



FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting
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Review of FIRMS Information Standards (IMP)
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Issues established on FIRMS information standards during 2006

Through its data contributions work, the TWG members uncover new issues related to information standards.

Reporting year (and Year of observation):

With the massive load accompanying the FIRMS website launch during the period March to July 2006, the only issue which came out that requires harmonization and common understanding is the discrepancy in the way the Reporting Year field is interpreted by various partners.

The Reporting year is the Year value displayed at the end of the title of a FIRMS Marine resource fact sheet (e.g. "Cod in Baltic Sea, 2003"). The definition of Reporting Year found in the "Marine resources data dictionary" is the following: "*Year, possibly followed by an index (e.g. 1999a), assigned to the observation which reports status and trends on a Marine resource or Fishery. Generally year of the latest data available, or for which the latest indicators can be supplied. It is used in the construction of the Title of the observation. Reporting Year should not be confused with the Year of Publication*".

It must be added that in the Excel template distributed to Partners for the initial bulk upload of the database, the label intended for Reporting year was displayed as Year of observation adding to the confusion.

While the earlier fact sheets were produced, the Reporting year has been generally intended as the year when the assessment is done. This is discrepant with the definition since the assessment date often does not correspond to the year of the latest data collected and used in the assessment (generally the previous year or even earlier), and may be misleading since some indicators displayed in the fact sheets may be older than the reporting year.

Every partner has further interpreted the meaning of this field in an attempt to fit the rule to their own needs (e.g. according the way of producing their reports). NAFO considers the reporting year to be the year when the assessment is done (even if content concerns descriptors of previous year); ICCAT considers the reporting year to be the year of the SCRS meeting where executive summaries are updated, while it would distinguish the "year of observation" as the year when actual assessment is lead. IOTC would favour the Year of observation to be the last year for which you have data in the assessment, while reporting year would be the year when the assessment is done; for IATTC, the reporting year should be the year on which the assessment has been conducted, but in the absence of recent assessment the year of the most recent review of catches and status and trends with respect to standing analyses.

The following table summarises these interpretations:

	Last year for which data exists in the assessment	Year when the assessment is conducted	Year of the most recent review of catches and status and trends	Year of the Meeting reviewing executive summaries	<i>Year of publication</i>
<i>Year of observation</i>	IOTC ICES	ICCAT			
<i>Reporting Year</i>		NAFO IOTC IATTC	IATTC	ICCAT (SCRS meeting)	
<i>Year of observation +1</i>					NAFO

Suggestions for FSC4:

- it looks like more than one Year concept would be useful;
- Partners should strive to agree on common definitions, and which among the year concepts should be displayed as extension of the title;

Concepts and related Reference terms – Depth zone, geofoms, or sea floor physiography

FSC3 has elaborated a list of reference terms (see annex 4 of the report of FSC3) which it recommends to be used for the development of search tools for the FIRMS database. It was understood that this is a first list of basic terms that is kept open for the addition of new concepts and terms and definition of sub-terms in future meetings of the FIRMS Steering Committee. Each category should be supplemented with an “unspecified” entry.

Work involving Partners during the intersession has uncovered a gap in the concepts currently agreed: within the framework of the FAO project “Promotion of sustainable fisheries: support for the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development: Phase II ” launched in September 2006, an inventory of fisheries operating on Sea mounts in the high seas will be implemented. This project will contribute to the global inventory of fisheries and has consequently reviewed the guidelines and related controlled vocabulary. It was noted that “Sea mounts” is absent from the list of terms.

At the same time, the discussion paper “Towards a global classification of marine habitats for marine data exchange” authored by Dr. Mark J. Costello (OBIS chair) was distributed to a community of web-based information system practitioners in the field of Marine biodiversity, with the intention to provoke discussion towards a common set of globally recommended standards for data exchange. This document reviews existing standards highlighting needs for considering a set of concepts including Region, Seascape, Biotope. The document stresses the NatureServe-NOAA classification to be probably the best starting point.

“Sea mounts” refer according to the NatureServe classification to underwater landscapes (or seascapes) defined by their physiographic features. Other example include estuaries, fjords, canyons, lagoons. The nature classification refers to these as geofoms and macrohabitats.

Considering the current list of FIRMS agreed terms under the “Depth zone” concept, it is apparent that the FIRMS list of terms doesn't properly reflect the concept of Depth zone.

Coastal
Shelf
Slope
Abyssal
Unspecified

Instead terms like “shelf”, “slope” and “abyssal” listed together suggest geoforms, and one could propose to add “Sea mounts” to this list and rename it.

On the other side, this “Depth zone” concept is extended in the guidelines for Fisheries inventory (Fishcode-STF project) with sub-levels which render much better the idea of depth zone than does the top level FIRMS list of terms.

Coastal
Coastal – Intertidal
Coastal - Close to the shore, littoral (0 m - 20 m)
Coastal - Shallow waters, inshore waters (0 m - 50 m)
Shelf
Shelf - Upper shelf (up to 100 m)
Shelf - Deep shelf (100 m - 200 m)
Shelf - Edge of shelf
Slope
Slope - Upper slope (200 m – 500 m)
Slope - Deep slope (500 m -1000 m)
Abyssal
Unspecified

Suggestions for FSC4:

- The FIRMS list of “Depth zone” terms could be qualified with depth zone ranges to be more explicit;
- A new concept “Geoform”, or “Sea floor physiography”, could be added to the list of concepts
- the work lead within the initiative “Towards a global classification of marine habitats for marine data exchange” should be kept under review.