



## **2023 ASFA Advisory Board Meeting**

Bangkok, Thailand

3–6 October 2023

### **ASFA/2023/9**

## **ASFA - Terms of Reference for Cooperation in the Preparation and Publication of the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA)**

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### **Background**

Recognizing the importance of ensuring an information system that provides access to the world's aquatic science, fisheries and aquaculture research, a number of entities, who include governments, United Nations (UN) bodies, research institutes, universities and other institutions, agreed to cooperate in the ASFA partnership to share best practices and contribute to information systems including the ASFA database.

In light of rapid technological advances and at the invitation of FAO, a meeting of the ASFA Partners was held on 3–6 October 2023, hosted by SEAFDEC Secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand, to determine how and through which mechanisms, the Partners would further contribute to the ASFA initiative, increase their cooperation and better coordinate their efforts. The Partners' meeting resulted in the decision to continue the ASFA partnership initiative and the adoption, by the Partners and other Stakeholders, of the Bangkok Statement on Information Sharing in Aquatic Sciences ("the Bangkok Statement").

### **WHEREAS:**

- the publication Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) was originally established in 1970 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the cooperation of a commercial publisher and several national centres ("the Partners"), in order to provide an information system facilitating access to world literature on aquatic sciences and fisheries;
- The Partners recognize the need to clarify and revise the nature and scope of their partnership, as set out in the previous version of the Partnership Agreement which should now therefore be considered as superseded and replaced with these Terms of Reference.

**NOW THEREFORE** the Partners have agreed as follows:

### **Vision, Mission, Objectives and Guiding Principles**

The vision, mission and objectives of ASFA are as follows:

Vision: Aquatic science, fisheries and aquaculture information is accessible to all.

Mission: to organize, promote and share technical information relating to aquatic sciences, fisheries and aquaculture, paying particular attention to hard to reach research, the needs of developing countries and global societal objectives.

Objectives: to address the following work areas at international and country levels:

- Ensuring the equal and FAIR sharing of information related to aquatic environments and resources
- Identifying and addressing knowledge gaps through the provision of specialised collections and information services

- Providing a forum to share best practice and experiences in knowledge management
- Promoting the work of information managers and value of libraries and information centres

The guiding principles of ASFA are:

- Partners contribute to ASFA's information products and goals, with the success of ASFA determined by the commitment each partner.
- Opportunities for partners to contribute are provided regardless of technical expertise and capacities.
- Sharing of best practice in aquatic science information exchange is enacted through dialogue with Partners and Stakeholders.
- Equity and inclusiveness are assured for all Partners.

### **Nature of ASFA**

ASFA is not an autonomous legal entity but, rather, a flexible, light and consensual coordination framework, supported by FAO. ASFA provides technologies and support needed for Partners to voluntarily collaborate and coordinate their activities in support of the achievement of the vision, mission and objectives laid out above, linking participants by their shared commitment to share aquatic science, fisheries and aquaculture research.

### **Partners**

ASFA is open to a broad range of entities, such as States, international organizations, civil society organisations and academia.

Entities wishing to become Partners of ASFA must adhere to the vision, mission, objectives and guiding principles of ASFA, as well as to the Bangkok Statement. Participation of non-State, including private sector entities, is subject to the requirements laid down in the FAO policies and guidelines for collaboration with the academia and the civil society<sup>1</sup>.

Consequently, prospective academia and civil society partners will be subject to the FAO mechanisms for assessing adherence to those Guidelines<sup>2</sup>.

The Partners meet at least every two years, either virtually or in person, to agree on priorities, general objectives, plans and proposals for the activities of ASFA.

