



**2023 ASFA Advisory Board Meeting**

Bangkok, Thailand

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**ASFA/2023/8**

**Summary of the survey on aquatic sciences and fisheries information user needs**

Summary of the survey on aquatic sciences and fisheries information user needs

Contents

Background..... 1

Results..... 1

Recommendations..... 16

Background

ASFA first conducted a survey on the information needs of the fisheries and aquatic sciences sector in November-December 2018. This survey received 568 responses from 49 countries. A major conclusion of the survey was that ASFA can improve on its provision of full text and grey literature, as well as finding ways to increase access to the database. Analysis of the survey was presented in ASFA Magazine articles and the paper - *Ensuring equitable access to ocean and coastal information to advance knowledge and inform decision-making: The global Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts* – published in Ocean and Coastal Management.

The decision to update and recirculate this survey was taken in order to see what progress ASFA has made in meeting user needs and what impact the COVID pandemic had on how users searched for information. The survey was translated into four other official FAO languages (Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) and disseminated in June 2023. The survey resulted in 154 responses from 33 countries, significantly down on the 2018 total. Whilst efforts were made by the ASFA Secretariat and individual partners to share the survey, the significantly lower response to the 2023 survey makes comparisons harder. This document presents a summary of results and further analysis will be undertaken by the ASFA Secretariat who will look to compare results with the survey from 2018 and identify geographic or other factors influencing responses.

Results

**1. What country you are based in?**

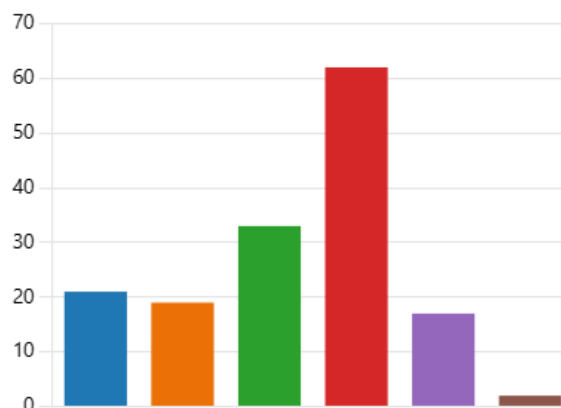
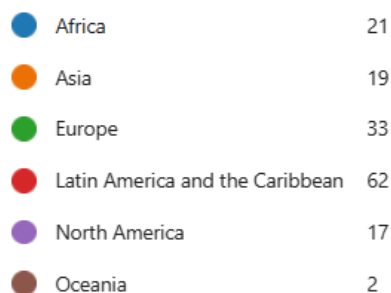
<b>AFRICA (21)</b>	<b>Asia (19)</b>	<b>Europe (32)</b>	<b>LA &amp; Caribbean (63)</b>	<b>North America (16)</b>	<b>Oceania (2)</b>
Algeria – 7	India – 4	Croatia – 1	Argentina – 8	Canada – 6	New Zealand – 1
Guinea – 1	Malaysia – 2	Czechia – 1	Brazil – 2	USA - 10	Samoa - 1
Kenya – 2	Philippines – 9	Ireland – 10	Chile – 1		

Mauritania – 1 Nigeria – 2 Seychelles – 1 Tunisia - 7	Turkey – 1 Russia - 3	Italy – 3 Poland-3 Portugal – 1 Ukraine – 2 UK – 1 Russia - 10	Colombia – 8 Ecuador – 1 Mexico – 1 Peru – 21 Uruguay – 20 N/A - 1		
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2. Which region are you based in?

[More Details](#)

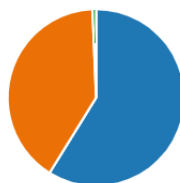
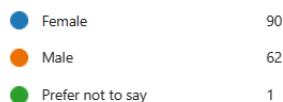
[Insights](#)



3. What is your gender? (Optional)

[More Details](#)

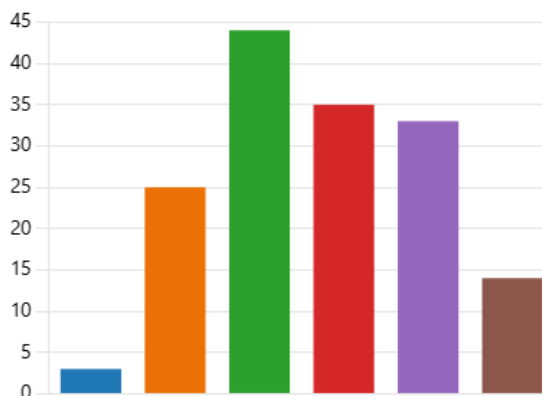
[Insights](#)



59% of respondents are females, 41% – males, and 1% prefer not to say.

4. Which age category do you belong to?

[More Details](#)

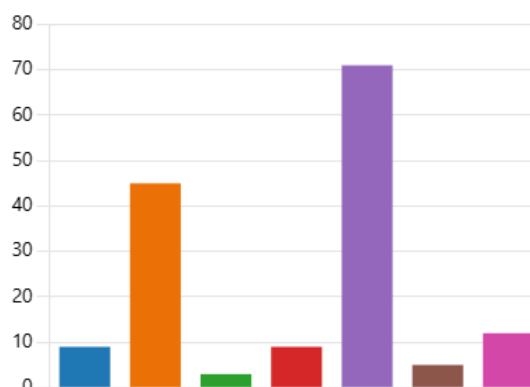


Most numerous group of respondents is 35-44 years old ones constitutes 29% of all those responded to the survey, followed by 45-54 years old – 23%; 55-64 years old – 21%; 25-34 years old – 16%; over 65 years old – 9%, and Under 25 year old – 2%.

