



## FIRMS Information Management Policy

<b>Management Summary</b>	

Author	FIRMS Secretariat
Version	1
Project	FIRMS
Distribution	FIRMS Partners & Technical Group
Created	3/29/2005 3:18 PM
Saved	3/29/2005
Printed	

<b>Revision History</b>		
Date	Author	Summary
26/02/05	FIRMS Secretariat	Version 1 of the Information Management Policy Document adopted at the FSC2 meeting

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26/02/05

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### Preamble:

The FSC formulates and revises as necessary the Information Management Policy. Various parts of this Policy may be at various stages of elaboration, according to the needs and issues to be addressed.

FIRMS is powered by FIGIS, and will be guided by the same principles as FIGIS. The FIGIS is a FAO system for disseminating information provided by many different partners, each holding data in different databases (or otherwise). Data in the FIRMS system will be loaded and maintained by 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 FIRMS shall be disseminated ensuring source and citations of responsible Party together with information on the nature, origins and quality of the information.

As overall guiding principles, the Information Management Policy shall encourage participation and cooperation by partners and facilitate submission of information, as well as maintain objectivity and transparency of the information presented.

### Definitions:

- **CWP:** the **Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics** provides a mechanism to develop and promote common standards for fisheries statistics of regional fishery bodies and other inter-governmental organizations with a remit for fishery statistics.
- **FIGIS:** the **FAO 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. **FIGIS** is the tool powering the FIRMS web-site, taking care of the management and dissemination of information shared within the FIRMS partnership. Core modules handled by FIGIS for this FIRMS sub-system comprise resources and stocks, fisheries, fisheries management systems, and collections descriptions, whereas peripheral modules include species, fishing techniques, organizations descriptions.
- **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.
- **FSC:** the **FIRMS Steering Committee** described in article 5 of the Partnership Arrangement.

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**Para.1: FIRMS Partners policies:** Partners' policies regarding their publications and the dissemination of data and documents apply for the information that each Partner has submitted. Partners are responsible for informing the FIRMS secretariat of their information management policy. In practical terms, this means for FIRMS that:

- Partners' logo will be associated together with their information contributions;
- information submitted by a Partner may be withdrawn if the Partner withdraws from the Partnership;
- the Partner will be responsible for ensuring synchronisation with its own publication process;
- FIRMS will set-up mechanisms to prevent distortion of partners' published sources;
- Partner's publishing languages will be respected as far as possible.

**Para.2: Language handling.** Notwithstanding provisions made in paragraph 1, the use of one of the 5 FAO official languages is encouraged in FIRMS. Consistently with the promotion of standards, there may be minimum language requirements for the submission of key attributes in English, such as titles or other searchable qualifiers.

**Para.3: Quality assurance.** High quality information in FIRMS requires that information is objective, transparent, timely and consistent. Objectivity will be achieved through submission of the best scientific information, and encouraged through the development of criteria for the establishment of quality levels of partners contributions. Transparency implies that each piece of information is clearly documented and traceable. FIRMS will encourage its Partners to maintain timeliness of the information they submit consistent with their Agreements. Consistency is encouraged through standardization in data provided which in turn implies training and support to partners. Quality assurance (QA) procedures are a key part of maintaining high quality information, 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. Where appropriate, information submitted by partners may include a general description of their QA protocols.
- 2) Minimum QA required for the sound operation of FIRMS (to be further developed by the FSC) should include, *inter alia*: identification of required information (eg mandatory fields), 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.

**Para.4: Handling of alternate views.** The presentation of alternate views and interpretations of the information is envisaged in FIRMS. Although a guiding principle is that 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), FIRMS provides for mechanisms to identify conflicting information and resolve subsequent issues that may arise among Partners. The Information Management Policy sets the following principles:

- one Partner, or joint Partners, are recognized as primary responsible(s) for information on any Marine Resource or Fishery, as per content of Partnership Arrangement's Annex 2;
- the role of the Secretariat is to enforce at system level this primary responsibility;

- Partners are entitled to submit alternate views on any Marine Resource or Fishery, final publishing being under the control of Partner(s) having primary responsibility over that Stock or Fishery;
- in cases where the primary responsibility is disputed between two or more partners, the FSC may decide on how to publish the alternative views.

**Para.5: Functionality automating analyses of the content of the system.** To avoid misleading analyses, search facilities shall ensure that information on status and trends or management advice is not separated from its associated interpretative context.

**Para.6: Users restricted areas.** FIRMS has a public domain as well as a domain to which access is restricted. FIRMS's restricted access area enables the information submission and validation process (including data integrity and consistency checking) for pre-publication reviews of that information by the FIRMS partners responsible. The Information Management Policy defines access rights by user types distinguishing editors, reviewers, approvers, system administrator, privileged users and general public. Identified inconsistencies in the contributions of partners remain under confidential private access until they are resolved.

**Para.7: Maintenance of historical data.** The Information Management Policy will consider maintenance of history, update cycles and recovery of historical data. It will identify the requirements for archiving information and how the system will provide access to historic information.

**Para.8: Information Technology (IT) Standards and Information Standards.** The FIRMS Information Management Policy respects a range of **IT Standards and Information Standards** but shall primarily respect the FIRMS Partnership Arrangement on this topic. The distributed nature of 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, and therefore the final standards will be a major topic for resolution by the FIRMS Steering Committee. The following is a list of standards currently used within FIRMS:

FIRMS uses FIGIS IT standards that include:

- ✓ XML is the core format for data and information input, output and exchange;
- ✓ avoidance of the use of proprietary software wherever possible;

FIRMS information standards include:

- ✓ establishment of metadata and controlled vocabulary (thesauri) standards which, as a guiding principle, use existing standards including CWP, FIGIS, or other standards; however it is understood that extensions may be unavoidable. All controlled vocabulary, including metadata, might be available in three languages (English, French, Spanish);
- ✓ Exchange protocols of spatial information: 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.

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**Para.9: Mechanisms for the development, consolidation and validation of Metadata standards**

- ✓ the FIRMS web-site present the elements of protocols to facilitate the exchange of information.