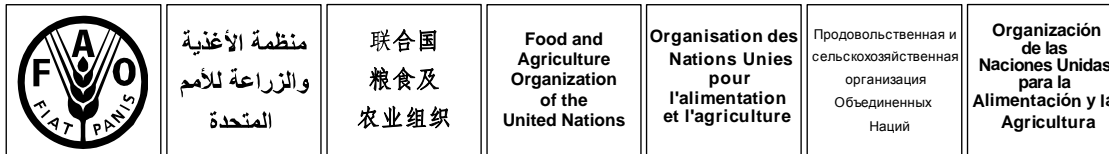


October 2012



REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES

Sixth Meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

Doha, Qatar, 5-8 November 2012

STATUS AND REPORT ON RECOFI/FIRMS COLLABORATION

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper document is to provide information to the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) on progress and status regarding RECOFI collaboration with the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) framework, and on the necessary elements towards a possible application of RECOFI as FIRMS Member.

The WGFM is invited to:

- consider the report from the RECOFI representatives who participated to the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting and the two subsequent TWG sessions, on any relevant information regarding benefits and application of RECOFI to a full membership in FIRMS;
- review the inventories of Bahraini and Iranian fisheries as available in the FIRMS system¹, as well as the draft inventories prepared by the other countries; provide guidance on additional information services (such as synopsis of management measures) which FIRMS could deliver to better serve the needs in the region;
- make decision on publishing of the RECOFI fisheries inventory in FIRMS;
- consider whether any progress can be achieved regarding the inventory of RECOFI marine resources, with reference to scientific activities which have been held since the fifth meeting of the WGFM in the region regarding stock definitions, stock assessment results and stock status information;
- validate the draft proposal for “Request from RECOFI Secretariat to CWP for formal endorsement of proposed splitting of FAO subarea 51.3 into divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2 (see Appendix 3);
- make recommendations to the 2013 RECOFI Commission meeting regarding a possible application to FIRMS as a full member.

In this respect, the WGFM is informed of the “Benefits and obligations for RECOFI Member States in FIRMS” (Appendix 1), and of the “Policy aspects regarding management of RECOFI fisheries and resources inventories in FIRMS” (Appendix 2).

¹ Access is restricted and members are invited to ask for user credential at FIRMS-secretariat@fao.org

BACKGROUND

1. FIRMS is an information partnership launched in 2004. It brings together 13 international organizations as members (more at <http://firms.fao.org/firms> and in Appendix 4). FAO is one of these organizations and RECOFI, as a FAO statutory body, has been invited at its WGFM5 to become part of FAO's activities in FIRMS.
2. At the Sixth Session of RECOFI (May 2011, Rome, Italy), the Commission was introduced to the FIRMS partnership during a side event. The focus of the presentation was on FIRMS' objectives, information products, benefits for a regional fisheries management organization, and its mode of operation (see meeting document). A proposal for an initial RECOFI-FIRMS workshop on a regional marine resources and fisheries inventory was agreed by the Commission.
3. The workshop took place from 12-14 July 2011 in Cairo, Egypt, hosted by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa. It was successful in developing the skeleton of an harmonized regional marine resources and fisheries inventory (see 3-d diagrams which enable participants to visually represent and position the multi-facets of fisheries and their relationships - described in the FIRMS-RECOFI workshop report). Appraising the potential benefits of the inventory approach in support to fisheries management in the RECOFI area, the participants agreed that the results of the workshop and follow-up activities should be conveyed to the fifth WGFM meeting.
4. The fifth WGFM meeting reviewed post workshop progress on inventories, agreed upon inventory related policy aspects (see Appendix 2), set out as priority the development of the fisheries inventory, recommended amendments to the existing FAO geo-referencing system in the RECOFI area for endorsement by CWP. Finally the fifth WGFM meeting also agreed upon a roadmap towards RECOFI membership in FIRMS, including the participation of RECOFI representatives at the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting, and the completion of draft national fisheries inventories by the sixth WGFM meeting.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE WGFM5

Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting (Rome, December 2011)