## 5. Which category of work best describes you?

[More Details](#)[Insights](#)

Government staff	9
Library / information professional	45
Private sector	3
Professor	9
Researcher	71
Student	5
Other	12

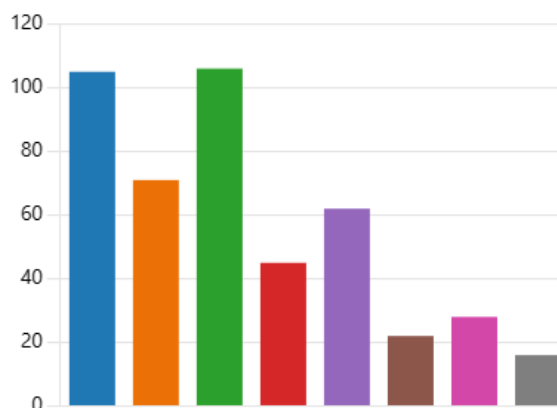


46% of responders are researchers; 29% - library and information professionals; 8% - Other (Pescadora artisanal; UN Agency staff; Editor; IGO staff; Ingenieur; Comunicadora Social; Contractual staff; Designer; FAO staff); 6% -Government Staff; 6% - Professor; 3% - Student; 2% - Private Sector).

## 6. What are your professional interests? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

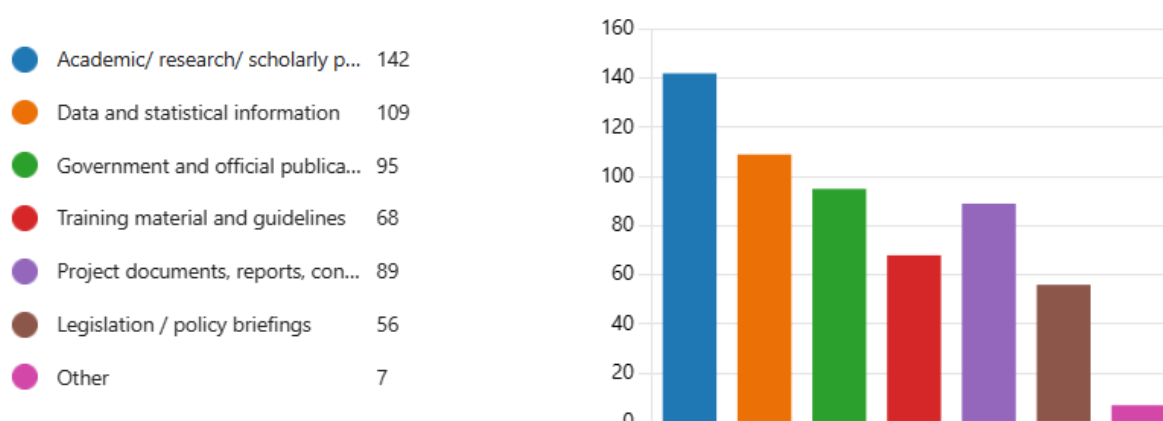
Fisheries	105
Aquaculture	71
Environmental / Conservation	106
Technology	45
Information management	62
Biotechnology	22
Food production	28
Other	16



Topics of Environmental/Conservation and Fisheries are of a highest professional interest (selected by 106 and 105 respondents, respectively).

Other professional interests indicated include: Biochemistry; Provide interlibrary loan services; Finance; Veterinary sciences; Fisheries institutions and governance; Freshwater biology and ecology; Limnology; aquatic plants; Algae; Freshwater parasites; protozooplankton; Eggs and larvae fishes; Oceanography; Phycology; fishing; Ichthyology; Ecology of continental aquatic environments; Freshwater ecology; Landscape ecology; Population ecology; Community ecology; Benthic invertebrates; Geostatistics; Hydroacoustics; Reproductive physiology of fishes; Taxonomy.

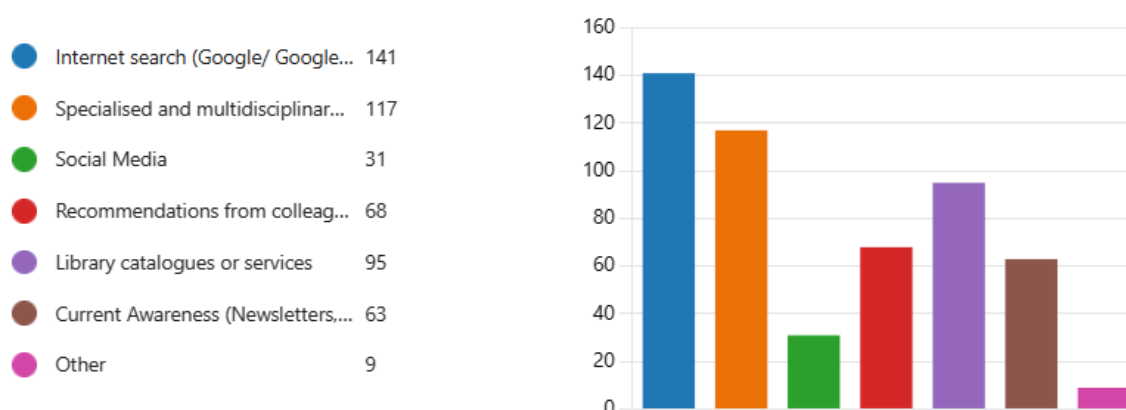
## 7. What sort of information do you need to support your daily activities? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

