



## FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting

### Fifth Session

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### NatFIRMS, AN INITIATIVE FOR FOSTERING FIRMS LIKE PROCESSES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

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#### Management Summary

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After discussions on the “Feasibility of expanding the FIRMS Partnership to national institutions”, FSC4 decided that expansion of FIRMS membership to national institutions will not be considered at this point in time. The meeting felt that the current work of FIRMS should be consolidated and better embedded before an expansion can take place.

At the same time, through the discussions taking place i) as part of FIRMS partners meetings regarding validation of resources or fisheries inventories, and ii) with potential donors for supporting FIRMS mechanisms, the need for the availability of a FIRMS like process at national level is tangible. Such initiative of direct interest to donor countries could foster financial support and be launched as a 4 to 5 years project to test the feasibility of FIRMS like processes at national level. While institutionally disconnected from the FIRMS Partnership arrangement, this project would strive for information flow synergies between countries and RFBs on a case by case basis, and should benefit FIRMS Partners from higher ability to exchange information on fisheries status and trends, and from the additional toolkit developed.

This document introduces to FIRMS partners, for their awareness and comments, the NatFIRMS project concept note elaborated by FAO. This project concept has already been forwarded to France and should be discussed soon with Canada.

## **Project concept note**

### **Towards the development of a national version of the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (NatFIRMS)**

#### **1. Project rationale**

##### Background

The Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) is a formal Information Partnership Arrangement between RFMOs which FAO coordinates as Secretariat. FIRMS, a major implementing mechanism of the FAO Strategy for improving information on status and trends of capture fisheries (Strategy-STF), was launched in February 2004 and currently includes 12 Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) and FAO. FIRMS's objective is to provide to information users with a better means to monitor the state of world fishery resources and the status and trends of fisheries and their management, based on authoritative information sources. This is achieved through development of standards and protocols for information exchange.

This first phase of development involving RFBs aims at consolidating a trusted platform which would provide a reference to expand the monitoring system at the national level: indeed, the goal for a global monitoring is to seek as comprehensive coverage as possible, which implies including Resources and Fisheries under National jurisdiction. There are obvious benefits for countries to join such collaborative initiative: for countries with lesser capacities, identifying and formalizing list of Fisheries or Resources while starting to provide regularly some monitoring information is the first but indispensable step to sound management. For countries with higher capacity, joining a FIRMS like process contributes to formalize the assessment and reporting processes, to fill in the gaps in the system, to organize and cross-link all documents generated throughout the knowledge based management workflow, and to finally demonstrate good Governance to their general public. A national version of FIRMS (NatFIRMS) would provide a framework to support this move.

##### Problem to be resolved

The FIRMS steering committee needs to determine under which conditions the projected expansion to the national level could be decided. Such evaluation requires real scale experiment of developing FIRMS like mechanisms at national level with a few countries, both developed and developing. The development of a national version of the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (NatFIRMS) should proceed in parallel to the current FIRMS partnership, building indeed on FIRMS assets (much has been learned from the existing collaboration between FIRMS and RFMO's, and much of the existing functionality/infra-structure will be ported to NatFIRMS) but institutionally disconnected in order to facilitate the formulation of requirements and standards that might be specific to the national level, hence avoid interfere too much with FIRMS regional partners preoccupations. Depending on the outcomes, the two entities could eventually merge or remain distinct while information would anyway be interoperable for a global monitoring.

This project will prepare this national version of FIRMS. Main issues to be tackled are:

- consolidating the Fisheries and Management system concepts as a Metadata standard in order to address national level needs including with more emphasis on reporting in support to management and decision making;
- setting-up quality assurance rules in order to distinguish different levels of quality associated with the assessments; this would feed into eco-labeling schemes;
- streamlining workflow and facilitating systems interoperability;

- setting-up an information sharing governance mechanism suitable for the national level;

### Envisaged Strategy

Both developed and developing countries should be involved in this project.

- Regarding developed countries, it is expected that the donor country will itself be interested in encouraging its national fisheries center(s) of excellence (eg DFO in the case of Canada) to be involved in the project. Such involvement of Canadian institutions could be considered part of an existing collaborative arrangement with FAO tightly connected to this Project.

