAO/FI)*

They also noted that the following international fisheries institutions were participants to the inaugural FSC meeting to ensure that they could report back to their institutions on the progress in establishing the FIRMS and its administrative systems.

7. *Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)*

CCAMLR had further considered a FIRMS Partnership Arrangement at its annual meeting in November 2003 where it was agreed that the CCAMLR Secretariat would maintain a watching brief on developments in FIRMS. A FIRMS Partnership Arrangement with CCAMLR remains under consideration.

8. *Eurostat*

Eurostat noted that internal difficulties had delayed the approval of the Partnership Arrangement. However, the contents of Annex 2 have been agreed with the FIRMS Secretariat and the internal administrative consultations are under way and within a few weeks the process is likely to be completed.

9. *Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO)*

In September 2003 the NAFO Scientific Council (STACREC) reviewed the draft FIRMS Partnership Arrangement but noted the difficulty of doing so without legal expertise and given the short time period. STACREC recommended that a draft Annex 2 of the FIRMS Partnership Arrangement should be prepared in advance of the June 2004 Scientific Council meeting for review at that meeting.

10. *Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)*

The meeting noted that SEAFDEC made the proposal to its 35th Meeting of Council Directors in April 2003 to consider a Partnership Arrangement with FIRMS. The Council made strong comment particularly on the benefits from the FIRMS Partnership to the member countries of SEAFDEC. They decided to defer the matter for reconsideration when detailed information is provided to the member countries by the SEAFDEC Secretariat. The meeting was informed that SEAFDEC Secretariat has its plan to resubmit the proposal again to the 36th Council meeting in April 2004 for consideration and approval.

11. *General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)*

GFCM is awaiting the establishment of an autonomous budget which will be completed relatively soon. As soon as this is achieved the Partnership Arrangement matter will be put formally to the Commission, and it is most likely that it will become a Partner.

12. *Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)*

Until such time as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) comes into being and a FIRMS Partnership Agreement with WCPFC is established, SPC will provide information on tuna fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean for FIGIS under a memorandum of understanding between SPC and FAO that was established for that purpose in 2000.

The requisite number of ratifications for the WCPFC Convention was deposited on 19 December 2003; hence, the Convention will come into force on 19 June 2004. It is anticipated that WCPFC will engage SPC for the provision of research services; WCPFC may also engage SPC to provide the technical support for the FIRMS Partnership Agreement with WCPFC, when it is established.

In regard to species not covered by WCPFC, such as those, other than highly migratory species, that are taken in the coastal fisheries of SPC member countries and territories, SPC may, in the future, establish a FIRMS Partnership Agreement, distinct from that which will be established with WCPFC.

5. Review, and revision of the FSC Rules of Procedure

The meeting reviewed the draft Rules of Procedure of the FIRMS Steering Committee.

As part of the discussions held to set up the rules of procedures, the meeting requested to record in this report some of the issues discussed:

- The FIRMS Partnership Secretariat is also that of the FSC Secretariat.
- The FIRMS Partners are all FSC members. This may change if/when the Partnership reaches a critical point at which time Rules of Procedures will have to be modified to include reference to subsidiary bodies.
- In order to set-up and maintain mailing lists of contacts, FIRMS Partners and Observers will nominate contact points, differentiating those belonging to the FSC from those belonging to the technical working group.
- The criteria for Partner's inactivity should not be measured through absence at FSC meetings, and partners with insufficient resources to attend meetings would be obviously disadvantaged. These criteria should rather be based on lack of contributions from a Partner. Means to involve Partners unable to attend FSC meetings have to be found, such as Newsletter or a FIRMS Agenda item at the level of Regional Fishery Body meetings
- Inactive Partners should not have a possibility to block the process.
- For transparency purposes, the report of FSC meetings should be made publicly available.

6. Adoption of the FSC Rules of Procedures

The meeting adopted the Rules of Procedures as appended in this report ([Attachment 5](#)).

7. Review of the content of Partners' Annex 2

a) STRUCTURE OF ANNEX 2

The meeting reviewed the contents of each of the Partners/signatory institutions' Annex 2 of their FIRMS Partnership Agreements. The meeting recognised that the general contents of each Annex 2 would be as follows:

1. Scope of information contributed, referring as far as possible to partners' mandates
2. Metadata and information management
3. Data and information security
4. Collaborative institutions
5. Additional entitlements

b) PARTNERS ANNEXES

Individually, the signatories noted the following (access to each organizations Annex 2 can be obtained by the hyperlinks below):

1. *Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)*

The supply of information to FIRMS would be based entirely on the publicly available stock status information made available by IATTC. The data on 5 highly migratory stocks of the Pacific Ocean (southern Pacific Albacore, Pacific Bigeye, Pacific Shortbill spearfish, Pacific Black marlin and Pacific Blue marlin) would be supplied to FIRMS in a manner to be decided by IATTC and SPC, recognising the distribution of these species stocks and the need to recognise shared data ownership and responsibilities. Noting that no formal agreement between IATTC and SPC has yet been agreed, the representatives noted that the WCPFC Convention requires the establishment of collaborative mechanisms, one of which could be the sharing of FIRMS data responsibilities. [IATTC Annex 2.](#)

2. *International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)*

The supply of information to FIRMS would be based entirely on the standard fish stock assessment publication templates/frameworks established by the ICCAT Standing committee on Statistics and Research (SCRS), known as the *Species Executive Summaries*.