The Partners plan, budget, provide their own resources for, and implement their own activities on contributing records to the ASFA database and any other ASFA activities they choose to undertake, including updating the ASFA Thesaurus, contributing to ASFA communications products, participating in ASFA working groups and providing training and promotion of knowledge sharing in aquatic science, fisheries and aquaculture. Under the umbrella of ASFA, they seek to cooperate and coordinate such activities. In this context, they may decide to temporarily organize themselves in national, regional or thematic groups and networks to coordinate activities under their own programmes or jointly develop plans for activities to come under ASFA. As such, Partners may propose, individually or collectively, at the Partners' Meeting (as described under of Annex 1.1 of these Terms of Reference) or through a Steering Committee, to place ongoing or future self-funded activities on aquatic science information systems at risk of discontinuation to be placed under the umbrella of ASFA. The Partners may also, subject to the availability of resources and the approval of the Steering Committee, receive funding or other support for the implementation of activities

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<sup>1</sup> Such policies and guidelines are set out in the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector, FAO Guidelines for Partnerships and Collaboration with the Private Sector, and the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations

<sup>2</sup> UN System organizations and other entities with which the FAO has a general collaboration agreement in place will be considered to meet those Guidelines.

under ASFA. In all cases, the placement of an activity under the umbrella of ASFA and the allocation of funding received by ASFA for such activities require the collective endorsement of the Partners.

#### Other Stakeholders

Other Stakeholders may attend Partners' Meetings and participate in its discussions, without taking part in any decision-making process. Similarly, they may be invited to Steering Committee meetings. Other Stakeholders may circulate to the Partners' Meeting and the Steering Committee the views of the entities which they represent.

#### Mechanisms for coordination

In order to achieve its mission and objectives, a variety of modalities exist for the exchange of views, planning and prioritization of activities, and coordination. The main platform is the Partners' Meeting, which takes place at least every two years. The website of ASFA hosted by FAO is also an important tool to keep Partners and other Stakeholders informed of activities during the period between the Partners' Meetings, as is the OpenASFA Virtual Research Environment (VRE) to which all Partners have access and use to create ASFA records. The purpose and methods of work of the Partners' Meetings are described in the annex on operational mechanisms.

A Steering Committee supports the implementation of activities towards the achievement of the objectives and priorities agreed upon by the Partners. It ensures continuity of activities and monitors progress made on planned activities during the period between the Partners' Meetings. This is a representative group, selected by the Partners. The Steering Committee keeps the Partners informed and can make recommendations to the Partners. The composition, purpose and working methods of the Steering Committee are described in the annex.

#### Role of FAO

FAO, under its mandate and institutional framework, and within its programme of work and budget, provides operational and administrative support to ASFA, including technical support, negotiating and executing legal documents, carrying out other legal acts on behalf of the ASFA and advocacy. Accordingly, the day-to-day activities supporting ASFA are undertaken in full compliance with FAO's rules, procedures and policies.

Should FAO decide to relinquish its support to ASFA, it shall notify the Steering Committee accordingly. A minimum period of notice in writing of six (6) months shall be given.

In light of its primary role in the establishment of ASFA and its day-to-day functioning, FAO is a permanent Partner of ASFA and a permanent Member of the Steering Committee.

#### Financial arrangements

Consistent with its nature as a voluntary, collaborative platform with the primary objective of strengthening the coordination of the efforts of the Partners, there is no mandatory requirement upon any Partner to make a financial contribution to support the activities of ASFA.

Participation in ASFA, including attendance at any meetings related to ASFA, is at each Partner's own cost.

The costs of all activities of the Partners in relation to ASFA are to be met from their own resources, except for specific activities to be funded under ASFA, as approved by the Steering Committee and endorsed by the Partners collectively.

Any funds made available to ASFA will be administered in accordance with the Financial Regulations, rules and procedures of FAO. They shall be exclusively dedicated to substantive activities, except as otherwise provided in the present Terms of Reference.

## Annex: Operating mechanisms

### 1. Partners and the Partners Meeting

1.1 The main forum for the Partners to collaborate under ASFA is the Partners' Meeting, which is held every two years, either virtually or in person. All Partners are assigned to one of the following regional groups through which they are invited to collaborate and attend meetings: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean and North America. The Partners may also wish to collaborate through national, or thematic groups and networks. Stakeholders are welcome to attend the Partners' meeting as observers.

