

3rd Meeting of the Scientific Committee

Port Vila, Vanuatu
28 September - 3 October 2015

SC-03-31

Secretariat Scientific Committee related activities *Secretariat*

Summary

Paper SC-03-31 informs the SC about relevant meetings that the Secretariat had attended as an observer over the past year, in particular: the Steering Committee meeting of the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS); the intersessional meeting of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP), the FAO Workshop on VME process and practices and as a stakeholder in the New Zealand South Pacific VME project. The SC is invited to consider whether it would like to recommend that SPRFMO joins the FIRMS and CWP.

FIRMS Steering Committee 9 Report - Summary

Craig Lovridge attended the ninth session of the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) Steering Committee (held in Swakopmund, Namibia 23-24 and 27 February 2015). This meeting offered the opportunity to celebrate “ten years of FIRMS” for the four member and three observer organizations that were represented (FAO, Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, South East Atlantic Fisheries Organization; Benguela Current Commission (BCC), South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, and Western Indian Ocean Fisheries Database). The Steering Committee recognized that FIRMS had built strong foundations for global reporting on fisheries status and trends and that it had met expectations of most partners. It acknowledged the ongoing progress towards timelier reporting, e.g. with the forthcoming International Council for the Exploration of the Sea web-services, or the harvesting capacities developed for serving the Chimaera portal under the SmartFish project. These foundations can now be exploited to expand reporting coverage, and to respond to target audience needs, through various pathways:

- Increased membership: the meeting acknowledged SPRFMO’s interest to join the partnership, as well as WIOFish’s willingness to initiate discussions with the Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission towards a statute of associate partner.
- Strategic collaboration with large marine ecosystem initiatives and programmes is seen as a way to strengthen national reporting in FIRMS, and the Committee encouraged the developing of experience with the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems and Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (where the focus is on positioning FIRMS as tool to support adaptive fisheries management), and welcomed BCC’s intention to follow a similar process.
- FSC9 supported the proposed project of a Global record of stocks and fisheries (a component of BlueBRIDGE), which will federate knowledge on status/trends of stocks and fisheries across various sources, and as such is expected to offer key services to stakeholders involved in “regional/global state of stocks indicators”, as well as public and private actors involved in ecolabelling, traceability and sustainable fisheries.

- The Committee endorsed the renewal of the FIRMS website which is expected to better serve expectations of the general public, in particular through the proposed stocks and fisheries maps viewer.

Judging from satisfactory activity reports from the majority of its members, which include information contributions and attendance at e-meetings of technical working groups (e-TWGs), the Committee was not overly concerned regarding low attendance of its members at this meeting. It recognized that low attendance also resulted from a conjunction of institutional and personal conflicting agendas, and finance-driven priorities. Nonetheless, FSC9 urged the Secretariat to re-engage some partners in order to harness them on the above-described goals. The incoming chairperson is Mr Neil Campbell (NAFO) and vice chairperson Ms Nancy Cummings (WECAFC). FSC10 will be held in Rome in 2017, and a technical working group (TWG) might be organized in connection with the twenty-fifth session of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP25) in February 2016.

Full report: ftp://ftp.fao.org/FI/DOCUMENT/FIGIS_FIRMS/2015/FSC9_Report.pdf

SPRFMO considerations:

Should SPRFMO become a member of the FIRMS (Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System)?

FIRMS is a partnership of RFBs and other relevant organisations that share scientific and management information on marine fishery resources. The FIRMS system is maintained by FAO as part of the Fisheries Global Information System (FIGIS). FAO serves both as the Secretariat and as a partner. Information provided by the partners is organized in a database and published in the form of fact sheets. These are accessible to all users without restrictions. <http://firms.fao.org/firms/en>

Currently, FIRMS has 14 partners and 7 observers. The partners are: CCAMLR, CCSBT, EC DG MARE, FAO Fisheries Dept., GFCM, IATTC, ICCAT, ICES, IOTC, NAFO, NASCO, NEAFC, SEAFDEC, and SEAFO. The observers are: BCC, IWC, NAMMCO, CPPS, SPC, SPRFMO and WCPFC. It is intended to broaden the partnership to also include national institutions and interest has been expressed so far by fisheries agencies from Australia, Canada, France, Namibia, USA, and Viet Nam.

The main objective of the FIRMS [partnership arrangement](#) is to establish a framework between the Partners by (a) building a community of responsible institutions that will report in an objective way on fisheries status and trends and (b) collating, managing and disseminating information through the internet.