Academic, research & scholarly publications is most needed type of document (selected by 142 respondents). This was followed by data and statistics, which ASFA has begun tentatively to cover though at present data sets are not searchable on either the FAO website or ProQuest Database. That government and official publications ranked third highest indicates efforts should be made to cover these document types- recruiting government departments to ASFA could be a good way to improve coverage. Academic research and data and statistics were also the top two most needed documents in the 2018 survey, however project documents was the third most needed whereas in 2023 this is the fourth most needed document type.

Other types of documents (7 respondents) listed are: Collection management; Tesis; Book, Reference books, Thematic databases, Research portal - periodical publications, books and databases; grey literature; stakeholder knowledge/interests/preferences; original knowledge generation; Editors' guides).

## 8. How do you find this information? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

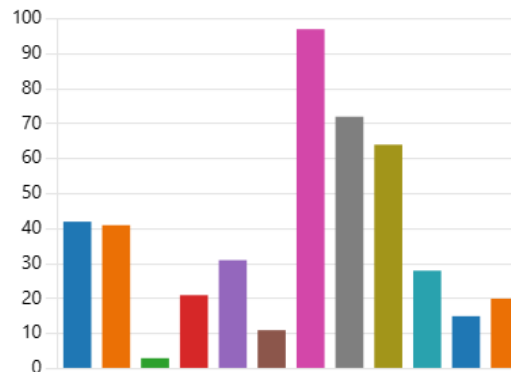
Most respondents (141) use Google/Google Scholar to search for information, followed by specialized and multidisciplinary databases (ASFA, Scopus, Web of Science, etc.) – selected by 117 respondents. It is encouraging that Specialised databases and Library and catalogues were the second and third highest ways to find information respectively.

Other sources indicated are: CORREO INSTITUCIONAL, intercambio de publicaciones, Contacting colleagues; Elsevier; citas en la literature; Rede Iamslic, OCLC, Curriculum Lattes - Platform-Brasil, ORCID; Reseau personnel; Alertas institucionales.

9. Which of the following databases or resources have you used in the last 12 months? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> ASFA database on ProQuest	42
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> AquaDocs	41
<span style="color: green;">●</span> CABI	3
<span style="color: red;">●</span> ChatGPT	21
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> OpenASFA interface on FAO.org	31
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> Preprint servers	11
<span style="color: magenta;">●</span> ScienceDirect	97
<span style="color: grey;">●</span> Scopus	72
<span style="color: olive;">●</span> Web of Science	64
<span style="color: teal;">●</span> I use Discovery Service provided...	28
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Not sure	15
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Other	20



ScienceDirect is the source of information used by majority of respondents (97), followed by Scopus (72), Web of Science (64), ASFA (42), AquaDocs (41), etc.

10. How successful are you in finding information to support your work / studies?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Never - I hardly ever find inform...	5
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Sometimes - I sometimes strug...	97
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Always - I always find the infor...	51

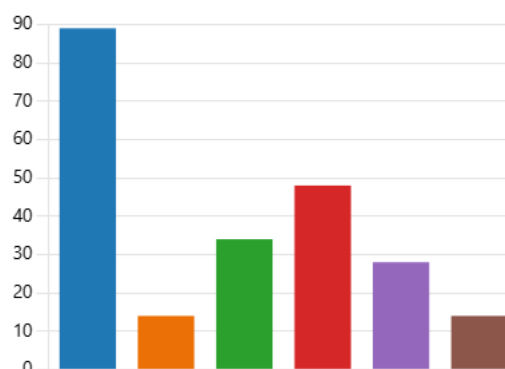


63% (97) of respondents indicated that they sometimes struggle to find information to support their work, whereas 33% (51) of respondents always find the information they need and 3% (5) hardly ever find information to support their needs.

11. Which of the below factors prevent you from finding or accessing the information you need? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Paywalls - my institution does n...	89
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> There is no library/ information ...	14
<span style="color: green;">●</span> My research area is too specific ...	34
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Searches return too many result...	48
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> I lack skills to perform advanced...	28
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> Other	14



Paywalls is the most frequently selected factor (89 respondents), preventing respondents from finding or accessing the information they need, receiving almost twice as many results as any other factor. Whether geographic location was a further factor on who cited paywalls as a factor will be investigated by the ASFA Secretariat. The second ranked factor was 'searches too many results to filter' indicating a role for ASFA's detailed indexing which allows precise retrieval still has benefit. Absence of library/information as a factor preventing from finding/accessing information was indicated by 14 respondents only.