1.2 Partners are classified into four groups:

Group 1: United Nations agencies and other United Nations bodies. United agencies and other United Nations bodies are permanent partners in ASFA.

Group 2: Other intergovernmental organizations and State actors (including governments, public and governmental agencies).

Group 3: Academia and Research institutions.

Group 4: Civil society organizations, including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

1.3 The main purpose of the Partners' Meeting is for the Partners to:  
elect and nominate the Steering Committee, paying due regard to geographical, sectorial and gender balance;  
discuss and agree on priorities, general objectives, plans and proposals for the activities of ASFA, and review progress made towards the implementation of its planned activities and the achievement of the mission and objectives of ASFA; and  
entrust the Steering Committee with those tasks it considers appropriate to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the activities planned to take place under the umbrella of ASFA.

1.4 The Partners, either at the Partners' Meeting or by electronic means if waiting for its occurrence would delay the activities:

endorse the setting-up of temporary national, regional and thematic groups and networks aimed at advancing the objectives of ASFA, which the Steering Committee may decide to recommend approving as coming under ASFA's areas of interest, and receive reports on progress made by such groups and networks;

consider proposals for relevant self-funded ongoing or future activities of the Partners to be placed under the umbrella of ASFA;

consider proposals for the allocation of funds made available to ASFA for specific activities.

1.5 The required quorum to hold a Partners' Meeting, whether in person or by electronic means, will be constituted by the participation of the simple majority of the total number of Partners. Efforts should be made to reach decisions by consensus. When voting is necessary, decisions will be adopted by simple majority of the participating Partners, each Partner having one vote.

1.6 The nomination of the Steering Committee will follow the following rules:

between one and five seats on the Steering Committee are allocated to each Regional Group so as to respect the proportion of Partners per Regional Group and ensure each region is represented on the Steering Committee;

the precise number of seats open for election for each Regional Group is determined on the basis of the Partnership of ASFA two months before the elections;

only those who are Partners of ASFA two month prior to an election may participate in the election; following a call for nomination of candidates, a list of candidates is drawn for each Regional Group; Partners, including those who are candidates, will be requested to vote for all seats open for election in accordance with the number of seats allocated for each Regional Group.

for each Regional Group, the candidate(s) who will receive the highest number of votes will be elected so as to fill the seat(s) allocated to that Group.

if in a Regional Group there are fewer candidates than the number of allocated seats for that Regional Group, the remaining seats will be proportionally allocated to the other Regional Groups.

## 2. Other Stakeholders

Other Stakeholders may attend Partners' Meetings and participate in its discussions, without taking part in any decision-making process. Similarly, they may be invited to Steering Committee meetings. Other Stakeholders may circulate to the Partners' Meeting and the Steering Committee the views of the entities which they represent.

## 3. The Steering Committee

3.1 The Steering Committee supports the implementation of the work programme of ASFA agreed upon by the Partners, and is accountable to the Partners.

3.2 The Steering Committee meets at least once a year, including on the side of the Partners' Meeting. Meetings may be in person or virtual. Between its meetings, the Steering Committee may meet or take decisions by electronic means subject to the quorum being met. Partners that are not members of the Steering Committee may attend its meetings as observers. The Steering Committee may also decide to invite other Stakeholders to attend its meetings.

3.3 The Steering Committee is normally composed of up to 20 Members (including FAO, UN bodies and the Chairperson) depending on whether the Chairperson is nominated from among the Members or not, representing Partners from all types of Partner organisations. However, the Steering Committee may decide, without the Partners having to organize new elections, to co-opt up to four additional Members from the Partners, preferably from the candidates at the preceding elections, in order to ensure a better geographical, sectorial or gender balance among Steering Committee Members.

3.4 FAO and other UN bodies that are partners in ASFA, are permanent Members of the Steering Committee, while the other Members are nominated for four-year terms and may be re-elected.

3.5 Subject to the approval of the Steering Committee, following close consultation with FAO, each Member designates a representative as well as an alternate who may represent the Member if the representative is unable to attend a meeting of the Steering Committee. In such case, the alternate will have the same power, rights and obligations as the representative. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson cannot designate alternates or otherwise delegate their powers, rights and obligations.