Principles that apply are: (1) the information on fisheries is shared and appropriately disseminated; and (2) contributions remain within the full control and ownership of the responsible Partner including control of what and when information is made available (i.e. preserving the originator's data confidentiality protocols), and how it is processed. Responsibilities assumed by the Partners mainly consist in contributing information related to fish stock assessments and fishery management and in participating in the FIRMS Steering Committee meetings.

The benefits to the partners are seen in improved transparency and dissemination of relevant fishery information, and in gaining access to FIRMS editorial tools as well as to restricted information (e.g. GIS layers) and to relevant services of FAO, e.g. training in the use of FIRMS and other information products. Partners also have influence on the overall development of the FIRMS database structure, content and access policies. The costs for the system are borne by FAO. Each Partner submits the agreed information in the formats required and also covers travel to FSC meetings. Withdrawal from the Arrangement is possible at any time with three months' notice.

If SPRFMO were to become a member, the Scientific Committee would be requested to provide guidance regarding the format and content of the initial fish stock fact sheets; these would then be

updated annually by the Secretariat and submitted to FIRMS. The fact sheets would incorporate information already contained in the SPRFMO species profiles. In addition to the scientific information, the Secretariat would annually submit updated SPRFMO CMMs to the FIRMS.

In view of the above, the SC is invited to comment and/or make recommendations on the following questions:

- Should SPRFMO formally join the FIRMS partnership?
- Does the SC have any comments related to FIRMS generally?

CWP – Intersessional Fishery Subject Group meeting - Summary

Craig Loveridge attended the CWP intersessional fishery subject group meeting held in Swakopmund, Namibia 23-24 and 27 February 2015. Four participating organisations attended as well as 3 observers. Topics that were discussed included:

- Review of the current status of the CWP handbook revision
- Dissemination of the revised handbook on the CWP web page
- Enhancement of the socio-economic section
- Elaborating the section on standards for GIS data and geospatial presentation
- Streamlining reporting of national statistics
- Fisheries commodities classifications
- Vessels, gear and effort statistics
- “Fishery” identification
- Role of the CWP in harmonizing/standardising fisheries data
- CWP Membership and direction

Full report: ftp://ftp.fao.org/FI/DOCUMENT/cwp/Cwp-int_2015/CWP-IFS-2015_Report.pdf

SPRFMO considerations:

Should SPRFMO formally join the CWP?

The Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP) ([Legal foundation](#)) provides a mechanism to coordinate fishery statistical programmes of regional fishery bodies and other inter-governmental organizations with a remit for fishery statistics. It has 3 main functions:

- Continually review fishery statistics requirements for research, policy-making and management;
- Agree on standard concepts, definitions, classifications and methodologies for the collection and collation of fishery statistics;
- Make proposals for the coordination and streamlining of statistical activities among relevant intergovernmental organizations

Since 1960 the CWP has served as the leading international forum for agreeing on common definitions, classifications and standards for the collection of fishery statistics. One of the CWP’s most influential works is the [Handbook of fishery statistical standards](#) which is intended to cover the concepts, definitions and related matters as applied to fishery statistics by the international agencies. Most RFMOs are members (CCAMLR, CCSBT, GFCM, IOTC, IATTC, ICCAT, IWC, NASCO, NEAFC, NAFO, SEAFO, and WCPFC) as well as many advisory fishery bodies (FAO, ICES, NACA, SPC and SEAFDEC) and other relevant agencies (EU/Eurostat, OECD). FAO serves as the CWP Secretariat and also as a participating organisation. In 2010, the CWP split into fisheries and aquaculture groups.

It is important to note that the recommendations and decisions of the CWP are not binding on participating organizations. However, by integrating and coordinating the statistical programmes among organizations, the CWP made possible the standardization of statistical reporting systems, which resulted in an improvement of both the quantity and quality of fishery statistics. The CWP defined the FAO major fishing areas still in use today, it developed the catch and effort questionnaires used by FAO to collect fishery information from over 200 countries and over 1000 species, made a major contribution to the specification of measures of fishing effort by gear type and agreed on concepts, definitions and classifications for fishing fleet statistics including the International Standard Statistical Classification of Fishing Vessels (ISSCFV). The standards recommended by the CWP are in use by Regional Fisheries Bodies including the SPRFMO.

Changes in the nature of the fisheries and in the needs of users of fishery statistics necessitate frequent reviews of the statistical systems. Therefore, in recent years the CWP has not only reviewed the existing codes and standards in fishery statistics but also discussed a broad number of topics in the context of modern fisheries management, e.g. the use of VMS data for scientific purposes and a harmonisation of VMS data; Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX); electronic logbook systems; catch documentation schemes; criteria used for the determination of IUU fishing; data required for an ecosystem approach to fisheries management; issues related to incidental catch (by-catch) and discards; socio-economic fisheries information; a global fishing vessel list; and fishery statistical issues arising from climate change.