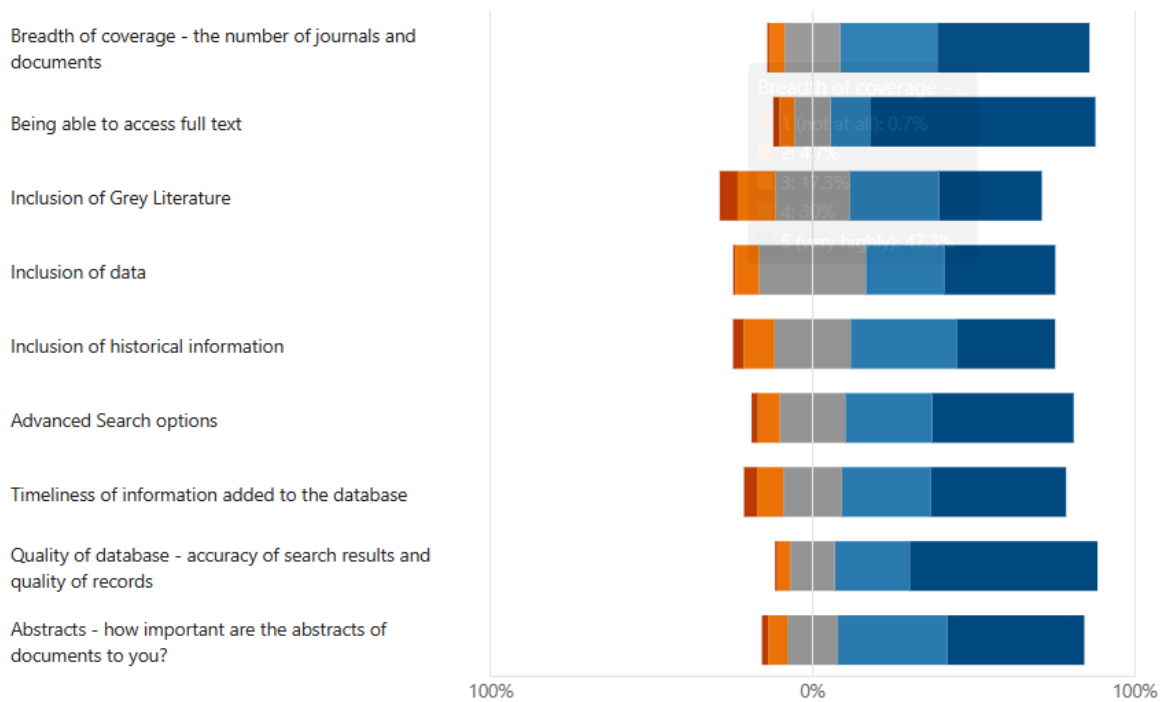
Other factors mentioned by the respondents are:

- As a librarian, I would like to give my opinion on the signatures that are on the Capes Portal. For example: The ASFA is very important to the Nupélia Sectorial Library for being specialized in continental aquatic environments and the subscription was not renewed.
- As a science librarian (Full Professor faculty rank) with biology and masters (aquatic ecology/ecotoxicology), degrees and a Library Science Masters degree, I provide the services that solve and teach these skills to students, faculty, and staff. ;
- Connection Internet fiable;
- Access to some collections is on a paid basis;
- Subscription to paid databases is limited.;
- Library specific searching;
- My country subscribes to many journals by Timbo but of course not all of them. What I don't get I ask colleagues and authors;
- Do not access the ASFA to survey the literature for the development of research projects..;
- Russian users have restricted access to international databases;
- While we have bases to which we subscribe sometimes it does not have what we are looking for;
- Subscription to journals has been reduced due to budget constraints and avail. of pubs on Research Gate, etc.;

12. How much do you value the following features of a database?

[More Details](#)

1 (not at all) 2 3 4 5 (very highly)



“Being able to access full text” is the most valued feature of the database, followed by “Quality of database – accuracy of search results and quality of records”, with inclusion of historical information being the least valued feature.

13. Does your institution have a library or information centre?

[More Details](#)

Yes	137
No	8
Not sure	6
N/A	3

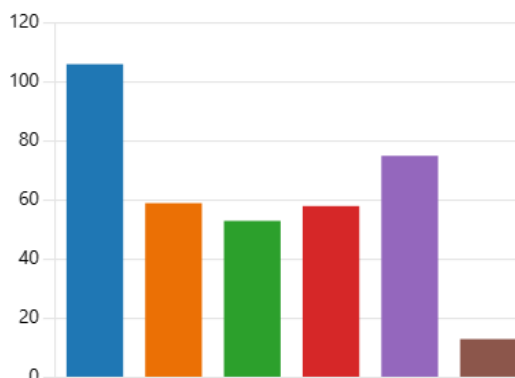


89% (137) of respondents indicated that their institution has a library or information centre, whereas only 5% (8) indicated that their institution has no library/information centre.

14. Which of the following services has your library provided to you in the past 12 months? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

● Obtaining the full text of a reso...	106
● Performing an in-depth literatur...	59
● Training on how to search for in...	53
● Catalogued my publications/ m...	58
● Assisted with a search query	75
● Other	13



Majority of respondents (106) indicated that the library provided them with full text of resource/journal article, followed by assistance with the search query (selected 75 respondents) and in-depth literature search (59 respondents).

