

oneFish, many uses

The oneFish Community Directory is a new Web-based tool for researchers and academics working in the area of fisheries

The oneFish Community Directory is a Web-based knowledge management system that draws together a broad cross-section of stakeholders within the fisheries and aquatic research community. The primary aim of oneFish is to raise the profile of fisheries and aquatic research, and reinforce its impact on responsible fisheries development.

oneFish represents a fundamental advance in devolved management information systems. It responds to long sought-after information, communication and networking needs of the many agencies currently actively engaged in the complex process of promoting more responsive fisheries and aquatic resources research and development. These include donors, NGOs, national aquatic research centres (NARS), international organizations such as FAO, universities, consultancies and others. The design of oneFish has been demand-led in that it integrates into one interactive system many of the communication ideas and needs articulated by these organizations.

It allows users to contribute information in electronic form to specific subject areas, including by email for those with limited Web access; and to search and retrieve information, files and other linkages across the whole oneFish domain. Institutions and special interest groups will be able to use oneFish to develop discussion groups and create 'virtual' offices; and many subject specialist Topic Editors will assist in the administration of specialized topics by editing, adding and ranking the information submitted to them.

The software underlying oneFish is being developed by SIFAR and the FAO Fisheries Department in partnership with the

World Agriculture Information Centre (WAICENT). The design team has spent the last year developing a prototype which is now undergoing intensive testing by a small group of fisheries specialists. Version1 will be released during April 2000.

Many of you who use the Internet will already be familiar with directories or portals such as Yahoo! and Netscape. Over the last few years, these have played a significant role in revolutionizing the ways in which vast amounts of information are both managed and accessed on the Internet. You may also be familiar with the new, 'open-content' directories like Netscape's Open Directory Project which recognize the need to devolve the management of information to the user community. By making available powerful Web infrastructure, they allow users to define and manage their own information needs, a strategy which has proven massively successful, as it enhances users' ability to obtain relevant information more easily and efficiently from an ever increasing morass of online electronic data.

The oneFish Community Directory draws on the design philosophy of these open-content directories; in fact, it goes much further. Rather like a thematic library, its specialist focus will ensure both quality of content and relevance to user needs.

Powerful repository

oneFish is a powerful repository for information based around specific subject areas; however, in addition to linking Websites, it permits the uploading of most current electronic media (that file on your C drive; that bibliography sitting in your dusty diskette box; your favourite ListServe group; GIS maps, and so on) and

the creation of multiple relationships between these; it enables the establishment of virtual offices from which individuals and organizations can manage their knowledge (for example, projects, contacts) and share it, sometimes selectively, with others with similar interests.

References to information that is not in electronic form can be added, as can links to electronic information stored elsewhere. In addition, oneFish will allow submission of notes and comments on other people's contributions, and the establishment and participation in discussions and debates on their own and related topics. Finally, opinions on current issues, news items and relevant diary dates can be added at any topic level in oneFish, thus enabling clearly identifiable, subject-specific headline pages.

Volunteer Topic Editors will assist in administration, by editing, adding, collating and ranking the information submitted to them. oneFish will deploy a comprehensive suite of editorial tools, allowing these Topic Editors to collaborate in the administration and development of the system.

The Topic Editors will be responsible for the content and quality of their own particular topic areas, culling out the bad and obsolete material, and keeping only the best.

Although oneFish will provide the opportunity for everyone to contribute, like any community, it requires ground rules. An Editor-in-Chief is responsible for developing and managing the top-level categories, overseeing the creation of new sub-categories, and removing inappropriate items. It will also be the role of the Chief Editor to facilitate the selection of topical material for news, create user polls and update the fisheries calendar.

To accommodate the many different ways in which individuals perceive things, oneFish offers several innovative approaches to information retrieval, one of which is the introduction of 'worldviews'. oneFish worldviews are multiple-topic trees, each of which leads the user down a unique pathway, but ultimately arriving at the same piece of information.