The need to distinguish start-up costs from routine maintenance costs was stressed. With respect to start-up costs, the FIRMS Secretariat indicated that some limited funds could be made available to this effect. [ICCAT Annex 2.](#)

3. *International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)*

The supply of information to FIRMS would be based entirely on the publicly available stock status information prepared by ICES through the Advisory Commission on Fisheries Management (ACFM). It also noted that there is progress in supplying such data through an automated method for the preparation of summaries of detailed data (derived from stock working groups of the ACFM) through a two-phase approach (Phase 1 beginning in May 2004 and Phase 2 beginning in October 2004) with expectations of completion by December 2004. The standard formats for publicly available data were outlined in terms of text, graphics and tables, which would include significant reference to management objectives, advice on management, predictions on the stock status results of management advice, reference points that are used to guide management policy, research and status analysis, sometimes with special comments and other relevant factors.

In particular, ICES noted that reduced 'Fishery' Assessment texts would also be made available, specifically to make useful, small-summary overviews publicly available.

NAFO noted that it would be useful to establish a FIGIS/FIRMS tool to enable broad extractions of species/fishery information across adjacent regions (oceanic and/or global).

ICES noted also that collaborative Partners may be numerous, ranging from regional organizations to national ones with mandates on coastal fisheries, but that agreements on who will contribute what will have to be dealt with on a case by case basis. [ICES Annex 2.](#)

4. *Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)*

The detail in its Annex 2 was introduced and reviewed. It was noted in particular that stock assessments have been undertaken and therefore stock status information has been made public on four species. The mandate of IOTC extends to 16 species and it is hoped that future assessment efforts will enable their stock status information to be similarly assessed and published.

IOTC indicated that it had to reflect its mandate in Annex 2, using IOTC naming conventions, but that this would not contradict the need to adopt standard Resources naming conventions in FIRMS. [IOTC Annex 2.](#)

5. FAO Fisheries Department (FAO/FI)

The meeting reviewed the extensive Annex 2, noting the context of the availability of information through its global information tasks, including ([FAO Annex 2.](#));

- *The State of World Fishery Resources;*
- *FAO Regional Fishery Body reports (e.g. CECAF, GFCM, etc);*
- *Global Statistics provided by member countries and non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies;*
- *Species lists and their geographic distribution;*
- *Stock and resource inventories; and*
- *Information and management at global/regional levels; RFB summary descriptions.*

6. Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Under the Memorandum of Understanding between SPC and FAO, SPC will provide information for FIGIS on catches, fisheries developments and the status of the stocks of the tuna species (i.e. albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin) for the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. This information will be taken from sources such as the SPC Tuna Fishery Yearbook, which includes estimates of annual catches and the numbers of vessels active, and from the reports of annual meetings of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, which includes summary statements on the status of the stocks.

In regard to stocks and resources of concern to both SPC and IATTC, those agencies will liaise to determine their respective responsibilities for providing information for FIGIS.

7. Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)

The contents of the CCSBT Annex 2 was noted and can be found at the following link – [CCSBT Annex 2.](#)

8. Eurostat

The information to be supplied will focus on socio-economic data and fleet economics derived from the existing sources and with the collaboration of DG Fish. In the near future the information defined in Annex 2 will be submitted to FIRMS, with particular attention being paid to the presentation of quality, harmonised data.

Attention will be paid to the possibility of providing information on the economic performance of fleets to supplement the resource status information provided by ICES. All data supplied by Eurostat will be in the public domain. Annex 2 refers to the necessity of respecting national restrictions on confidential data but this is unlikely to affect submissions to FIRMS. [Eurostat Annex 2.](#)

9. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

Given that GFCM is an FAO statutory management body, FAO Fisheries Department is aware of the need to contribute Mediterranean fisheries information to FIRMS and is already taking care of this task, as part of the FAO/FI contribution. When GFCM becomes a Partner it will develop its own Annex 2. It was noted that GFCM recognises the overlap between its mandate and those of ICCAT and Eurostat with whom discussions are ongoing.

c) INFORMATION SUBMISSIONS

It was noted that consistency among the information submissions by the various Partners would be useful for the users of the system, but it was understood that this had to be balanced against the cost of achieving this.