3.6 Any Member of the Steering Committee may be represented at meetings, whether in person or by electronic means, by another Member provided a proxy is signed. No Member may represent more than two other Members.

3.7 The required quorum for the Steering Committee to meet, whether in person or by electronic means, will be the simple majority of the total number of Steering Committee Members, including

the Chairperson. Efforts should be made to reach decisions by consensus. When voting is necessary, decisions will be adopted by simple majority of participants with voting power, each Member, including the Chairperson having one vote.

3.8 The seat of a Member who is not represented at three consecutive Steering Committee meetings will be considered vacant. In such case, the Steering Committee may decide, without the Partners having to organize new elections, to co-opt a new Member from one of the Partners belonging to the same Group, preferably from the candidates at the preceding elections, in order to fill the vacant seat.

3.9 The Steering Committee:

elects and nominates its Chairperson;

coordinates the activities of ASFA to give effect to the priorities, plans and proposals agreed between the Partners at the Partners' Meetings, including by monitoring progress made;

reviews proposals of Partners to organize temporary national, regional and thematic groups and networks, and makes recommendations to the Partners (either at the Partners' Meeting or through electronic means), as to whether to endorse such groups and networks as coming under ASFA; considers, and recommends to the Partners (either at the Partners' Meeting or through electronic means) whether to approve, proposals for relevant self-funded ongoing or future activities of the Partners to be placed under the umbrella of ASFA;

considers, and recommends to the Partners (either at the Partners' Meeting or through electronic means) whether to approve, proposals regarding the allocation of funds made available to ASFA; liaises with the Partners and national, regional or thematic groups and networks as necessary and receives reports on progress made by such groups and networks;

in close consultation with FAO, handles requests to become Partners of ASFA and any issue that may arise regarding the membership of a Partner (which will be addressed in light of the applicable FAO guidelines and procedures), as well as requests from other Stakeholders to be part of ASFA; assists the Partners in the organization of the Partners' Meetings, including centralizing and reviewing propositions of candidacies for future Steering Committee Members.

3.10 In undertaking its activities, the Steering Committee works closely with the FAO personnel providing support to ASFA.

3.11 The Members of the Steering Committee do not receive remuneration for their work.

4. Chairperson of the Steering Committee

4.1 The Chairperson of the Steering Committee chairs the Partners' Meetings in addition to the meetings of the Steering Committee. The Chairperson serves at all times in an independent capacity, representing the interest of all the Partners, and is accountable to the Partners. The Chairperson keeps the Steering Committee regularly informed of, and provides a report to the Partners' Meeting, on activities undertaken by the Steering Committee.

4.2 The Chairperson is elected and nominated by the Steering Committee following its establishment for a two-year term, renewable once.

4.3 Suggestions of candidates for the position of Chairperson of the Steering Committee may be submitted to the Steering Committee, through FAO, by the Partners and Steering Committee Members.

4.4 The candidate who receives more votes is elected. In case of a tie, a new vote is organized to select the Chairperson from among the tied candidates.

4.5 The Chairperson may be selected from among the Members. The Members may agree to nominate as Chairperson a representative of a Partner or other Stakeholder, or from outside. The candidacies of individuals who are not representatives of Partners or other Stakeholders are reviewed by FAO prior to their consideration by the Steering Committee. The nomination of a Chairperson from outside the Members will automatically result in an additional seat on the Steering Committee.

4.6 If the nomination of a Vice-Chairperson is deemed necessary by the Steering Committee, the same conditions as those applicable for the Chairperson will apply.

4.7 In case of temporary absence during a meeting of the Steering Committee or a Partners' Meeting of the Chairperson, and of the Vice-Chairperson if one has been nominated, the Steering Committee or the Partners' Meeting, as the case may be, will appoint another Member or Partner, as the case may be, to act as Chairperson until the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson is able to serve again.