- Regarding developing countries, 2 to 5 priority countries (from donor point of view) could be selected within a region of the world. The project (from a donor's view point) could concern more than one region.

Active involvement of some of the FIRMS RFB partners will be sought (eg NAFO for Canada), by touching upon immediate benefits they may anticipate from seeing countries involved in FIRMS like processes, and it is expected that they will constitute sound relays.

Other donor countries are being approached along the same lines (eg France, USA). Participating countries are expected to contribute to a multilateral trust fund under the Fishcode umbrella in support to this development.

From a FIRMS view point, various regions might be of primary interest for NatFIRMS: Mediterranean (with GFCM), South East Asia (with SEAFDEC), Western Africa (with CECAF), Central America (with Oldepesca), Latin America (with CPPS), North Atlantic (with NAFO, NEAFC, ICES).

The overall project will be accompanied by means of a thematic knowledge network including e-forums, and regular project meetings of the developing national version of FIRMS.

### **3. Project expected outcome**

At corporate level, the expected outcome is a decision on the form of collaborative arrangement (knowledge network, national level partnership, current FIRMS partnership expanded at national level, ...) suitable for the national version of FIRMS. This decision will be based on technical, institutional and financial considerations.

Consistently with goals of the FAO Strategy for improving information on status and trends of capture fisheries (Strategy-STF), the project should contribute to strengthen FAO's global role as enabling organization for fisheries information exchange in support to an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, thanks to the development of fisheries information standards and interoperability solutions.

On the countries side, becoming part of the national version of FIRMS would imply country's ability to comply with FIRMS principles (objectivity, transparency, best evidence, timeliness) and quality assurance standards for sharing information on state of resources and fisheries. Where possible, connections will be established with Eco-labeling schemes<sup>1</sup> and possibly contribute to their development thanks to the application of information standards (such as fisheries unique identifiers, etc...). Such compliance pledges responsible governance of fisheries.

### **4. Relationship to FAO strategic framework/medium term plan**

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<sup>1</sup> see "Guidelines for the Eco-labeling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, COFI 2005".

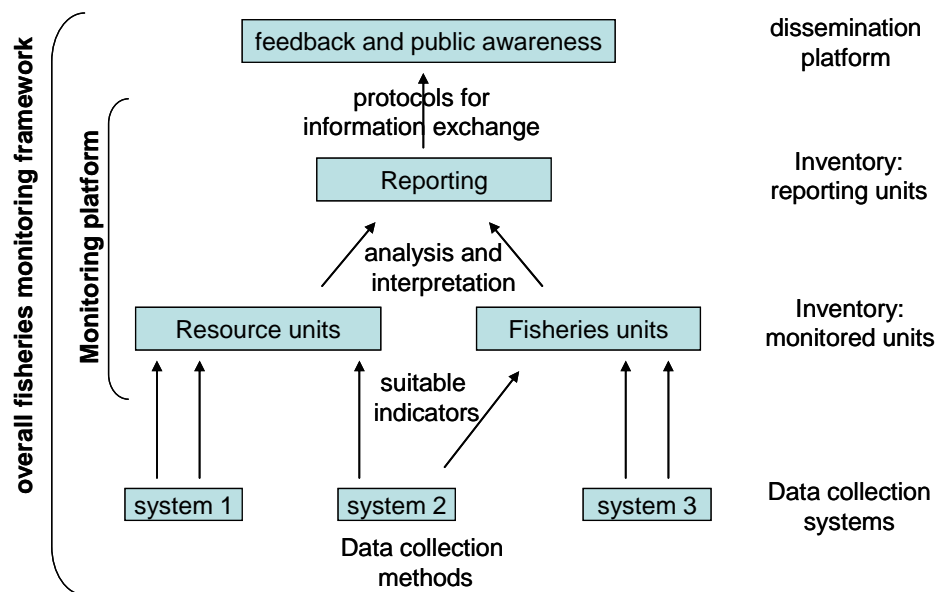
FIRMS is a major implementing mechanism of the FAO Strategy-STF. Developing FIRMS and other FIGIS partnerships is itself a FAO programme entity (2HA01) which fully contributes to corporate Strategic Framework E1 “An integrated resource base, with current, relevant and reliable statistics, information and knowledge made accessible to all FAO clients”. FIRMS is one of FAO thematic knowledge networks.