In conclusion of this agenda item, a discussion started:

-
- on whether or not there should be consistency between the contents of Annex 2. A consensus was reached that Annex 2 represents commitments that Partners have with respect to FIRMS, and that consistency should not prevail over what Partners' commitments can be. It was also noted that this would not prevent Partners to make available additional data contributions to FIRMS through other arrangements (e.g. Tuna Atlas Project); and
 - on the need to develop a glossary for FIRMS, so that the terms used for the operation of FIRMS, such as copyright, data ownership, responsible institutions, amongst many others, be understood consistently. There was general consensus that FIRMS would need such a glossary facility. It was also indicated that as far as content is concerned, definitions may be varying from one institution to another, and that definitions have to be supplied in their context.

8. Report from the FIRMS Secretariat on the development of the FIRMS framework

The Secretariat presented a report on the development of the FIRMS framework ([FIRMS FSC 1/2004/6](#)). The presentation was supported by a demonstration of the new modules developed by FIGIS:

- Tuna atlas,
- Home page for the species identification programme,
- Species fact sheets,
- Regional fishery body summaries,
- Fishery topics and issues, and
- The draft FIRMS web-site.

This presentation triggered some remarks on the likely need to establish a group to address FIRMS technical matters.

Some discussion started also on whether or not the FAO inventory of fisheries mentioned as a FAO contribution is relevant to FIRMS. Different views were expressed on this matter: on one side, reporting on the conduct of fisheries is enshrined in the Partnership Arrangement. On the other side, FIRMS should concentrate on presenting reports on those Fisheries under the mandate of Partners. At this stage, the group was not able to reach a consensus on this matter, which will have to be readdressed at a later stage with improved understanding of the goals and implications of including such exhaustive inventories.

More generally, the meeting expressed its concern that there is a risk of confusion between FIRMS and FIGIS. Although it is accepted that FIGIS is the tool used to handle information provided within FIRMS, the Partners should clearly differentiate FIGIS (a tool) and FIRMS (a partnership). FAO recognised that the present stage of development of FIGIS doesn't help reducing this confusion, but that plans are on-going to position FIGIS as a software powering different web-sites such as the FI-home page and FIRMS. FIGIS as a web-site will thus disappear within the next two years.

On the draft FIRMS web-site presented, the meeting express the preference for the banner of the FIRMS Web page to be specific to FIRMS. The meeting asked the Secretariat to investigate acquiring a domain name for FIRMS.

It was stressed that the partners should provide any information related to their competence.

The submission of material could be in one or more languages: the Secretariat would not translate any piece of information provided by partners.

9. Reports of developments in agency programmes in FIRMS matters

It was agreed that the initial intention for document FIRMS FSC1/2004/7 “*Reports of developments in agency programmes in FIRMS matters*” would be replaced by paragraphs inserted in this report.

- ***Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)***

Training in FIRMS tools: One staff member of the IATTC has been trained in the basic use of XML technology and document preparation. FIGIS input requires skills and knowledge transcending fisheries reports of the agency, editorial abilities and computer programs.

Development of FIRMS tools and metadata standards: No tools have been developed by the IATTC, but work has been done to develop the templates necessary to present the reports on status and trends prepared and which will be uploaded to FIGIS. Metadata standards are being adopted and incorporated into IATTC data systems in a formal, systematic manner. At this time, such information is readily available in reports, and various other documents and user guides, prepared by the Commission.

Development of FIRMS home page: The initial page for the IATTC is under construction, with collaboration from the FIRMS Secretariat, and should be available for public access on FIGIS within the next 4-6 weeks.

- ***International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)***

ICES has not implemented any part of the FIRMS but has concentrated on finalising the Partnership Agreement and defining the content of its Annex 2, i.e. the information it is committed to supply to FIRMS. ICES is pleased with progress and plans to contribute to the FIRMS website in 2004.

- ***International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)***

One ICCAT staff member has been trained in the use of basic XML editing tools, and several templates have been prepared as examples of potential contributions to FIRMS.

- ***Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)***

No activity was led by IOTC. However, IOTC mentioned that they do not need training since one of their staff is a former FIGIS staff.

- ***FAO Fisheries Department (FAO/FI)***

FAO has formatted its entire 1997 Review of the Status of World Fishery resources in the FIRMS proposed template, as well as case studies for CECAF and GFCM reports. Inventories of resources and fisheries have been developed for following areas: CECAF, Oman and Red Sea, WECAFC (Mexico and Greater Antilles), GFCM, South West Atlantic.

10. Requirements for the operational version of the FIRMS modules

The Secretariat made a presentation related to the report on the requirements for the operational version of the FIRMS modules ([FIRMS FSC 1/2004/8](#)). The approach to integrate the information provided by FIRMS partners has been developed based on case studies. The need to consider qualifiers such as Management Unit in addition to Stocks and Fisheries has been underlined. Different qualifiers may concern the same entity, depending on the perspective (assessment, exploitation, management).