5. Two RECOFI representatives² attended the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting. They indicated that their participation was motivated to determine if it is appropriate for RECOFI to become a FIRMS partner. They presented progress on inventories of fisheries occurring within RECOFI Iranian and Bahraini waters. Their presence, together with CECAF, SWIOFC, SEAFDEC, and SPC, raised high in the FIRMS agenda the profile of small scale fisheries in tropical areas, and the needs and expectations from actors in developing countries. Upon request from the RECOFI representatives for more assistance from the Secretariat for completing the inventories, the FIRMS Secretariat responded that this could be provided under the condition that additional funding can be mobilized.
6. The Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting agreed to include the Representatives of FAO's associate partners (CECAF, RECOFI and SWIOFC) as members of the FIRMS' Technical Working Groups (TWGs). RECOFI did actually contribute to the two virtual TWG meetings held in 2012.

Development of fisheries inventories and their uploading in FIRMS

7. The draft inventories of Bahrain and Iranian fisheries presented at the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting have been completed during the course of 2012 through close collaboration with the FIRMS Secretariat. These inventories containing respectively 15 fisheries for Iran and 26 for Bahrain have been uploaded in the FIRMS system and are ready for publishing.

² Mr Karim Al-Radhi and Mr Tooraj Valinassab

8. In parallel, the RECOFI and FIRMS Secretariats have reiterated the call for the presentation of draft fisheries inventories by all RECOFI members at the sixth WGFM meeting.

Specification of the boundary line between the proposed new divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2.

9. The fifth WGFM meeting agreed that the FAO statistical sub-area 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions: 51.3.1 for the Oman Sea, and 51.3.2 for the Arabian Sea (South Western). The approximate limits of the two divisions were visualized and agreed on the map, and Iran and Oman agreed to provide geographic coordinates for this delineation. Following these recommendations, Mr Valinassab (Iran) in consultation with Mr Al Siyabi (Oman) and FIRMS Secretariat proposed the coordinates and logic for drawing the dividing line, as reflected in Appendix 3.

ROADMAP IMPLEMENTATION STATUS TOWARDS A FORMAL PARTICIPATION OF RECOFI IN FIRMS

10. The roadmap agreed upon at the fifth WGFM meeting towards applying as formal member in FIRMS was:

By the sixth WGFM meeting:

- a participation of RECOFI at the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting, with three national inventories available in draft form,
- all national inventories of fisheries should be available in draft form (Excel template) for aggregation in a regional inventory.

At the sixth WGFM meeting:

- a review of the outcome of the above actions, for a WGFM6 recommendation to RECOFI Commission regarding such application as fully-fledged FIRMS member,
- a regional inventory aggregating a minimum of three or four Members’ national inventories deemed necessary for publication in FIRMS of a consolidated RECOFI inventory of fisheries.

Appendix 1: Benefits and obligations for RECOFI Member States in FIRMS

1. Anticipated benefits

The Sixth RECOFI Session and the fifth WGFM meeting have recognized that the involvement of RECOFI in FIRMS could enhance Members visibility in the international arena regarding their efforts to promote sound and more responsible fisheries management, the FIRMS initiative providing one of such opportunities.

At a political level:

FAO member countries through COFI, and UN members through the UN General Assembly, have made commitments to the Strategy-STF³ and their willingness to adhere to principles of good fisheries governance based on the best scientific knowledge available. Reporting status and trends of resources and fisheries demonstrates countries' compliance with such commitment, and FIRMS offers an enabling framework.

As well, the 2006 UN Review Conference on Straddling and highly migratory Fish Stocks recommended that States individually or collectively through RFMOs should cooperate with FAO in the implementation and further development of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (par. 18j)"

At a strategic level:

Although the Partnership has not yet been open to National partners, FSC5 agreed that national level reporting can be channelled and encouraged through relevant FIRMS RFB members. These national level contributions are accepted provided some peer review process and quality assurance rules are applied at RFB level. Such process has already been initiated with CECAF, GFCM, SWIOFC, SEAFDEC. Therefore there is scope for RFBs to combine national level reporting required as part of the regional mechanisms, and FIRMS reporting.