Other services mentioned are: Ninguna; No he consultado a biblioteca; none; obtaining dissertations, we only have a USA-wide virtual library; Scientific editing, bibliographic standardization, cataloging in publication, guidance on where to publish - consult the Journal Citation Reports - JCR; EDICIÓN CIENTÍFICA, ESTANDARIZACIÓN; We have a wonderful library staff.

15. Are you aware of ASFA?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Yes	87
● No	48
● Not sure	19



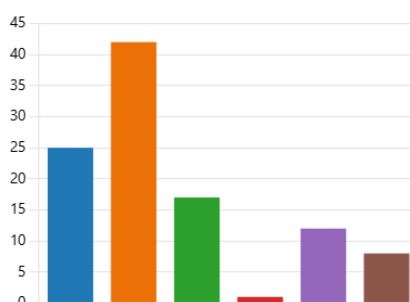
Only 56% (87) of respondents are aware of ASFA; 48 respondents (31%) are not aware of ASFA. Disappointingly, this is lower than the 2018 results which showed that 69% of respondents had heard of ASFA. Efforts to promote ASFA should be undertaken.

16. How did you hear about ASFA?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● From colleague	25
● From librarian / library website	42
● From FAO website	17
● From promotional materials	1
● ASFA training/ webinar	12
● Other	8





42 respondents heard about ASFA from librarian/library website, 25 – from colleague, 17 – from FAO website, 12 – from ASFA training/webinar, and only 1 – from promotional materials.

Other:

- Acceso a ASFA por ser obra de referencia para el desarrollo de proyectos de investigación
- As a representative of the ASFA National Partner in Russia, I am involved in promoting and disseminating information about ASFA.
- Institutional email
- I am an ASFA member
- National Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Gdynia, Poland
- Search reference tool on aquatic sciences, of importance for the Sectorial Library of Nupélia - Specialized in ecology of continental aquatic environments
- Unsure

17. Which of the below ASFA information products are you aware of? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

- Full ASFA database (hosted by P... 66
- OpenASFA search interface (avai... 69
- ASFA Thesaurus (https://agrovo... 40
- None of the above 16



Less than half of respondents (69) are aware of OpenASFA search interface, only 66 of 154 respondents are aware of the full ASFA database hosted by ProQuest; 40 – of ASFA thesaurus and 16 – none of the above. That the OpenASFA search interface is freely available on FAO’s website might be a reason that it is better known than the full ASFA database on ProQuest, however lack of publicity of the ASFA database as a standalone product on ProQuest may mean many are not aware it exists but search it as part of a package of products. The difficulty in defining and marketing these two products is perhaps highlighted by these results, with no clear or concise way to refer to either.

18. Which of the following ASFA information products have you used in the previous 12 months? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

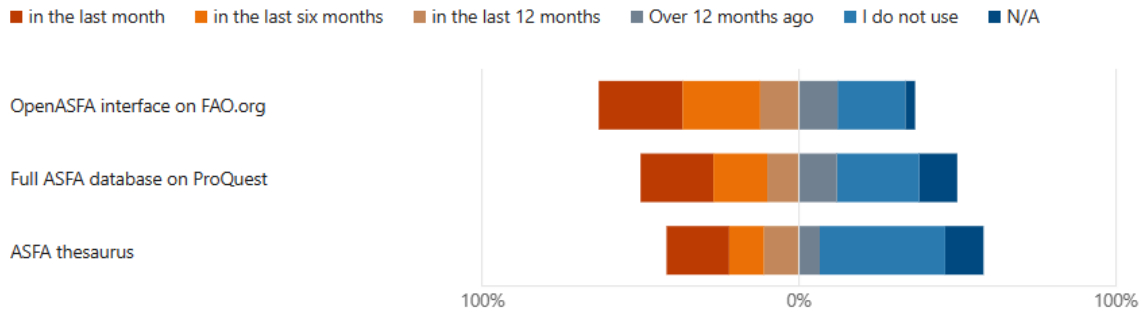
- Full ASFA database (hosted by P... 40
- OpenASFA search interface (avai... 56
- ASFA Thesaurus (https://agrovo... 28
- None of the above 34



OpenASFA search interface was used by 56 respondents, whereas full ASFA database on ProQuest platform – by 40 respondents only (it should be noted that libraries in Russia doesn’t have access to PQ databases); A total of 34 respondents didn’t use any of the ASFA information products in previous 12 months.

19. How often do you use the below ASFA information products?

[More Details](#)



OpenASFA interface on FAO.org is the most used information product.