The importance of focussing on FIRMS issues rather than FIGIS ones was emphasised. It was also noted that unless there was sufficient clarity in terms, there was a risk of conflicting reporting on the same entity (resource/fishery/management unit) by different partners.

The system is designed on the basis of providing the information in the format normally produced by the partner. However, harmonizing of this to allow more comprehensive searches and display

will add value to the information. Thus, the approach developed for FIRMS should respect both concerns.

11. Priority areas for developing the FIRMS Information Management Policy (IMP)

The meeting reviewed attachment 5 of the [Report of the Ad Hoc meeting on the Establishment of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System](#) (30th June-1st July 2003) and made the following comments on the nine paragraphs of principles it contains:

- *Definitions:* it was agreed that definitions for terms used in the IMP requiring common understanding should be part of the IMP.
- *Para 1 refers to FIGIS as the FIRMS information management tool:* some of the ideas of this paragraph fit better with the preamble of the document than the body.
- *Para 2 refers to Partners policies:* Para 2 was generally accepted. But it was thought that the issue concerning language should be made a separate point. The policy should encourage the use of one of the 5 FAO official languages. Some minimum requirements concerning the submission of key attributes in English should be established (e.g. titles or other searchable qualifiers). The policy should provide for the withdrawal of information. On the logo aspect, Partners mentioned that they generally would like to associate their logo together with their information contribution.
- *Para 3 refers to encouraging Partners submissions, and Para 4 to transparency and Quality Assurance:* the idea in Para 3 would fit better in the preamble as well as the first sentence of Para 4. The ideas in Para 4. were generally accepted by the meeting suitable for the IMP, although the third sentence about “timeliness” should be reformulated as it was felt confusing.
- *Para 5 refers to handling of alternate views:* as a matter of policy there will be a mechanism to identify conflicting information and to require resolution of that among relevant members before publication.
- *Para 6 refers to tool functionality automating analyses of the content of the system:* the committee thought that it was better that the policy provides for facilitating appropriate searches rather than avoiding inappropriate ones. The application of Metadata standards was mentioned to be an obvious way for this purpose.
- *Para 7 refers to users restricted areas:* was accepted by the meeting. It was outlined that restricted access areas of the system is useful to circulate information within the FIRMS partners. Restricted access to information is also part the validation process before publication.
- *Para 8 refers to maintenance of historical data:* was accepted by the meeting.
- *Para 9 refers to technology and information standards:* the meeting agreed that Information Management Policy shall respect the FIRMS Partnership Agreement.

The meeting also reviewed the paper “Priorities for FIRMS information management policy” ([FIRMS FSC 1/2004/9](#)). In respect to the consistency item for data management, the meeting agreed that consistency should be encouraged not required. The meeting noted that it might be advantageous to develop a policy which distinguishes between the main ideas requiring decision making by FSC, and operational details which could be contained in the Annexes and may only involve technical working group decisions.

It was agreed that the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chairperson, will draft the IMP and circulate it for discussion during the intersessional period.

12. Planning for the second session of FSC

It was agreed that the 2nd session of the FSC will be held in conjunction with the next CWP meeting in Copenhagen during 25th to 26th February 2005. The provisional agenda should include:

- Progress on the development of FIRMS
- Review of Annex 2 for new partners
- Review of the draft information management policy
- Review of the FIRMS web-site
- Review of new perspective partners
- Election of officers,
- Consideration of the report of the technical working group

13. Planning of FSC intersessional activities

During the intersessional period, the meeting agreed on the following activities:

- Development of the draft Information Management Policy statement. The Secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson will draft a version of the IMP and distribute it to the Partners for review.
- The partners will elaborate the terms of reference for a Technical working group. These terms of reference would include, *inter alia*, to;
 - (i) *agree on meanings of some concepts;*
 - (ii) *give definitions and advise on how FIRMS database content should be made searchable,*
 - (iii) *provide feedback on version 1 and review system requirements for the 2nd version;*
and
 - (iv) *participate in the testing of new developments.*

The Secretariat should convene the technical working group prior to the second session.

Partners and Observers will provide feedback on the FIRMS website (under restricted access until the Partners authorise its publication)

14. Any other business

- ***List of next potential Partners:***

The committee agreed that CCAMLR, GFCM, SEAFDEC, SPC, NAFO and WCPFC should be considered the next potential partners, and the Chairperson should contact them inviting them to become members. Beyond this second wave group of potential partners, FIRMS Partners should start promoting the Partnership to other organisations (NASCO, OECD, IWC) since agencies internal mechanisms may take up to 3 years before they can join.

