



**FIRMS Steering Committee Meeting**

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**FIRMS Information Management Policy  
(Draft for Review by FSC2)**

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## FIRMS Information Management Policy

Draft for review by FSC2

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### Preamble:

The FSC formulates and permanently revises 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 operated as a subsystem within 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 FIGIS system will be loaded and maintained by professionals belonging to 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 FIGIS 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 coordinate fishery statistical programmes 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**

**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.

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**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 includes objectivity, transparency, timeliness and consistency. 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. Enforcement of quality assurance (QA) procedures is 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 mandatory information, 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 Stock 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 Stock or Fishery, final publishing being under the control of Partner(s) having primary responsibility over that Stock or Fishery;
- the FSC ultimately makes decisions on issues requiring resolution among Partners.

**Para.5: Functionality automating analyses of the content of the system.** Recognizing that use of information such as comparisons of analyses of status and trends or management advice may be misleading if separated from associated interpretative text, the Information Management Policy provides for facilitating appropriate searches. The application of Metadata standards will be an obvious mean for this purpose. Beyond automated routines, the FSC will also consider how the FIRMS Secretariat can assist users in their search for information.

**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) and where required reviews of that information among the FIRMS partners, before publication. 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: Technology and information standards.** The FIRMS Information Management Policy respects a range of IT 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 FIGIS:

- ✓ within FIGIS, XML is the core format for data and information input, output and exchange;
- ✓ in line with the general FAO policy, FIGIS avoids the use of proprietary software wherever possible;
- ✓ FIGIS must establish metadata and controlled vocabularies (thesauri) standards and, as a guiding principle uses existing standards wherever possible, or when extensions cannot be avoided build such extensions on existing standards. In FIGIS, all controlled vocabulary, including metadata, might be available in three languages (English, French, Spanish);
- ✓ Standards for FIGIS shall be made available through the CWP web page. FIRMS Partners can start contribute information to FIRMS provided standards, guidelines and codes are made available to them;
- ✓ Exchange protocols of spatial information are part of FIGIS standards: 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.