20. When you searched the below ASFA information product, how was your experience?

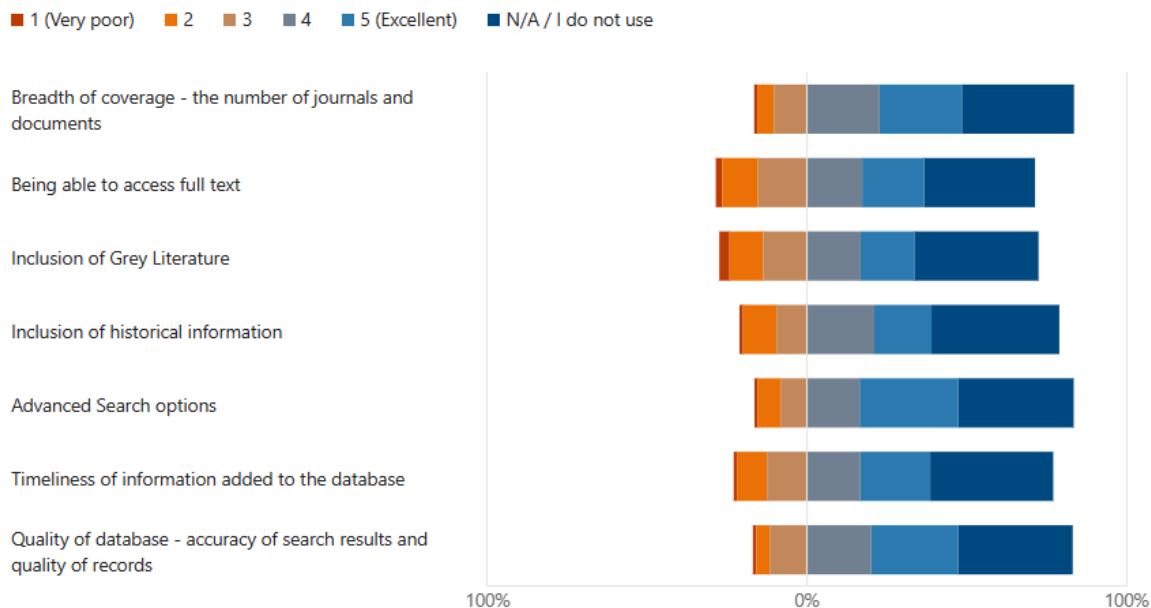
[More Details](#)



The respondents who used OpenASFA interface on FAO.org did not rate their experience being very positive with “OK” being the most frequently selected option. The experience of using of the ASFA Thesaurus is more positive, as well as searching the full ASFA database on ProQuest. The ASFA Secretariat is prioritising improvements to the OpenASFA search interface on fao.org.

21. How would you rate the following features of the full ASFA database hosted by ProQuest?

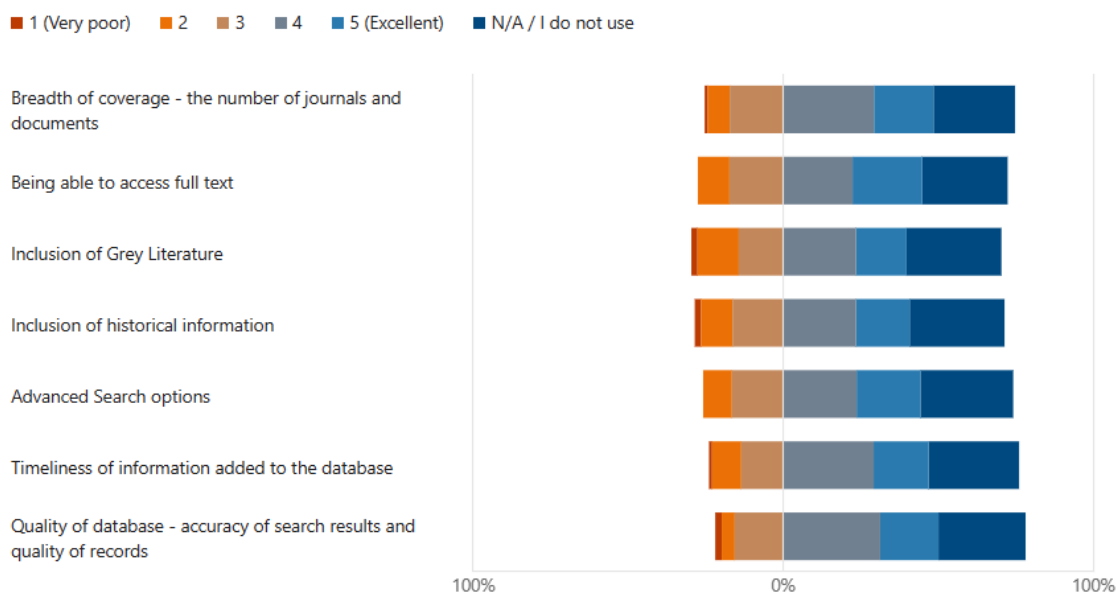
[More Details](#)



All the features of the ASFA database are rated quite positively by the respondents. “Being able to access full text” and “inclusion of Grey literature” received slightly more negative ratings (3, 2, 1) than other features.

22. How would you rate the following features of the OpenASFA search interface?

[More Details](#)



See comment for Question 21.

23.

Why do you use ASFA information products?