Different pathways

These pathways include: Top-down—a more formal approach to fisheries research and development, and Bottom-up—a more collaborative, people-centred and participatory view. Other worldviews are Geography; Ecosystem; Species; and People. While scientists might prefer Ecosystems or Species, field workers may find Bottom-up more relevant; institutional workers may find Top-down more appropriate to their needs. If you wish to

find information on a particular institution or country, then the People and Geography worldviews may make sense to you. In addition to all these pathways, a powerful search engine will facilitate simple and advanced searching and retrieval across the whole oneFish domain.

While oneFish builds on the design philosophy of Internet open-content directories, the overall concept of oneFish is a natural step forward in the development of aquatic information systems. For many years, various, often disparate, groups within the fisheries research community have been developing aquatic information systems—some on specialized subject areas, some for special formats or types of information—and providing, usually limited, access to these information systems through various means.

The most successful and enduring of these information systems, for example, the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) database, are those that foster input, co-operation and participation by those actually involved in fisheries and aquatic research.

Fisheries and aquatic bulletin boards and discussion lists are other examples of information or communication services that have grown to be very well used. Again, this is because they provide an avenue for those working within a specific thematic area to communicate, discuss and proffer their ideas and opinions, and feel that they are influencing the debate.

The concept of oneFish builds on this participatory approach. oneFish does not compete with other Internet resources—it unifies them within a holistic fisheries portal, while simultaneously providing context for them within relevant subject areas. In this sense, oneFish's approach to compiling and linking diverse information types from disparate sources is truly innovative.

oneFish is thus seen as an inclusive and facilitating communications tool which, through raising the profile of fisheries research, will encourage participatory approaches to disseminating and sharing of information.

oneFish will offer a new online Fisheries Project Information System (FIPIS) with several more dimensions to the original system operated from FAO. From the outset, oneFish will include over 5,500 project records imported from the old FIPIS. Soon after, project information from several major fisheries donor agencies, international institutions and projects involved in fisheries research will be added. This will provide a greater visibility of what research and development is being undertaken in the fisheries and aquatic sector, and who is supporting, funding and implementing that research.

oneFish will allow researchers and scientists on active projects to foster awareness of their work, and to more speedily disseminate interim results of research, including field notes, working papers and other data. It will also allow users to establish links between any project and any related information.

Access to the World Wide Web by many of the poorer developing countries is currently very limited or non-existent. Nevertheless, the explosion in global telecommunications, fuelled particularly by private sector investment and lowering costs, can not be ignored. There are also plans to provide regular CD-ROM outputs from oneFish from early 2001, as well as the additional facility of selective dissemination by email. This will ensure even wider access in areas where using the Internet is not yet feasible.

In addition to its role as a global facilitator of information flows, oneFish is expected to play an ever growing role for staffs of fisheries projects, in fisheries NARS, local fisheries organizations and NGOs.

Growing networking

Already, in many countries, local organizations and NGOs are using the Web and email for fostering more effective communications. Day by day, the numbers are accelerating. Linking these groups together will eventually serve to facilitate the greater integration of research with more general development objectives, such as the sustainable and economic use of resources, poverty alleviation, and the development of research proposals and projects that are

more responsive to the needs and capacities of all stakeholders.

oneFish aims to dissolve the traditional boundaries between research and the pressing needs of sustainable development. As oneFish develops, it will provide the fisheries research community with the largest fully integrated global collection of online information on fisheries research and development. oneFish will be a tool for all and, as a result, it will grow and develop according to the needs and requirements of those stakeholders, a truly responsive approach to the information needs of the fisheries and aquatic research community.

oneFish development is currently being sponsored by DFID (UK), Norway, ICEIDA, CIDA, IDRC, The World Bank, UNDP, and FAO. For more information, contact: oneFish Project, Support Unit for International Fisheries and Aquatic Research, FAO Fisheries Department, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, Rome 00100 ITALY. (www.oneFish.org)

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