

# Fisheries Software Register

**T**he concept of a fisheries software register has probably arisen independently in the minds of almost every fisheries scientist who has ever turned on a computer. It makes a good deal of sense to gather together information about computer programs that may be of use to people other than those responsible for their development. A central library, accessible to anyone, would go a long way to minimize the needless 'reinvention of the wheel' that characterizes the programming world (in any field).

During 1986, an independent Australian computer consultancy, Iotas, published a series of monthly newsletters that was aimed at the creation of such a library. There was considerable interest from around Australia and also from other parts of the world. Approximately 150 subscribers received the periodical which was called, appropriately enough, the Fisheries Software Register. We were hoping to make the content of the Register self-supporting in that the number of 'extractions' would be balanced by the number of 'contributions'. However, if the number of subscribers can be taken as the number of extractors, the ratio of contributions over the year to extractions was less than 5%, clearly a long way from equilibrium!

Iotas received support for the Register from the Australian Fishing Industry

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Research Trust Account and these funds have been used to set up an electronic bulletin board along lines similar to those of SESAME in the United States. While this bulletin board will initially not reach as many people as the mailed newsletter, we hope that it will be more effective from the collation point of view. Rather than relying on an editor to collect and then disseminate articles, the electronic Register will largely maintain itself. A sysop will take the place of the editor but will only be required to conduct general housekeeping tasks. We will continue to publish occasional newsletters as material comes to hand.

The electronic bulletin board, known as BULLFISH, will be maintained at the Research Laboratories of the Tasmanian Department of Sea Fisheries, GPO Box 619F, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 7001. It can be reached (soon) using your modem by dialing Australia-002-279171. If you have difficulties with BULLFISH, please bear with us through our teething period. For more information, write to the sysops, Dr. Ian Woodward and Robert Kennedy at the above address. We would love to hear from you!

As a general comment, it may be of interest to note the lesson to be learned from our experience with the Fisheries Software Register. Essentially, it appears that a central library cannot easily be created in a vacuum. It does not matter how excited people may become with the *idea* of a central library, the building of that library is another matter entirely. A book library is not very useful without books, even when there is an almost limitless number of readers who would love to borrow books from that library. The same comments apply to a computer program library.

That is why organizations such as ICLARM are so important. By having an established organization whose members have, by definition, an active interest in sharing information of one kind or another, there is a pre-existing foundation for building a software library. As someone who has tried to build a library first in order to attract users later, I can strongly recommend the opposite approach! Anything that ICLARM, or any other fisheries organization, attempts to do in the way of establishing a software register, or similar, should be supported to the full—supported by contributing information on software that you have developed.

*ICLARM has begun a software project—see p. 4. Ed.*

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Naga, the ICLARM Quarterly publishes information/data on all phases of fisheries and other living aquatic resources, including research or project summaries, news, notices of new publications and upcoming workshops, conferences, symposia, and courses, summary reports of meetings, and news of personnel. The editor invites articles and reviews, but reserves the right to accept or reject papers and to shorten them to meet space requirements. Authors may order reprints of articles published at cost. Opinions expressed in a signed article are those of the author/s and not necessarily those of the management of ICLARM.

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