*General comments:*

- Convenience and open access to full articles;
- Efficiency;
- It is up-to-date and easy to access, easy to use;
- It is a free-of-charge fisheries/aquatic database tailored for the needs of users who usually know what they are looking for;
- Because that can be handy, thank you!
- Easy search, breadth of coverage
- I am just learning about this database. I find it interesting that this survey is being carried out

*Comments related to research/publishing:*

- for writing manuscripts for journal publication;
- For the development and formulation of research projects
- Because it makes it easier to find information for my research.
- Database is relevant to my field of work;
- Excellent indicator to track where researchers are publishing articles.
- They best reflect the areas of work of our institute
- often best place for sources applicable to my work
- Because they are specialised in the subject I am interested in and are managed by information professionals.
- They provide succinct and targeted information about aquatic and fishery sciences
- Another option to access fisheries information.
- To acquire more knowledge awareness about fisheries generally
- To improve my research and to construct a supporting bibliographic database
- To obtain relevant information or data on fisheries and aquaculture

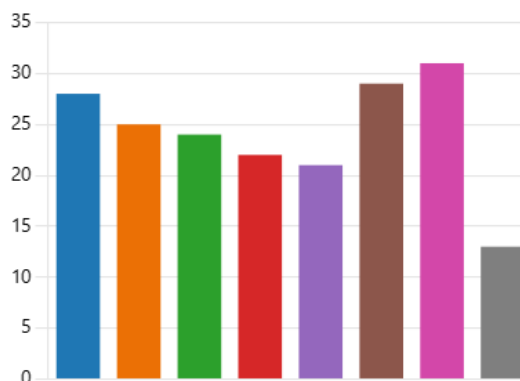
*Comments by library/information professionals:*

- To organise and retrieve information from the area for the users of the library where I work.
- Literature searches for library users;
- I use the ASFA Thesaurus on a daily basis to assign key words to the resources I am cataloguing.
- to meet the needs of researchers and to ensure that all publications are indexed.
- to assist researchers & students in my institution find scholarly publications, data, historical, etc. information...
- I am a partner
- To serve library users

24. Which, if any, of the below topics are under represented on ASFA information products? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Fisheries	28
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Aquaculture	25
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Inland waters	24
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Sustainable Development Goals	22
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Conservation/ ecology/ habitats	21
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> Biology (including fishery biolog...	29
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> Regional / geographically specif...	31
<span style="color: grey;">●</span> Other	13

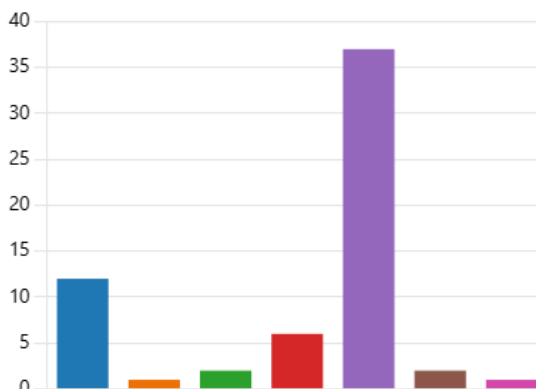


Most frequently selected topic which is underrepresented in ASFA is "Regional/geographically specific collections" (31 respondents), followed by Biology (incl. Fishery biology, marine biology, freshwater biology) (29 respondents) and Fisheries (28 respondents). Additional topics mentioned are: Taxonomy; Freshwater ecology; Electronic Monitoring; grey literature; TECNOLOGIA DE LOS PRODUCTOS PESQUEROS; Historical publications;

25. Why do you not use ASFA? Select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> I prefer Google / other web-bas...	12
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> I prefer non-English databases	1
<span style="color: green;">●</span> I am only interested in full text	2
<span style="color: red;">●</span> My institution does not have ac...	6
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> I have not heard of it	37
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> I do not need to use specialised ...	2
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> Other	1



The main reason for not using ASFA indicated by the respondents (37) is "I have not heard of it", some respondents (12) prefer Google and other web-based search over ASFA. Again, this shows more efforts are needed to promote ASFA.

26. During the pandemic, which of the below factors negatively affected how you searched for and accessed information?

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> My institution or library did not ...	47
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Unable to access online sources...	41
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Lack of IT equipment prevented...	27
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Restrictions prevented me from ...	32
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Other	19



All the factors listed had some negative effect on how respondents searched and accessed information, with “My institution did not permit on-site visits” being selected most frequently (47 respondents).

Among “Other” mentioned:

- I think that in a pandemic, my search on the internet increased;
- Udelar prepared very well for the pandemic. Laptop loan, remote access to PCs, and rotation of virtual and in-person work.;
- Online resources worked well but in case a library, which we contacted in order to get a full text, was on a full lockdown mode, then we had to wait weeks or months till they could scan the document.;
- 

Some respondents mentioned that none of the factors affected them:

- It didn't limit me because I paid my own internet
- At my institution, all access was remote
- Nothing, access remained un-changed
- No negative impact
- None of above
- I had no problems as there was internet

27. During the pandemic, which of the below factors positively affected how you searched for and accessed information?

[More Details](#)