The rules for accession to the CWP are uncomplicated and no agreement has to be signed. Upon request, a two thirds majority of already participating organisations may admit other intergovernmental organizations having competence in fishery statistics. Withdrawal is equally straightforward; three-month notice is sufficient. An organisation can send up to 5 fishery data experts to a CWP meeting (normally, participants are staff members of the organisation but occasionally competent scientists have participated also).

As a member of the CWP, a regional fishery organisation is part of a global collaborative effort. It can influence the agenda of the CWP, advise the CWP about its relevant activities and needs, and ensure that the specific requirements of its region and fisheries are being considered by the CWP. Also, a RFB can inform its Members about current relevant discussions within the CWP in a timely manner and provide prompt feedback from its organisation to the CWP.

The CWP meets in full session approximately every two years and carries out intersessional and ad hoc meetings as required. Travel expenses have to be borne by the members and FAO provides technical and secretariat support. Other than a commitment to collaborate no obligations arise for members. The duration of a CWP meeting normally is 3 days. To alleviate the time and financial burden of traveling, the CWP meetings are organised in conjunction with the FIRMS Steering Committee meeting, and, if possible, with COFI.

In view of the above, the SC is invited to comment and/or make recommendations on the following questions:

- Should SPRFMO become a member of the CWP?
- Does the SC have any comments related to CWP generally?

FAO – VME Processes and practices workshop

Craig Loveridge and Geoff Tingley attended the FAO VME processes and practices workshop held in Swakopmund, Namibia 2-5 March 2015. Other participants were drawn from the FAO, NEAFC, NAFO, SEAFO, SPRFMO, GCFM, SPC, SPRFMO and SIODFA. The workshop aimed to facilitate understanding of the work that has been done globally in RFMOs, enable the sharing of experience among the regions and assist with the upcoming UNGA review on bottom fisheries in 2016 (UNGA Res. 66/68, para. 137). FAO is compiling a publication entitled VME Processes and Practices in ABNJ detailing the development of the assessment and management of VMEs in each region to date. This will form a sister volume to the Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas that was published by FAO in 2009. FAO also plans to update the Worldwide Review publication using information covering the period 2007-2013. The objectives of the Swakopmund workshop were to:

- Present and discuss draft regional chapters on the VME process and practices,
- Outline revisions required for each chapter, and,
- Agree on a plan of work for completing the drafts and a deadline for publishing the document.

A first draft of each chapter had been prepared by the FAO prior to the meeting, which was passed to the representative(s) of the participating RFMOs to review, provide references and return to the FAO. The South Pacific chapter was reviewed by Andrew Penney, Geoff Tingley and Craig Loveridge and is currently within the FAO publications process.

Kim Duckworth, the SPRFMO Secretariat and Malcolm Clark provided comments and input into the SPRFMO chapter within in the FAO 2009 world-wide review.

- The SC is asked to note the work that has been done as a result of the VME Workshop.
- Would the SC like to nominate people for involvement in the update of the Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas?

NZ South Pacific VME project

During 2013 the SPRFMO Secretariat was invited to become a member of the Stakeholder Advisory Group created for the South Pacific VME Project funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. This project is being administered and undertaken by the National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research (NIWA) in collaboration with scientists and students from Victoria University Wellington and the Marine Conservation Institute (USA). The project aims to answer the question: What are the vulnerable marine ecosystems adjacent to New Zealand's exclusive economic zone and can habitat prediction models be used effectively to determine their characteristics and spatial extent?

Johanne Fischer attended the most recent stakeholder meeting at the NIWA site on 24 February 2015. There are generally 2 meetings per year and Craig Loveridge has attended previous meetings. The stakeholder advisory group aims to:

- bring together stakeholder representatives;
- Maintain connections among stakeholders on the topic of VMEs;
- Provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information for the benefit of the South Pacific VME Project.

The following groups have been also identified as Stakeholders - Project Scientists, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Australia), National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (USA), Deepwater Group (NZ), New Zealand High Seas Fishing Group, Seafood NZ, Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (NZ), Ministry for Primary Industries (NZ), Department of Conservation (NZ), Ministry for the Environment (NZ), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ) .

- The SC is asked to note that the Secretariat is currently part of the stakeholder group and invited to comment (noting that VMEs are on a later agenda item).