

## ON A PROPOSED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ICCAT AND FIGIS-FIRMS

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### SUMMARY

*The Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) is a project for the global dissemination of information on fisheries coordinated by FAO. This document provides information on current and potential collaboration between ICCAT and FAO on this project.*

### RÉSUMÉ

*Le Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) est un programme coordonné par la FAO visant à la dissémination globale de l'information sur les pêcheries. Le présent document fournit des informations sur la collaboration actuelle et potentielle entre l'ICCAT et la FAO sur ce programme.*

### RESUMEN

*El Sistema de Seguimiento de Recursos Pesqueros (FIRMS) es un proyecto para la difusión global de información sobre pesquerías coordinado por la FAO. Este documento proporciona información sobre la colaboración potencial y actual entre ICCAT y la FAO en este proyecto.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

FIGIS (Fisheries Global Information System, [www.fao.org/fi/figis](http://www.fao.org/fi/figis)) is a distributed web-based network encompassing fisheries resources, biology, technology, aquaculture and trade. FIGIS is being developed by FAO. It is intended to support the global analysis of fisheries issues by offering a single and unique entry point to strategic data, information, analyses and reviews of issues and trends on a broad range of fisheries subjects.

As a network, FIGIS interconnects a number of subsystems such as:

- FIRMS: The Fishery Resources Monitoring System. This is a global aquatic resource monitoring system made up of modules on species, resources, fisheries and fisheries management systems. FIRMS draws together a unified partnership of international organizations, regional fishery bodies and national scientific institutes collaborating within a formal agreement who are willing to report and share information on fishery resources.
- GLOBEFISH: Contains information on international fish trade.
- ASFA: The Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstract, a bibliographical database.
- Other Subsystems: For example, on Aquaculture, Trade and Marketing, and Research.

ICCAT is already a partner in ASFA. This document is a follow-up on Restrepo and Taconet (2001), dealing with the possibility of ICCAT also becoming a partner in FIRMS.

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## **2. INVOLVEMENT TO-DATE**

As explained in Restrepo and Taconet (2001), the ICCAT Secretariat together with staff from other regional organizations (RFBs) collaborated with FAO in developing a prototype of FIRMS. This exercise consisted of building case studies based on different stocks. For ICCAT, the North and South Atlantic Albacore Executive Summaries of 1999 were used as a template, and FAO staff created the XML code for a “resource object” on Atlantic albacore.

In March 2002, Secretariat staff participated in an inter-sessional meeting of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP) which included “FIGIS/FIRMS Partnership Agreements” as an item on the Agenda. Meeting participants discussed how to go forward more formally with agreements in which RFBs and FAO would work together to publish stock status reports on the Internet in which the RFBs would maintain complete ownership and also responsibility for maintenance of up-to-date reports. A draft partnership agreement was distributed and edited during the meeting. Meeting participants agreed to take the document to their decision-making bodies so that they could evaluate it before the end of 2002.

Also in March 2002, FAO held a technical consultation on “improving information on status and trends of capture fisheries”. The consultation drafted a “Strategy” document to be considered by COFI (Committee on Fisheries) at its next meeting. This Strategy proposes to re-invigorate data collection and research, and the assembly and dissemination of information. Among the Strategy’s objectives is that of allowing “States, Regional Fishery Bodies and FAO to cooperate better in the assembly of information on status and trends in a more systematic way using modern technology and to disseminate this through FIGIS.”

Later, in July 2002, FAO held a methodological workshop on FIGIS/FIRMS (see <http://www.fao.org/fi/meetings/FIGIS-FIRMS/default.asp> for information) which was also attended by a staff member of ICCAT. The workshop considered many technical issues related to design and standards, as well other non-technical issues related to the partnership agreements.

Workshop participants debated at length the nature of participation in a formal partnership. Participants stressed that national institutions (nominated by national governments) and the RFBs that have a legal mandate to monitor and/or manage fisheries would constitute the only partners. However, one key issue that the workshop was unable to clearly define had to do with the creation and functioning of a FIRMS Steering Committee, and the role that the Steering Committee should have in molding the partnership agreement and in approving the addition of new (future) partners. The workshop proposed that CWP be used as a vehicle for establishing the Steering Committee, with discussions scheduled for CWP’s next meeting in 2003.

## **3. NEXT STEPS**

At this stage, it appears that a FIRMS Steering Committee needs to begin to take shape before a partnership agreement can go forward. ICCAT needs to evaluate whether or not it is worthwhile for the Secretariat to continue this endeavor, as ICCAT would be a logical member of the Steering Committee and one of the initial partners in an agreement.

There are obvious benefits to this such as the use of state-of-the-art electronic publishing tools and more global dissemination of ICCAT’s assessment reports in a standard format. In addition, ICCAT would maintain closer control of such worldwide dissemination than it currently has.

There are also costs to consider. Being a member of the Steering Committee would involve about one week of travel annually for one staff member. Preparing the Executive Summary reports for publishing in FIRMS would take some initial training period (only once, about one week), plus about

two weeks of editing time every year. Inclusion of any other items in a partnership agreement would augment the time spent on this by ICCAT staff, but any such extra involvement is not envisioned at this time.

Meanwhile, as long as resources permit, the ICCAT Secretariat staff intends to continue collaborating with FAO and other RFBs on the development of this FIGIS module.

## **REFERENCES**

RESTREPO, V.R. and M. Taconet. 2001. Testing phase for the participation of ICCAT in the design of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System. ICCAT Col. Vol. Sci. Pap. 52: 1927-1932.