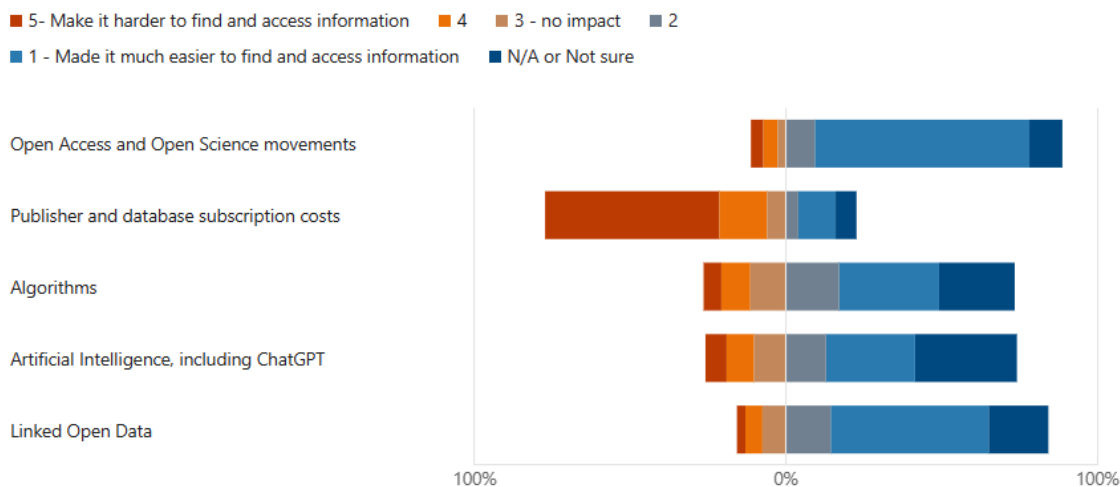
● Increased remote learning - avai...	94
● Increased access to digital resou...	88
● Open Access and Open Science ...	63
● Other	8



All the factors listed had some positive effect on how respondents searched and accessed information, with “Increased remote learning...” being selected most frequently (94 respondents). Other responses included: It didn't affect me; none.

28. Thinking of the future, how do you anticipate the below factors will affect how you find and access information?

[More Details](#)



Majority of respondents think that in the future the factor which will most negatively affect finding and accessing information will be Publisher and database subscription costs, whereas Open Access and Open Science movements, as well as Linked Data, according to the respondents, will make it much easier to find access information in the future.

29.

If you would like to make any other comment on how the pandemic has affected how you find and access information, please write below.

- Lack of computer equipment and training;
- Decreased student-faculty advising and communication;
- During the pandemic we were unable to access a number of services for security reasons. Now, I consider the great post-pandemic impact in relation to people's behavior, values, the notion of acceptance if it were not for the internet, the isolation of many people continues, they do not accept teachings from others. They look for their own causes. I am concerned about the course of humanity.
- lack of subscription to various magazines and publications in my application;
- I have had more time to search the internet. I understand that I lack training for advanced research (I recently started postgraduate studies and the research topic is linked to the fishing sector (social sciences) and I need data;
- It affects on be overinformed. Now there is too much;
- I've got low grades during pandemic;
- The pandemic forced more training in the use of information search tools;
- The possibility of attending conferences and talks remotely facilitated access since by eliminating the need to travel one could participate in a greater number of these;
- The stress and the state of health moved us away from the research;
- limited source of internet access;
- It did not affect my search for information, but my laboratory work;
- No requested data was found;

- Surprisingly, pandemic times have brought a bigger research output than before, which means that remote work and access to a large part of collections can boost the research. However, a number of libraries which got closed during the pandemic period still have not been reopened again, which is definitely a big minus and a sad tendency;
- The provision of E-resources from our library was limited;
- To gain more of knowledge of students on how to avoid the pandemic;
- Sanctions have had a stronger impact than the pandemic, honestly (*comment by a respondent from Russia*);

30.

If you have any comments on ASFA, or your information needs in general, please write below. If you wish for a response from the ASFA Secretariat, please include your email address.

- I do not know the tool, if there was the possibility of receiving guidance on its use I could give a comment;
- Our team is not only happy to use the database but also feels really proud that we can contribute new records into it, making at least some searches around the globe more findable due to our efforts;
- I would like training to access the ASFA database;
- I just found out that ASFA exists;
- More information is needed, it is not known like this, it is not common to post publications in YouTube tube messages, but more information is better;
- It will be feasible if you can provide me with a guide to access. Thank you;
- Topics addressed from the social sciences for the maritime and fishing sector are relevant (one of them linked to fisheries governance, institutionalization, professional training, technique for new production models) and it is not easy (from the social sciences), searches linked to the sciences natural (which must be taken into account). It is an interdisciplinary challenge and cooperation between areas of knowledge.
- Thank you for keeping ASFA available, growing, and very relevant to all involved in aquatic sciences & fisheries related research and education. I use or promote ASFA weekly, if not daily, and hope my institution will be able to continue subscription or access to ASFA, by any method, & always!
- The FAO OpenASFA database, i.e. published records needs some improvement. I have had a hard time searching by title. The French titles do not show up in there is an English title in the record.
- restrictions in access to the database lead to the fact that the "replacement" interface is forgotten to be accessed (*comment by respondent from Russia*)
- Thanks for the interesting questions.

## Recommendations

The ASFA Secretariat will further analyse the results looking at differences based on respondents age and location in particular. Whilst it is disappointing that fewer responses were received in 2023 than 2018, the survey still indicates areas where ASFA can improve, namely in promotion, coverage of full text and the OpenASFA search interface. Ways to improve these areas will be discussed at the 2023 virtual and in person Advisory Board Meetings.

It would also be useful to discuss the reason for lower number of responses and see whether there is anything to be done to improve the response rate in the future should the survey be repeated.