FIRMS RFB partners have understood the benefits of FIRMS reporting mechanisms. Fact sheets are multi-purpose communication products:

- The FIRMS fact sheets primarily serve data owners needs. FIRMS offers a technology which enables the Partner to "recycle" in its own website the fact sheets which it contributed to FIRMS. GFCM⁴ has already implemented this facility and others are following.

Additionally, Fact sheets are communication products which:

- provide overviews and contribute to convey the essential information for fishery management or policy making; full details are accessible through link to electronic sources;
- allow better searchability on the internet including through full text and controlled terms; a presence in FIRMS increases the profile of RFB reports, as well as the visibility of their work on the internet;
- can be merged and enriched with other sources of information such as catch statistics, or multidisciplinary maps;
- constitute a dynamic reporting featuring ability to maintain time series of reports as information becomes available;
- enable the development of new products, such as maps, statistics, or synoptic views (eg Status and Trends summaries)

³ FAO Strategy-STF: FAO strategy for improving information on status and trends of capture fisheries

⁴ see www.gfcm.org/gfcm/topic/17104/en

2. Obligations of RECOFI as FIRMS member

By becoming a FIRMS member, RECOFI will have to fulfil its commitments, at its own expenses:

- contribute to FIRMS information on fisheries and/or resources status and trends as per the signed Appendix 2 of the FIRMS partnership arrangement⁵;
- participate to the FIRMS decision making process, by regularly attending FIRMS Steering Committee meetings (these meetings are generally organized back to back with CWP meeting, on average once every 1.5 year),
- participate to the FIRMS Technical Working Group meetings, which now meet virtually twice a year through video-conferencing, and can exceptionally hold physical meetings.

⁵ FIRMS partnership arrangement: <http://firms.fao.org/firms/about/en#Org-LegalFoundation>

Appendix 2: Policy aspects regarding management of RECOFI fisheries and resources inventories in FIRMS

1. FIRMS general information management Policy aspects

FIRMS is an information partnership framework that implements principles of best scientific evidence and of transparency promoted by the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO Strategy for improving information on the status and trends of capture fisheries (Strategy-STF). A fundamental FIRMS rule is however that the information contribution and publishing process is under the control of partners. As a FIRMS partner, RECOFI would decide what information it commits to regularly contribute (to be defined in Appendix 2 of the FIRMS Partnership arrangement) as well as which content and when is actually published.

2. Additional Policy principles agreed within RECOFI

More specifically, the following policy aspects have been agreed upon within RECOFI at the fifth WGFM meeting. There is a necessary distinction between the Fisheries inventory, and the Marine resources inventory, both in terms of primary ownership and development priority:

- Primary ownership of the fisheries inventory lies with countries, while that of the marine resources inventory lies with RECOFI. In both cases, RECOFI retains the corporate ownership and as such decision making responsibility regarding publishing in FIRMS.
- In the RECOFI context, first priority should be for the development of the fisheries inventory, while the Marine resources inventory should develop consistently with the findings of regional scientific working groups.

Fisheries inventory:

- Primary and Corporate ownership: the inventories of fisheries developed at national level will eventually be aggregated at regional level according to the harmonized framework. Accordingly the countries retain primary ownership (and control) over the content which they supply while RECOFI, as corporate owner of the aggregated inventory, ensures in close collaboration with the FIRMS Secretariat that agreed conventions and harmonization rules are applied. Without RFBs' sign-off of information under their corporate ownership, no information can be published in FIRMS.
- The inventories harmonization process at RECOFI level will be achieved as follows: national delegates will develop the inventory content through the FIRMS excel template, while referring to the harmonized framework set out by FIRMS-RECOFI workshop (3-d diagrams). During this process, any harmonization issue which cannot be resolved will be recorded. The next meeting of WGFM will examine the regionally aggregated inventory, and discuss and make decisions on the reported outstanding harmonization issues.
- The decision making process for publishing the RECOFI inventory in FIRMS: a successful outcome of the procedure described in the above paragraph will allow RECOFI to proceed with such publication. A regional inventory aggregating a minimum of three to four countries was deemed acceptable for such decision.