- ***FIRMS Technical working group:***

The FSC agreed to establish a Technical Working Group with the mandate to consider technical issues and make recommendations on matters of a purely technical nature. Partners and Observers to FIRMS FSC1 will nominate a contact person. This working group convened by the Secretariat will work through correspondence and hold a meeting, if necessary.

15. Appointment of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

- Chairperson: Robin Allen
- Vice-Chairperson: Hans Lassen

16. Adoption of the Report

The report was adopted on 5th February 2004.

Attachments:

[*Attachment 1 - List of Participants*](#)

[*Attachment 2 - Contents of the Agenda*](#)

[*Attachment 3 - List of Documents*](#)

[*Attachment 4 - Opening Statement by Mr. Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director-General,
FAO Fisheries Department*](#)

[*Attachment 5 - Rules of Procedure*](#)

[*Attachment 6 - Draft Information Management Policy*](#)

Attachment 1 – List of Participants**FIRMS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING: FIRST SESSION (Launching meeting)**

Chairperson *Robin Allen*
Rapporteurs *David Evans/ Marc Taconet*

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FAO LEGAL DEPARTMENT

Legal Officer	<i>Cristina LERIA</i>
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FIRMS Secretariat

Chief, FIDI	<i>Richard GRAINGER</i>
FIGIS Officer	<i>Marc TACONET</i>
FIDI Consultant	<i>David EVANS</i>

Attachment 2 - Contents of the Agenda**Monday 2 February, 2004****Morning: 09:30 hours**

1. Opening of session and Welcome address
2. Appointment of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Initial membership of the FIRMS Partnership - Endorsement by FAO

Afternoon: 14:00 hours

5. Review and revision of the FSC rules of procedures

Tuesday 3 February, 2004**Morning: 09:00 hours**

6. Adoption of the FSC Rules of Procedure
7. Review of the content of Partners Annex 2
8. Report from the FIRMS Secretariat on the development of the FIRMS framework

Afternoon: 14:00 hours**(CWP intersessional meeting)****Wednesday 4 February, 2004****Morning: 09:00 hours**

9. Reports of developments in agency programmes in FIRMS matters
10. Requirements for the operational version of the FIRMS modules

Afternoon: 14:00 hours

11. Priority areas for developing the FIRMS information management policy
 - List of priority areas
 - Guidelines for priority areas
12. Planning for the second session of FSC (FSC2)
13. Planning of FSC intersessional activities
14. Any other business

Thursday 5 February, 2004**Morning: 09:00 hours****(CWP intersessional meeting)****Afternoon: 14:00 hours**

15. Adoption of the Report

(CWP intersessional meeting – adoption of the report)

Attachment 3 - List of Documents

FIRMS FSC1/2004/1	PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND TIMETABLE
FIRMS FSC1/2004/2	PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA AND TIMETABLE
FIRMS FSC1/2004/3	PROVISIONAL LIST OF DOCUMENTS
FIRMS FSC1/2004/4	PROVISIONAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
FIRMS FSC1/2004/5	FIRMS PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENT
ANNEX 1	<i>Current FIRMS Partners on the date of signature by the two parties</i>
ANNEX 2	<p><i>Outline and detailed arrangements on the nature of information and the conditions under which it is made available under this partnership arrangement, including any institutional collaboration and additional entitlements that a partner may wish to include</i></p> <p>IATTC – Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission</p> <p>ICCAT – International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas</p> <p>ICES – International Council for the Exploration of the Sea</p> <p>IOTC – Indian Ocean Tuna Commission</p> <p>CCSBT – Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna</p> <p>EUROSTAT – Statistical Office of the European Communities</p>
FIRMS FSC1/2004/6	Report from the FIRMS Secretariat on the development of the FIRMS framework
FIRMS FSC1/2004/7 (cancelled)	Report of developments in agency programmes in FIRMS matters
FIRMS FSC1/2004/8	Requirements for the operational version of the FIRMS modules
FIRMS FSC1/2004/9	Priorities for FIRMS Information Management Policy

Attachment 4 - Opening Statement by Mr. Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director-General, FAO Fisheries Department

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure on behalf of the FAO Fisheries Department, to welcome you to this first meeting of the FIRMS *Steering Committee*.

This year is the twenty-second anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the twelfth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Little did we know back in 1982 and 1992 how much work faced us, or how many changes we would need to make, to bring this fundamental law into practical effect and to include a holistic view of the environment into our perspectives.

Arguably, UNCLOS introduced the most fundamental changes to State jurisdiction, rights and responsibilities that the world has ever undertaken in a peaceful way. It completely changed national geographies, it moved us away from the global commons of the oceans where the advantages were with the powerful, and it was done with a unanimity rare in international relations.

