

**The Establishment of an Australia-Wide Register  
for the  
Dissemination of Fisheries and Related Software**

(FIRTA 86/75)

## INTRODUCTION

The Fisheries Software Register (FSR) was initiated by Dr Ian Woodward (Iotas Pty Ltd) late in 1985. To date 12 issues have been published. FIRTA funding has been provided to cover computing and printing costs and to enable an electronic version of the Register to be established.

## PROGRESS

The FSR now has approximately 135 paying subscribers from around the world. Of these, some 80% are from the Australasian region, 15% from North America and the remaining 5% from Europe, the Philippines and the West Indies. New subscribers are being added at the rate of about 1 per week.

While there has been considerable interest shown in the FSR, this has been almost entirely from readers wanting to extract information from the register. The initial aims of the Register were based on the concept of mutual benefit through software sharing. At present, it appears that Australian fisheries scientists are somewhat reluctant to share programs they have developed. This is undoubtedly due largely to the program developers not regarding their documentation and interfacing as being suitable for general use. In fact, it is this very problem that the FSR is attempting to address. We are therefore faced with a Catch-22 situation, where scientists are reluctant to contribute their software because it is not suitable for general use while the FSR is attempting to encourage those same scientists to develop their programs for just that general use.

This problem is not confined to fisheries programmers. As illustrated by recent articles in *Computing Australia* (Dec, 1986), Australian software developers in general are behind the United States in terms of developing software with an eye to later dissemination. This is not surprising but it is also unnecessary given the current computer communication facilities available to most scientific institutions.

The importance of communication led to the changes in capital items purchased through the grant, as approved by F.I.R.C.. Rather than concentrating on paper-based methods of information sharing only, Iotas is also setting up an electronic bulletin board using the IBM-AT compatible NEC APCIV that has recently been purchased through the grant.

The bulletin board, tentatively called Wetware, is being set up using Fidonet, an international network of bulletin boards. This will allow Wetware users to communicate with over 1000 nodes world wide, including SESAME, a fisheries bulletin board in the United States. The Wetware system will be housed permanently at the Research Laboratories of the Tasmanian Department of Sea Fisheries, rather than at the office of Iotas, as first proposed. This will provide a more secure connection with fisheries research; department staff have also offered to help with the maintenance of Wetware.

As the number of FSR subscribers possessing modems increases, the publication rate of the paper version of the FSR will be reduced. For the foreseeable future, the FSR will be published quarterly. The experience of the past year has shown that this would be an adequate rate and would allow a greater quantity and range of information to be presented in each issue.

The future development of the FSR and Wetware will proceed by 'feel', adjusting to the perceived requirements of the users. While the contribution rate to the FSR has been less than hoped for, the response to the concept and aims of the Register have been encouraging and its future appears sound.

#### EXPENDITURE

The following capital items have been purchased so far using grant money:

One NEC APCIV (IBM AT compatible) microcomputer with monitor and 40Mb internal hard disk.....	\$9600
One NetCom 123A autodial, autoanswer, autobaud select, autodisconnect electronic modem.....	\$1818
Total expenditure to date.....	\$11418

#### APPENDIX

Copies of the first 10 issues of the Fisheries Software Register are attached.