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Organización
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para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES

Fifth meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

Iran (Islamic Republic of), Tehran, 9-12 October 2011

RECOFI COOPERATION WITH FIRMS

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this paper document is to provide information to the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) regarding how much the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) information partnership can be instrumental in achieving RECOFI's objectives and the merits of RECOFI's FIRMS membership. An overview roadmap is suggested in the document.

BACKGROUND

2. FIRMS is an information partnership launched in 2004. It now brings together 13 international organizations as members. FAO is one of these organizations and RECOFI, as a FAO statutory body, is de-facto part of this partnership.

3. At the Sixth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) (May 2011, Rome, Italy), the Commission was introduced to the FIRMS partnership in 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 document <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/022/am423e.pdf>). A proposal for an initial RECOFI-FIRMS workshop on a regional marine resources and fisheries inventory was agreed by the Commission.

4. The workshop took place from 12-14 July 2011. It was hosted by the FAO Regional Office for the Middle East, Cairo, Egypt. It was held back-to-back with a workshop on RECOFI minimum data requirements.

5. The FIRMS workshop was successful in developing a skeleton for a regional marine resources and fisheries inventory. While 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, with the understanding that the meeting may wish to discuss the possibility of RECOFI's participation in FIRMS.

6. The draft report of RECOFI-FIRMS workshop on a regional marine resources and fisheries inventory was dispatched on 30 August 2011 for review and comments by workshop participants. The final version of the report will be distributed to RECOFI Members as soon as comments have been incorporated into the draft. However, the activities and results of the workshop are summarized below.

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ACTIVITES AND RESULTS

7. Ten representatives from six RECOFI Members (Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia) and a resource person from Iraq participated to the RECOFI-FIRMS workshop. The goal of this workshop was to formalize an inventory of marine resources/stocks and fisheries for the RECOFI area (at both national and regional levels) for its eventual publication through FIRMS (<http://firms.fao.org/>). This inventory will be used as the backbone for regular reporting of status and trends of stocks and fisheries under the RECOFI mandate, using the web-based framework and approaches established by FIRMS.

8. Prior to the workshop, a preliminary inventory, building on previous RECOFI and FIRMS work, was dispatched to national focal points together with guidelines in English and Arabic, requesting them to review and amend the inventory. In addition, Members were invited to attend the workshop so that regional validation of the inventory could be undertaken.

9. Even though advance notice was relatively short, the workshop provided a first exposure for RECOFI Members to the inventory approach. Nonetheless, two countries (Iran and Oman) attended the meeting with appropriately revised data, including the inventory. They also requested clarification regarding the guidelines. Other Members opted to deliver information, including data availability for their respective fishery sectors, and to use the workshop to gain a better understanding of the inventory guidelines.

Workshop's inventories outputs

10. **Fisheries inventory:** during the workshop the consolidation exercise followed a methodological path based on the "three dimensional diagram", which enables participants to visually represent and position the multi-facets of fisheries and their relationships. This approach was very appreciated since it supported the building of a consistent regional picture of the fishery situation. Based on this approach, the workshop successfully managed to set the skeleton of the regional fisheries inventory, with the requirement that fishery units be defined consistently with the minimum data requirements.

11. **Marine resources inventory:** using the 17 RECOFI priority species/groups, a regional list of marine resources will develop. However, interest was expressed by some participants to expand the inventory with reference to species of national importance. For this purpose the involvement of national scientific institutes was deemed necessary to ascertain stock units and status.

12. **Capacity building in fulfilling inventory data requirements:** the workshop dedicated a substantial amount of time to training on the inventory guidelines. Participants gained the capacity to extend the agreed inventory skeleton with the necessary data input.

Salient points addressed during the workshop

13. **Geo-referencing:** for proper geo-referencing of marine resources and fisheries, a RECOFI geo-referencing system will be required. It will require adequate divisions and a coding system giving an overlay of RECOFI's area, the main seas or environmental areas (e.g. Gulf, Oman Sea and Arabian Sea), and exclusive economic zones.

14. A further aspect of the regional consolidation is the translation of the terminology used in Arabic and Persian. In this respect, some delegates agreed to provide existing translated resources. In addition, Some taxonomic corrections were made to the priority list of species previously published by RECOFI.

15. It was pointed out in the workshop that 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). However, a fundamental FIRMS rule is that the information contribution and publishing process is under the control of partners. As a FIRMS partner, RECOFI would decide what information would be published.

16. **Inventories in support to fisheries management:** the fisheries inventory could assist regional reviews of management measures at the national level. In the marine resource template, the management information supports reporting on scientific advice for management. The involvement of RECOFI in FIRMS could enhance Members visibility regarding their efforts to promote sound and more responsible fisheries management.

Roadmap towards a formal participation of RECOFI in FIRMS.

17. The workshop recognized that RECOFI's status as a FAO Article XIV body makes it eligible to become a fully fledged FIRMS partner. The workshop's proposed roadmap for the development of the inventory is related to RECOFI's primary objectives. The roadmap is as follows:

- The Fifth WGFM meeting will have a FIRMS agenda item. Members are encouraged to present a complete fisheries inventory at the meeting. The FIRMS Secretariat will participate in the meeting and it hoped that the WGFM might be in a position to validate the regional inventory of fisheries for publishing in FIRMS.
- WGFM may wish to recommend sending a RECOFI representative to the Seventh FIRMS Steering Committee meeting (12-16 December 2011, Rome, Italy). This participation would enable RECOFI's achievements to be presented to FIRMS partners and provide RECOFI with an understanding of how FIRMS functions in view of a possible application by RECOFI to become a FIRMS partner.
- The proposed development of a marine resources inventory for the RECOFI area will follow a slower path and is therefore set as a second level priority. Based on the skeleton of regional marine resource units agreed at the workshop, Members could encourage their scientists to collaborate to seek and agree on stock definitions, stock assessment results and stock status information. The progress of this consultative phase could be presented to the WGFM and determine appropriate next steps. The WGFM might consider publishing the RECOFI marine resource inventory as a platform for further work and deciding if a recommendation should be made to the Commission in relation to becoming a FIRMS partner.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE WORKING GROUP

18. The meeting is invited to:

- comment on the above reported workshop results;
- review the post-workshop progress on the inventories work, and
- make recommendations concerning the issues raised in the roadmap.