UNCED likewise recognized that fundamental changes were needed. It brought into sharp focus the interdependence of humankind and the environment, and the urgency with which we need to understand this and to find ways of assuring sustainability for future generations. The climate, the physical and biological environment, the scale and essence of biodiversity, and the effects on these of human intervention all became linked. A forward-looking and newly-cautious approach was agreed, which added weight to arguments that UNCLOS needed support from other instruments. The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Fish Stocks Agreements followed, and these have given us yet more detailed guidance on how to tackle problems and find solutions in the quest for fisheries sustainability.

Just as important as these global instruments are the numerous national and regional instruments, and the requirements for reliable information in support of sound policy-making for fisheries and effective fisheries management.

In summary, much has been achieved since 1982, and particularly since 1992, but much remains to be done.

Many of the problems have long been obvious, including overexploitation and overcapitalisation; advantaged and disadvantaged peoples; pollution and habitat degradation; ecosystem shifts and biodiversity impoverishment; and many more. One of the main problems is that solutions are not always easy to find, and that a fuller understanding of the nature and extent of problems, and how they interact with other problems, needs to be developed along the way to deciding on appropriate solutions.

We need to know where we stand, where we are going, and how the system is reacting to our activities. Improving our understanding of the status and trends of fisheries is thus absolutely essential to finding solutions. It will help us define more clearly the nature of our problems. Improved global understanding will almost certainly reveal some elements of the local solutions we need, for example to reduce fleets and catches so that stocks may return to sustainable abundance levels and to generate alternative employment opportunities. Improved understanding will generate ideas for new management methodologies, progress in fishery science and accelerated development of the whole panoply of knowledge we need to gain for future sustainability.

All these are generally accepted wisdoms, but are worth repeating here for the simple reason that our knowledge of the status and trends of world fisheries needs urgent and significant improvement. This is why you, distinguished delegates, are here today.

As you are all aware, this first meeting is the final culmination of a process that began at the Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR) in 1999. At that meeting a process began that resulted in the FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries, which was agreed at the Technical Consultation in 2002. That Strategy was finally approved by COFI and the FAO Council last year and endorsed by the UN General Assembly. The overall objective of the Strategy is to provide a framework, strategy and plan for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends as a basis for fisheries policy-making and for management for the conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources within ecosystems. The Strategy formally recognises the essential role FIGIS, the Fisheries Global Information System, and its Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) module, will play in facilitating implementation of the Strategy.

All of the international instruments recognize the importance of fisheries information as a basis for fisheries policy-making and management and to ensure sustainability of the fisheries. As the Chairperson of ACFR informed the last COFI meeting, the Strategy will be all the more necessary following WSSD as better information will be needed to monitor progress towards time bound goals for fisheries.

Around the table here are many representatives of the Regional Fishery Bodies of the world. Some of the world's RFBs originated as primary partnerships between countries for fisheries science and fisheries management, and have continued their contributions to fisheries for very many years. All recognise the need for good quality information as an essential basis for fisheries management and policy-making.

By taking advantage of the modern systems for information and communication, we can expect data gathering, data processing and information dissemination to be readily and accountably achieved in fisheries. In particular, we all hope that *'the information age'* will also focus on the development of fisheries knowledge systems within those countries that have faced difficulties, and for which capacity-building is recognised and being addressed in many ways.

We all recognise the role of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics – the CWP. The CWP continues its focus to develop and introduce applicable standards, including data types, comprehensiveness and quality. And, the CWP members have been a primary partner in the whole process leading up to today through inter-sessional meetings, one of which is in conjunction with this meeting.

Some brief comments on the draft agenda are as follows. Today, we will hold the signing ceremony of the Partnership Arrangement documents by the participants of this first phase of membership of the FIRMS *Steering Committee*. The Partnership Arrangement documents will recognise in their Annex 2 that individual Partner information needs vary, both now and in the future. In Agenda item 7, you will undertake a *'Review of the content of Partners Annex 2'*, and many of you will append your Annex 2 to your own *'Arrangement'*. (Such a review will always be an Agenda item when a new FIRMS Arrangement joins the FSC.)

In order for the FSC to get under way, our meeting will review and revise, where necessary, the draft of the FSC *Rules of Procedures* under Agenda Item 6. Later, FAO which is acting as the FIRMS Secretariat will report on the development of the FIRMS framework and other FIRMS matters. We all recognise that the development of the FIRMS *Information Management Policy* will be a key next task; and we will discuss the priority issues and ways to approach them. Lastly, we will address the requirements for the operational version of the FIRMS modules.

I wish you well in your deliberations this week and trust that you will give a safe birth to the FIRMS Partnership so that it can prosper in the years to come and contribute significantly to promoting sustainable fisheries.