## 5. Project expected outputs

At national level - consolidation of a “monitoring platform” (see figure 1) including:

- national inventories of resources and fisheries implemented and validated at national level, and registered in the global FIGIS ontology based infrastructure with unique identifiers;
- fishery monitoring mechanisms, and (where possible or necessary) resources assessment mechanisms, formalized, institutionalized, and certified with established levels of quality assurance for fisheries monitoring and reporting, able to feed into Eco-labeling schemes;
- streamlined workflow and corresponding tools established, including access to services of a distributed ontology-web based software infrastructure facilitating interoperability between providers of resources assessments and fisheries data;

Figure 1: concept of Fisheries monitoring platform



At corporate level – assets available to recommend the form of collaborative arrangement under which a National version of FIRMS could be implemented.

- Metadata standards consolidated and encompassing national level needs for the Fisheries domain, including quality assurance requirements scoring various quality levels of information contributions able to feed into Eco-labeling schemes;
- Enhanced Global Fishery Resources Monitoring System enabling smooth interoperability between national systems, and/or easy and streamlined submission of monitoring reports by national partners, implementing the above mentioned quality assurance scheme, and disseminating synoptic views of State and Trends;

- Report on the feasibility of a national version of FIRMS documenting the form of collaborative arrangement that this network could take, from considerations on technical, institutional, and financial conditions.

## 6. Inputs

Inputs to the project will depend on the number of countries envisaged for inclusion in the project. There will be baseline inputs to support the FAO Project core team with a critical mass of resources to ensure coordination and interaction with concerned countries, and variable inputs on the national side depending on number of countries, and whether or not RFB partners would be involved as well.

### 6.1.a Major inputs at Secretariat level

A minimum critical mass will be necessary to grant the Project core team with the staff deemed necessary to provide the expected services to countries, and to strengthen the interaction with existing RFB partners: inventories, development of new features, tailored protocols, certification scheme, training material, training sessions, e-forum moderation and technical assistance, etc...

Staff	1 full time experienced information manager (4 years)
	1 part time junior system development specialist (2 years)
	¼ time administrative assistant (1 year)
Consultants	junior consultant: inventories (12 months)
	application developer (6 months)
	senior consultant Protocols, information standards, certification scheme (3 months)
Travels	to Project's meetings (8)

### 6.1.b Major inputs in one region with 5 countries involved

The Project will organise regional workshops and training courses for capacity building, and will enable participation to Project's meetings. Senior consultants will be hired to facilitate at national level activities having an institutional connotation (validation of monitored units, formalisation of processes, ...).

Consultant	senior consultant facilitator, intervening in each country
Travels	2 Regional workshops (inventories, data quality assurance)
	Facilitation of national efforts to set-up the monitoring platform
	Travels of country representatives to Projects meetings
Contracts	local contracts (streamlined workflow, local inventories, ...)

### 6.2 Planned overall project duration

Depending on the countries and assuming that selected countries meet minimum requirements, one to three years' time is deemed necessary for bringing a potential partner to be compliant with FIRMS like mechanisms. The overall project's duration is therefore planned for 4 years.

**7. Total budget estimate**

Orders of magnitude of costs are presented below:

Total budget for providing the support to the FAO project core team and involving 5 countries of a same region during 4 years	\$ 1,390,000 (\$345,000/year)
of which:	
Marginal cost for involvement of each country	\$ 63,000

Costs implications to a single donor will depend upon number of donors joining in the Fishcode-NatFIRMS multilateral trust:

Assuming two regions are tackled during the project each supported by a distinct donor, the support to the FAO Project core team by each donor would be divided by two: under those conditions, the total amount for each donor intending to support during four years one region (including 5 countries) would be:	\$ 852,000 (\$213,000/year)
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