

# Visibility and Access through the Aquatic Commons

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The Aquatic Commons is a thematic digital repository (see <http://aquacomm.fcla.edu/>) covering the natural marine, estuarine/brackish and freshwater environments. It includes all aspects of the science, technology, management and conservation of these environments, their organisms and resources, and the economic, sociological and legal aspects. This thematic digital repository is sponsored by the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) and FAO has supported the development from its conception.

Launched in 2008, the Aquatic Commons repository aims to improve and facilitate the sharing of information on fisheries and aquaculture management. It will ensure the equal participation and coverage of literature from both developing and developed countries, and will provide free and open access of information for all. The preservation of this information and its availability for future generations will be guaranteed. Managers and resource users will be empowered to publish their findings.

In this biennium (2010-2011), FAO is extending its efforts in making grey literature available through the Aquatic Commons. The term “grey literature” refers to documents not controlled by commercial publishers, but published by institutions of which publishing is not the primary business activity. This literature is often difficult to identify and locate and is seldom available through commercial channels. As pointed out in the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No. 12 (2009), grey literature is invaluable to science. The published output of research by institutes in developing countries is generally the most relevant if not the only source for local and regional information on fisheries and aquaculture.

The potential of this repository is enormous and the benefits are already obvious to both depositors and

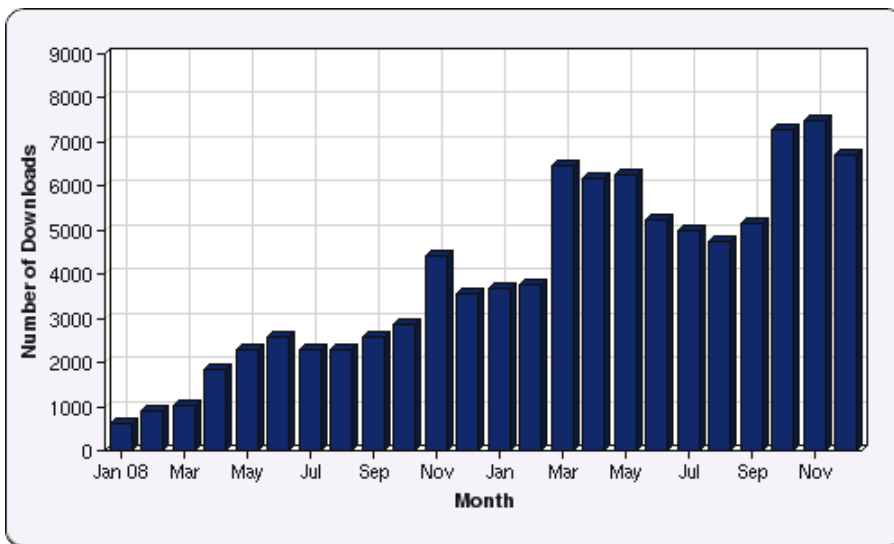
users. For example, small case studies were undertaken in 2008 in collaboration with fisheries institutions in Nigeria, Malawi and Uganda. Looking at this initial work, it is interesting to see that the following article is one of the top ten downloads from the Aquatic Commons:

Ezenwa, B. and Anyanwu, P.E. (2004). Water recirculatory system technology as a major tool for increased fish production by private fish farmers. In: 18th Annual Conference of the Fisheries Society of Nigeria (FISON), 8-12 December, 2003, Owerri, Nigeria.  
(<http://aquacomm.fcla.edu/852/>).

This article was downloaded 1112 times, of which more than 400 times from Nigeria, the country of origin. Also significantly, Nigeria is one of the top users of the Aquatic Commons repository. The uploading of the FISON Annual Conference Proceedings was clearly responding to an information need. This is a good example of how the Aquatic Commons has not only made this information more visible, but has given researchers access to this literature.

The total number of downloads of the repository is now up to 113,000. The graph on page 5 shows the number of downloads from January 2008 to December 2009:

It is interesting to see that of the most frequently downloaded articles, half are related to aquaculture, including several articles from Aquaculture Asia, the quarterly magazine published by the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA). Other examples of issuing bodies and contributors in the field of aquaculture are The WorldFish Center, the Institute of Aquaculture of the University of Stirling (UK) and the project Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management (STREAM).



Source: <http://irstats.aquacomm.fcla.edu/irstats-aquacomm>

FAO's support to the Aquatic Commons aims at assisting institutions in developing countries regarding the improvement of access, and the sharing and preservation of fisheries and aquaculture management publications. The publications from developing countries will be integrated into the mainstream of digital information. In this way, the capacity of these institutions to produce and share digital publications will be enhanced.

Building on the experience of case studies undertaken in 2008, FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Library (FBL) has started a project for the Aquatic Commons repository, in collaboration with the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts Bibliographic Database (ASFA) and financed by the ASFA Trust Fund.

FBL has a long history of involvement with information from developing countries. Since its establishment in 1967, FBL was aware of the lack of visibility of this information. Consequently, exchange agreements were set up with institutions in developing countries, thus making their publications available and visible to FAO staff and visiting experts. Over the years, the multidisciplinary nature of the information needed for fisheries management has been supported by the sizable collection of the David Lubin Memorial Library, FAO's main library. The grey literature collected by FBL was also made known to the world through inclusion in ASFA.

ASFA, for which FAO provides the Secretariat, is an international network of participating ASFA Partners (institutions or libraries dealing with aquatic sciences) which cooperates in capturing and disseminating the world's aquatic science literature.

(See the FAO ASFA Web site for further details <http://www.fao.org/fishery/asfa/en>).

The ASFA Partnership (66 members as of April 2010) covers all 5 continents of the world. Each partner focuses on the monitoring of journals and other literature specific to their country or geographic area and contributes to the ASFA Database by producing bibliographic references to these publications. This literature includes not only periodical titles and books, but also grey literature material such as documents and research reports produced by

the institute itself, many of which are not available elsewhere. By participating in the ASFA network, an ASFA Partner increases the visibility of its scientists and research initiatives.

When founded in 1971, ASFA was produced as a printed journal, with a view to developing a system which would produce the abstracting publication as well as providing a computer-based information retrieval system in aquatic sciences. Computer-based products first appeared in 1980, when ASFA was available for users to purchase on magnetic tape. In 1985, ASFA was offered on CD-ROM and since 1995, ASFA is searchable through CSA's Internet Database Service (CSA Illumina).

Almost 25 percent of the ASFA database consists of grey literature, and document availability is fundamental for this type of literature. Every effort is made to include full text links in the records on the ASFA database.

The Aquatic Commons project involves the digitization of grey literature from institutions in developing countries which is available in the FBL. It will guarantee that the publications are repatriated to the originating institution in digital format (PDF files). The inclusion of metadata and electronic copies of the literature in the Aquatic Commons repository is non exclusive and the copyright remains with the publishing institution. In the ASFA bibliographic database, links to these full text online versions will be added to existing records, or new records including links to the items in the repository will be created by the FAO ASFA Group, or the appropriate ASFA partner.



Illustration by Emanuela D'Antoni from the *FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries 12*

This grey literature will gain the benefits of visibility in a digital repository, and its metadata will be publicly harvested, e.g. findable using Google or Avano (a harvester in the field of marine and aquatic sciences, see <http://www.ifremer.fr/avano/>). The PDF files will be of high-quality, compressed and optimized for web viewing and also, because of their size, easily searchable and downloadable. For the participating institutions there is no need for local information technology and preservation will be ensured.

Institutions interested in joining our efforts in building up the Aquatic Commons repository are invited to contact the FAO FBL via e-mail through the authors of this article.



#### REFERENCES:

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