Attachment 5 - Rules of Procedure**RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE FIRMS STEERING COMMITTEE (FSC)****1. SESSIONS**

The FSC will hold Ordinary Sessions at least once every three years. Upon request by a FSC member and with the written concurrence of at least one third of the FSC members, the FSC will hold Extraordinary Sessions to discuss matters of interest to the FSC members, as defined in Articles 5.4 and 5.5 of the Partnership Arrangement. The FIRMS Secretariat will announce the date and location of the Session at least 90 days before the date on which the Session should be held.

2. AGENDA

A provisional agenda for each Session will be prepared by the FIRMS Secretariat in collaboration with the Chairperson. The first item on the provisional agenda will be the adoption of the agenda. If funds are made available to the FIRMS Partnership, the agenda will include an element entitled "handling of financial matters". The provisional agenda will be distributed with the announcement of the Session.

3. PARTNERS' REPRESENTATIVE AT MEETINGS

Each Partner will communicate to the FIRMS Secretariat the names of its Representative, alternate Representative, advisers and other members of its delegation prior to Sessions.

4. DOCUMENTATION

Relevant documents for each Session will be, if possible, distributed by the FIRMS Secretariat to all Partners at the announcement of the Session.

5. OFFICERS

As a final agenda item at each Ordinary Session the FSC will elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from among its members; they will remain in office until the election of the new Chairperson and new Vice-Chairperson at the next Session. The outgoing Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will be eligible for re-election.

The Chairperson shall be responsible for the following tasks in consultation with the FIRMS Secretariat:

5.1. Arranging such intersessional activities which may be required for the effective functioning of the FSC, including inter alia, holding informal technical preparatory meetings, holding meetings of regional or subject groups, preparation of working papers, and communication by correspondence.

5.2. Preparing the draft agenda for the next Session (Ordinary or Extraordinary)

5.3. Monitoring progress made by FIRMS Secretariat on the implementation of decisions taken by the FSC.

6. EXPENSES

The FIRMS Secretariat will not bear the expenses incurred by delegates, including Representative and alternate Representative, attending Sessions of the FSC.

7. WORKING LANGUAGE

English will be the working language of the FSC.

8. DECISION MAKING

All decisions of the FSC, including amendments to these Rules of Procedure, will be taken by consensus of all FSC members attending the Session unless this is specified differently in these Rules of Procedure.

9. REPORTS

At each Session the FSC will adopt a report of the Session that will be made publicly available by the FSC Secretariat.

10. NEW PARTNERS

10 a) Identification and communication

Potential partners may be identified by the FSC or apply directly to the FIRMS Secretariat. In both cases, potential partners should communicate formally their interest to become member of the FIRMS Partnership to the FIRMS Secretariat.

All applicant partners should provide evidence that they comply with the criteria established in the Partnership Arrangement.

10 b) Endorsement and objection

The FSC should endorse the new Partners at the Sessions of the FSC (Ordinary or Extraordinary) or, in case the potential partner is identified or applies to be a member between Sessions, by email correspondence between FSC members. Unless there is an objection from any of the FSC members within 30 days upon proposal, the applicant Partner will become a new member of the FIRMS Partnership and the FSC. In case of objection by any of the FSC members, the endorsement of the applicant Partner will be reconsidered at the next FSC Session (Ordinary or Extraordinary).

11. OBSERVERS

The FIRMS Partnership shall promote transparency in its activities and new membership. Therefore, national institutions, intergovernmental organisations and nongovernmental organisations may, upon request to the FIRMS Secretariat at least 90 days before the Session, be invited to be represented by an Observer at the FSC Sessions.

The FIRMS Secretariat will circulate the request for observer status to the FSC members who shall respond within thirty days with their concurrence or objection. A FSC member who fails to make an objection within 30 days shall be deemed to have concurred with the request for observer status. An Observer may submit memoranda and participate in the discussions, but will not participate in decision-making.

Attachment 6 - Draft Information Management Policy (i.e. Attachment 5 as extracted from the Ad Hoc Meeting on the Establishment of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System)

Preamble: in order to facilitate the reading of this document, the acronyms FIGIS, FIRMS, and FIGIS-FIRMS are hereby defined:

- **FIGIS:** the **Fisheries Global Information System**, is a web-based information management tool that integrates fisheries information and interconnects groups of institutional partnerships to build up a network of subsystems.
- **FIRMS:** The **Fishery Resources Monitoring System** is a partnership drawing together international organizations, regional fishery bodies and national scientific institutes, collaborating within a formal agreement, who are willing to report and share information on status and trends of fishery resources.
- **FIGIS-FIRMS:** this describes the **FIGIS sub-system** taking care of the management and dissemination of information shared within the FIRMS partnership. Core modules for this sub-system comprise resources, stocks, fisheries and fisheries management systems, whereas peripheral modules include species, fishing techniques.

