



<b>FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting</b>
<b>Ninth Session</b>
<b>Swakopmund, Namibia, 23-24 and 27 February 2015</b>
<b>FIRMS branding</b>
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*While working on the expansion of its geographic coverage, new stakeholders are invited to collaborate with FIRMS and to consider how to apply the FIRMS global framework in a regional context. This interaction generates new ideas and proposals for purposing FIRMS in regional or local contexts.*

*Regarding its functional scope: In the WECAFC context, FIRMS fisheries inventories are seen as a data collection mechanism in data poor context. For the sake of simple communication message, the FIRMS branding has also been used to cover the objective of a regional data base to support fisheries management and stock assessment.*

*Regarding its thematic scope: FIRMS already agreed in past FSCs that it should cover reporting on Ecosystem assessments. Now the FSC is called to examine whether the VME DataBase could fall under its remit.*

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## 1. A mature framework for data collection, in data poor contexts

The long experience, which brought FIRMS in developing well-structured methodology, protocols and standards to increase the data coverage and to respond to the need of some partners to channel national data, has resulted in the recognition of FIRMS as a tool for supporting data assemblage and sharing in data poor contexts.

This need has been expressed strongly in the WECAFC contexts, and to a certain extent in West Africa (FCWC and COREP). WioFISH provides yet another testimony of a very similar function delivered through its inventory of fisheries.

In the WECAFC context, FIRMS has also been seen as useful branding to encompass the function of a Regional Data Base supporting data collation and analysis for stock assessment and to support adaptive fishery management in an EAF approach. In a data poor context where data sharing is also difficult, the need expressed there and opportunity is to use FIRMS not only as the final stage of a shared reporting and web-dissemination system (which is somehow the nature of the Arrangement originally set-up for FIRMS, see [FIRMS Partnership arrangement](#)), but also as a Data collection and sharing mechanism:

- in data poor situations, the inventory acts as a form for data collection of minimum knowledge about stocks and fisheries, and results in a regional database;
- In richer data situations, this idea is further extended with the objective to set-up an on-line Regional DataBase for supporting stock assessment processes (whole workflow from data collation among participating countries, data sets harmonization, running stock assessment algorithms, publishing results in forms of tables and graphs, and reporting as FIRMS fact sheets).

## 2. VME DataBase

At the second FAO Workshop on the Global Database for Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems, Rome, 7-9 May 2014, the sustainability of the VME database has been discussed, along the following lines (extract from the report).

Though no conclusions were reached on the sustainability options, there were indications that the FIRMS Steering Committee could be approached regarding their possible role in respect of the VME DataBase.

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The sustainability of the VME DataBase is dependent upon an appropriate governance mechanism (serving policy needs, future development, user requirements, etc.), data maintenance (by partner RFBs) and system maintenance (by FAO). The VME DataBase was established through an invitation from UNGA to FAO. The development has been supported by two targeted workshops (including the current one), three regional VME Workshops and continuous networking effort. The data entry so far has been under the responsibility of FAO through the VME database project but is expected to migrate to the partner RFBs as they assume responsibility for data input. FAO has also supported the development of the VME DataBase dissemination interface. The iMarine partnership has developed the input interface. Future work is dependent upon guiding mechanisms, likely through the FAO GEF ABNJ Deep-seas project that has strong partnerships with the deep-seas regional fisheries bodies. Future support and

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engagement by the regional bodies is necessary to gain approval within the FAO system for continued maintenance and development of the VME DataBase. It is seen that, within the short to medium term, the governance framework managing the VME DataBase is likely to be with the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries team and the regional fisheries bodies partners.

An alternative option that was presented was to, in the medium to long term, to anchor the VME DataBase as a component of the FIRMS partnership, which is already operational. It was noted that in the longer term there is a need to rationalise the information flow between FAO and the partner RFBs so that communication processes follow more of a harvesting strategy than a data entry strategy.

#### Discussion

The participants were interested to understand the implication to the VME DataBase given that the VME DataBase and the iMarine data entry interface, are both supported through projects which are due to finish their current phases around the end of 2014. Regarding governance, some participants were of the opinion that organizations concerned by iMarine services should be able to influence the way iMarine will develop; It was a general agreement that for the moment the best option would be to have the VME DataBase managed /strengthened through the FAO deep-seas and the ABNJ Deep Seas partnership through a similar mechanism as today. The option to have this governance exerted under FIRMS as a longer term option was considered one possible future scenario. FAO replied that there is a strong link between the support that can be provided to the VME DataBase and the success of the VME DataBase as viewed by the UNGA, FAO and the partner RFBs. Funds can invariably, at least in the short to medium term, be sourced for successful initiatives that have the support of strong organisations. However, further development of additional modules for the VME DataBase and the development of the VME Portal, as well as maintenance, will be dependent on securing adequate funding from additional sources. The governance of the VME DataBase was discussed and, in the longer term, it is expected that it would fall under a group with strong RFB presence. Currently, the VME DataBase is managed by the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Team and it is likely that this will continue with increasing partnership through the forthcoming ABNJ Deep-seas Project and as further components are developed. Longer term options were briefly discussed and, though no conclusions were reached, there were indications that the FIRMS Steering Committee could be approached regarding their possible role in respect of the VME DataBase.

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### 3. Questions for FIRMS partners

Strategic considerations: should FIRMS

SC9 is invited:

- to acknowledge this important data collection function in data poor situation, and consider whether the article 1.1.2 of the Partnership Arrangement could be enriched accordingly;
- to comment on the use of the FIRMS branding as driving force for the development of a regional database in support to stock assessment and fisheries management;
- to provide an opinion on possible inclusion as part of FIRMS scope of the VME DataBase.