## 5. Role of FAO

5.1 FAO plays a facilitative and coordinating role, supporting the implementation of activities under the umbrella of ASFA, organizing relevant meetings and undertaking such other activities as may be appropriate to advance the mission and objectives of ASFA.

5.2 FAO, within its institutional mandate and the limits of available resources, while acting in compliance with applicable rules, regulations and policies:

- provides administrative and secretariat support to ASFA;
- provides personnel to support ASFA, as part of their official duties and under the supervision of their regular FAO supervisors;
- ensures development of OpenASFA and related information products by providing technical expertise and training support;
- reviews requests to become Partners of ASFA in light of the applicable FAO guidelines and procedures, and advises the Steering Committee on those requests; similarly, reviews requests from other Stakeholders to be part of ASFA;
- provides training and support to individual Partners, national, regional and thematic groups and networks in their activities and fundraising efforts;
- may, upon consultation with the Steering Committee, implement particular activities related to the priorities of the Partners, for which it has a comparative advantage, such as research, monitoring, dissemination, publishing or reporting and which are in accordance with the priorities set by FAO;
- maintains a list of the Partners and other Stakeholders, keeps in regular contact with them, and stays informed of their relevant activities;
- negotiates and executes legal documents and carries out other legal acts on behalf of the Partnership, and in the case of contracts with the Publishing ASFA Partner;
- acts as Trustee and legal owner of the ASFA database, including both past and future inputs, for the benefit of the Partners;
- establishes and maintains contacts with other relevant groups and partnerships for the purpose of advancing the mission and objectives of ASFA;
- conducts technical reviews of activities proposed to be placed under the umbrella of ASFA.

5.3 In addition, FAO provides the means necessary for the functioning of ASFA. As such, it:

- provides office space and a website hosted within the FAO website;

provides IT, financial and legal services and all other appropriate administrative services that may be required (procurement, management of financial contributions, conclusion of personnel arrangements);

administers any funds made available to ASFA in accordance with the FAO Financial Regulations, rules and procedures.

5.4 Liability: Any costs incurred by FAO in relation to claims, legal proceedings, damages or losses, arising from, or connected with the activities carried out by FAO for the ASFA partnership, including claims by FAO personnel or claims relating to services supplied by third parties, shall be charged to the Trust Fund. ASFA Partners commit to bear all costs arising in connection with ASFA activities in case funds from the Trust Fund are insufficient.

5.5 Adherence to UN values: As a specialized agency of the UN and part of the UN system, FAO adheres to the values of such system. Accordingly, ASFA partners ensures alignment with those values and compliance with FAO processes and mechanisms aimed to that end.

5.6 Funding/financial arrangements:

- Administers any funds made available to the ASFA in accordance with the Financial Regulations and FAO rules and procedures;
- Administers a multi-donor trust fund (“Trust Fund”) to receive voluntary contributions from Members, other international organizations, Governments, or other sources to support the activities of ASFA. The Trust Fund is subject to no charge from FAO for project servicing costs;
- The Trust Fund is administered and accounted for in accordance with the Financial Regulations of FAO, and subject to the day-to-day supervision of the Budget Holder, who shall be the Director of [...];
- The Director-General of FAO retains ultimate responsibility for the administration of the Trust Fund in accordance with FAO’s Basic Texts;
- The Trust Fund is subject exclusively to the internal and external auditing procedures laid down in FAO’s rules and policies;
- Any costs incurred by FAO in connection with the functioning of the ASFA (including all costs related to the use and maintenance of the facilities described in paragraph X are chargeable to the Trust Fund as appropriate, it being understood that FAO will incur no financial liabilities in excess of the amounts actually available in the Trust Fund. [Servicing costs applicable by FAO for projects will be charged separately];
- The Trust Fund is used exclusively for the functioning and operations of ASFA and the implementation of its activities;
- Any interest accrued on donor contributions into the Trust Fund are calculated in accordance with FAO’s rules and are addressed as agreed with the donor and in accordance with FAO rules and processes.

Records and reporting

1. Reporting shall take place in accordance with FAO’s Regulations, Rules, policies and procedures.