The FIRMS Steering Committee (FSC) will define an Information Management Policy. While the specific formulation of this policy will be elaborated by FSC, the Partnership agreement assumes that certain guiding principles form the basis for this Policy. These principles elements are summarised below. The FIGIS-FIRMS July 2002 workshop considered in its report/annex 7 some of the elements of an information management policy, including quality assurance. As FIGIS-FIRMS is a subsystem within FIGIS, it will be guided by the same principles as FIGIS.

Para.1: The FIGIS system is a tool for disseminating information provided by many different partners, each holding data in different databases (or otherwise). Data in the FIGIS system will be loaded and maintained by professionals belonging to many different organisations. In this distributed system, information remains under the full responsibility and control of data owners, and in that respect, information available through FIGIS shall be disseminated ensuring source and citations of responsible Party together with information on the nature, origins and quality of the information.

Para.2: FSC will formulate the Information Management Policy. Partners' policies regarding their publications and the dissemination of data and documents apply for that information each Partner has submitted. This also includes choice of language(s), logo(s), synchronisation with partner's publication process, need to prevent from distorting partners' published sources, how information contributed by a partner who withdraws from the partnership will be treated, etc...Partners are responsible for informing the FIRMS secretariat on their information management policy.

Para.3: The Information Management Policy shall encourage participation and cooperation by partners and facilitate submission of information. The policy shall encourage partners to submit the best scientific information, in particular through the development of criteria for the establishment of quality levels of partners contributions.

Para.4: A key target for FIRMS is to maintain objectivity and transparency of the information presented. Transparency implies that each piece of information is clearly documented and traceable. FIGIS-FIRMS must maintain timeliness of the information presented as defined by the submitting Partner. A key part of maintaining high quality information is the strict enforcement of quality assurance (QA) procedures, recognising the existence of two types of QA:

- 1) QA of information submitted by partners: Partners are responsible for the information submitted and the QA associated with that information. Therefore, the veracity of this QA will depend on the needs of partners and their level of responsibility. Where appropriate, information submitted by partners may include a general description of their QA protocols.

- 2) Minimum QA required for the sound operation of FIGIS (to be further developed by the FSC) should include, *inter alia*. Identification of mandatory information, agreement on standards, use of a single harmonised layout, development of quality assurance indicators (both qualitative and quantitative, such as “risks indicators”) and indicators of reliability and timeliness in metadata.

Finally, the system requires training and support to partners to ensure standardization in data provided.

Para.5: FSC will as part of the Information Management Policy consider the presentation of alternate views and interpretations of the information. The guiding principle is that FIGIS-FIRMS is an information system and not a forum for debate on interpretation of data. Such forums are established through bi- or multilateral arrangements or through the regional fisheries bodies. However, FSC may possibly advice on the development of mechanisms for addressing and/or harmonizing such views.

Para.6: FSC will as part of the Information Management Policy consider the types of information that may be extracted by automated routines so as to avoid ‘inappropriate’ use of information such as comparisons of analyses of status and trends or management advice, which may be separated from associated interpretative text. As part of the analysis FSC will consider using built-in relationships to facilitate searches on related objects. FSC will also consider how the FIRMS Secretariat can assist users in their search for information.

Para.7: FIGIS-FIRMS has a public domain as well as a domain to which access is restricted. The Information Management Policy will define access rights by users. Restricted domains are *inter alia* for information under scrutiny, under data validation and integrity checking, and resolution of conflicts. The Policy shall define security mechanisms to keep identified inconsistencies in the contributions of partners under confidential private access until they are resolved.

Para.8: The Information Management Policy will consider maintenance of history, update cycles and recovery of historical data: identify the requirements for archiving information and how the system will provide access to historic information.

Para.9: The Information Management Policy will respect a range of IT standards. However, the distributed nature of FIGIS-FIRMS implies that FSC will not be able to set standards in a vacuum. The realities of existing standards of partners (and their system sites) will always need to be recognized. The final standards will therefore be a major topic for resolution by the FIRMS Steering Committee. The following is a short list of standards currently used within FIGIS:

- ✓ within FIGIS, XML is the core format for data and information input, output and exchange;
- ✓ in line with the general FAO policy, FIGIS avoids the use of proprietary software wherever possible;
- ✓ FIGIS must establish metadata and controlled vocabularies (thesauri) standards and, as a guiding principle, should use existing standards wherever possible and, when extensions cannot be avoided, build such extensions on existing standards. etc.. In FIGIS, all controlled vocabulary, including metadata, might be available in three languages (English, French, Spanish);
- ✓ Standards for FIGIS shall be made available through the CWP web page. Standards, guidelines and codes for standardization between data suppliers and FIGIS should be undertaken before data suppliers start feeding FIGIS-FIRMS;
- ✓ Exchange protocols of spatial information are part of FIGIS-FIRMS standards: when presenting geo-referenced data, an individual data provider should use the appropriate geographical system. Local organisations should make sure that the detailed maps that they might develop for their own use conform to existing map systems.