Marine resources inventory:

- Unlike the fisheries inventory, the primary (and corporate) ownership of the Marine resources inventory lies with RECOFI. In this respect, the regional priority is for developing an inventory focusing on the priority species. Countries are encouraged to seek inputs from competent biologists' scientists in order to compile scientific knowledge regarding those priority species. Opportunities such as "Working group on Spanish mackerel" should be taken for consolidating subsets of it.
- The FIRMS Marine resources inventory template is available as an "information collection mechanism" which countries are encouraged to use for compiling information about any additional species in the regional inventory. These nationally contributed inventories will be

used, amongst others, as sources for decision making regarding the inclusion of more species in the priority list.

Translation in Persian and Arabic:

- FIRMS can disseminate the material related to the inventories in Arabic and Persian, provided guidelines, controlled terms and labels are translated. RECOFI would have to support the translation of these assets.

Amendments to the existing FAO geo-referencing system in the RECOFI area:

- FAO statistical sub-area 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions: 51.3.1 for the Oman Sea, and 51.3.2 for the Arabian Sea (South Western). This modification request is to be transmitted by the RECOFI Secretariat to the CWP Secretariat for formal endorsement by CWP, including specification of the limit between the two new divisions, the proposed codes and names, and the rationale for their creation.

Appendix 3 – draft proposal for “Request from RECOFI Secretariat to CWP for formal endorsement of proposed splitting of FAO subarea 51.3 into divisions 51.3.1 and 51.3.2

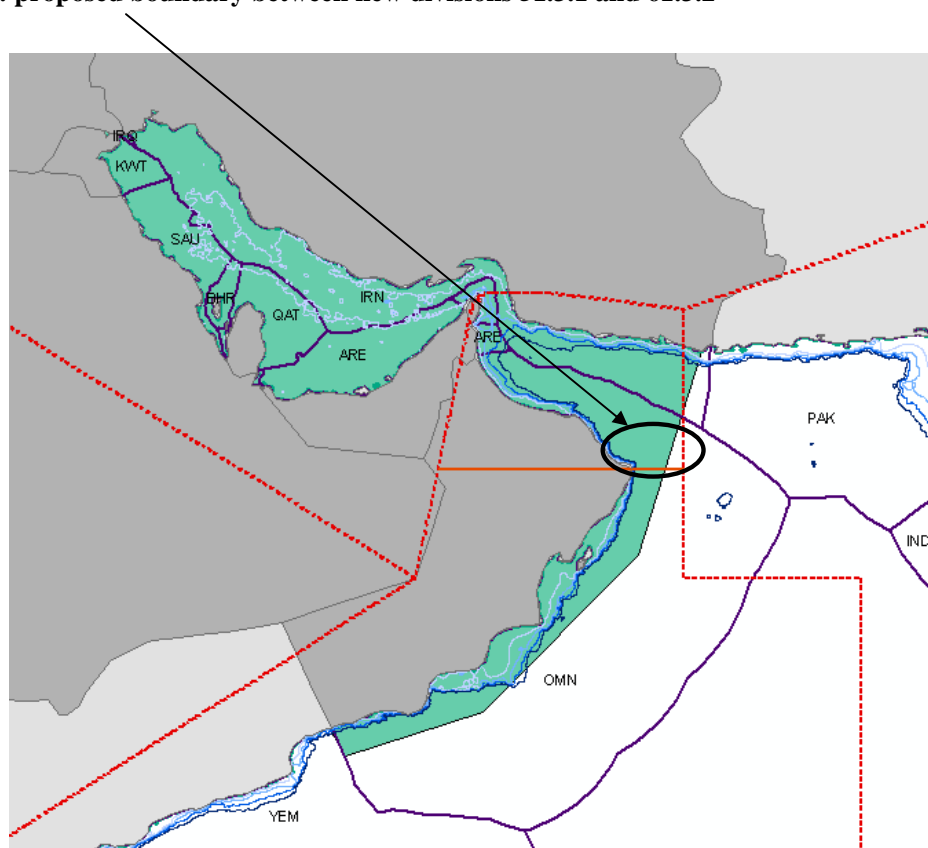
In order to properly geo-reference marine resources and fisheries in the RECOFI area, and in particular for distinguishing the fisheries operating in the Oman Sea, and those operating in the south Western part of the Arabian Sea, RECOFI fifth WGFM (Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of) 9-12 October 2011) agreed that FAO statistical subarea 51.3 “Western Arabian Sea” should be divided into two divisions:

- 51.3.1 - Oman Sea, and
- 51.3.2 - Arabian Sea (South Western).

The sixth WGFM meeting validated the specification of the limit between the two new divisions. The dividing line is set as follows (See figure 1):

“a horizontal line passing through the point Latitude 22 26N and Longitude 59 50E which determines in the Rasol - Had region the coastal border between the Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea, and extending eastward up to the vertical limit of FAO sub-areas 51.3 and 51.4”

Figure 1: proposed boundary between new divisions 51.3.1 and 61.3.2



Appendix 4 – current FIRMS membership

FIRMS Partners

Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)
Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)
European Union (EU) - Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - Fisheries and Aquaculture Department (FI)
General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)
International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)
International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)
Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO)
Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)
Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC)
South-East Atlantic Fisheries Organization (SEAFO)

FIRMS Observers

Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS)
International Whaling Commission (IWC)
Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

Other organizations which participated in FIRMS Steering Committee meetings

North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)
South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO)

Figure 1: FIRMS membership - Area and species coverage

Figure 1a: current list of non tuna-RFBs contributing information to FIRMS

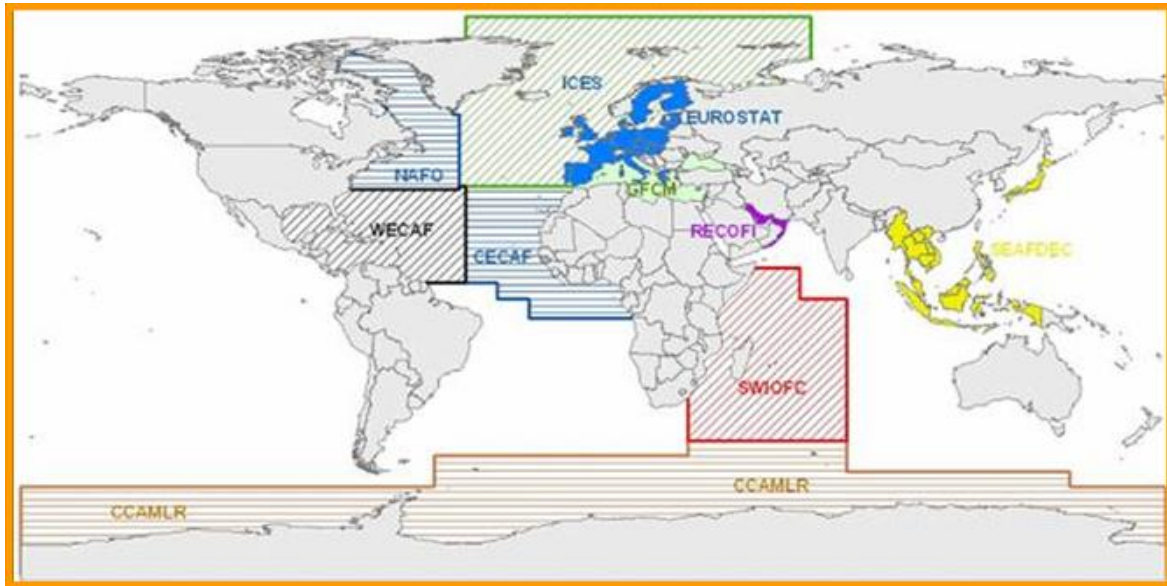


Figure 1b: current list of tuna-RFBs contributing information to FIRMS

