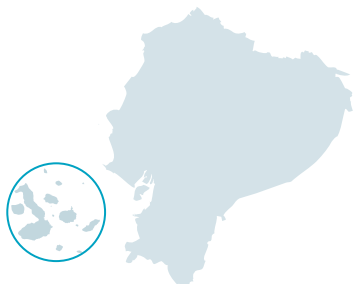




Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



**REPUBLIC
OF ECUADOR**

In cooperation with:



2022 Summary Assessment Report

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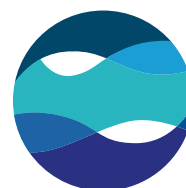
Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this assessment. All information was believed to be correct as of September 2022. Nevertheless, the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) cannot accept responsibility for the consequences resulting from the use of this assessment or its contents by others.

Furthermore, in conducting this assessment, the FiTI did not investigate the veracity or completeness of the published information and did not make any judgement about the integrity of the information or practices disclosed.

We would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who contributed to the various stages of research and preparation of this assessment.

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) is a global multi-stakeholder initiative that strengthens transparency and collaboration in marine fisheries management.

By making fisheries management more transparent and inclusive, the FiTI promotes informed public debates on fisheries policies and supports the long-term contribution of the sector to national economies and the well-being of citizens and businesses that depend on a healthy marine environment.



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www.fiti.global

TAKING STOCK: ONLINE TRANSPARENCY OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT INFORMATION *assesses the level of information that national authorities in Ecuador publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.*



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Ecuador's TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information assessment consists of this Summary Assessment Report, as well as an in-depth Detailed Assessment Report.

Both reports, as well as information on the methodology, can be found at:
www.fiti.global/taking-stock



SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES NEED TRANSPARENCY

For millennia, those who dedicated themselves to fishing, whether for food, income or recreation, did not need to worry about the sustainable management of this natural resource. Fish stocks replenished themselves with ease. **This is no longer the case.** The ocean is under increasing threats from myriad impacts, like climate change, pollution, and overfishing.

Governments have the fundamental obligation to manage common resources, such as fish, on behalf of their citizens. But this invokes a complex challenge: to ensure that fishing and fish trade contribute to income, employment, food and nutrition for millions of people, while conserving marine biodiversity for present and future generations.

Public availability of information is critical to achieving sustainable fisheries. Yet, transparency in fisheries management has not been a priority. Many governments do not disclose basic information on their fisheries sectors, such as laws, permits, fishing agreements, stock assessments, financial contributions, catch data and subsidies. Additionally, there are widespread concerns that companies are not consistently reporting accurate information on catches, fishing practices and payments to governments. The data that is already publicly available is too often incomplete, outdated, unverified, or not readily accessible.



Lack of basic transparency could be seen as an underlying facilitator of all the negative aspects of the global fisheries sector – IUU fishing, fleet overcapacity, overfishing, ill-directed subsidies, corruption, poor fisheries management decisions, etc. A more transparent sector would place a spotlight on such activities whenever they occur, making it harder for perpetrators to hide behind the current veil of secrecy and requiring immediate action to be taken to correct the wrong.

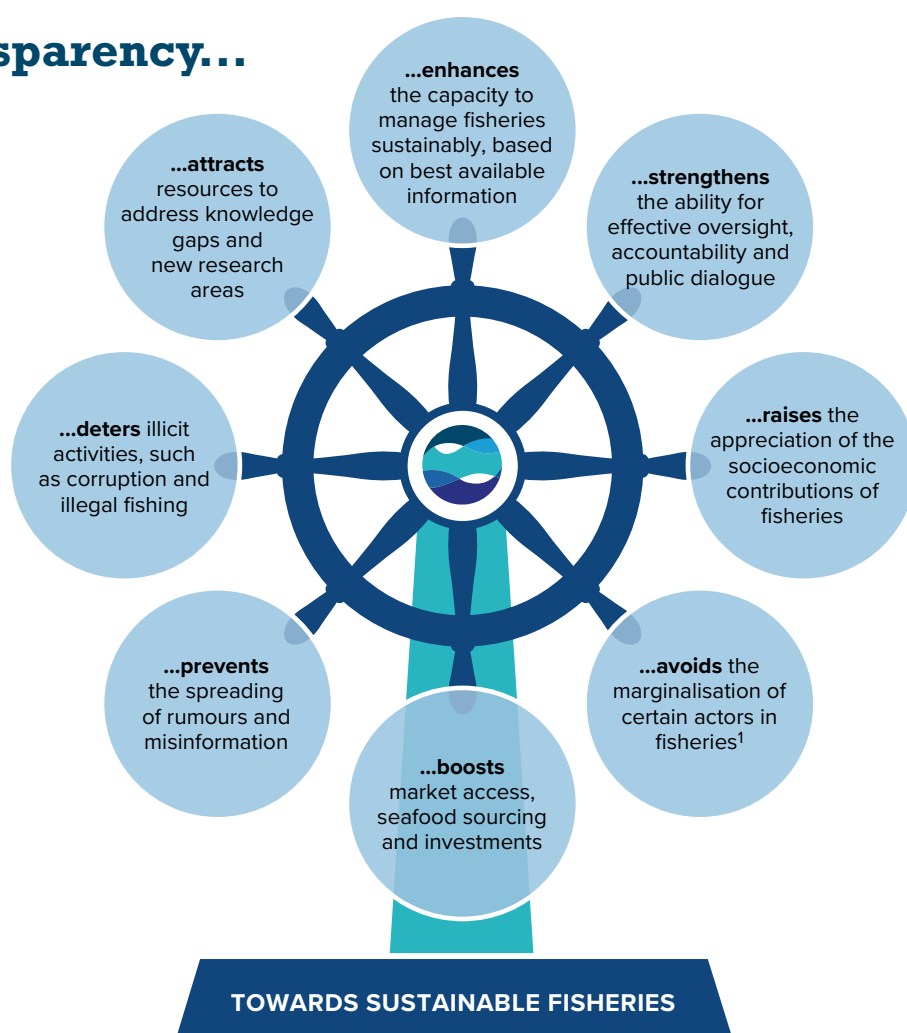
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010



Enhancing transparency in fisheries management appeals to all stakeholders that appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries – whether that relates to food and nutrition security, employment, the value to national economies, or the cultural importance of fishing.

Transparency in fisheries management yields multiple benefits, and their relevance and applicability vary depending on the national context.

Transparency...



Promoting these positive features of fisheries lies at the heart of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI).



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

¹ In particular small-scale fisheries and women.

Transparency is not voluntary. It is a government's duty and a citizen's right!

The provision of accessible, timely and credible information on a country's marine fisheries is increasingly becoming a **legal requirement for governments**, stemming, among other things, from Freedom of Information laws. Such laws are frequently based on three key principles: public participation, access to justice and access to information. The last of these principles implies that the public should be able to obtain environmental information (including information about their country's fisheries sector) with only limited, explicitly defined exceptions arising from justifiable confidentiality claims and security matters.



In the case of Ecuador, access to information is a fundamental right recognized in article 81 of the Constitution, and the Organic Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information (No. 24). This law details the scope of the information that must be disseminated by public institutions in its article 7, specifying that "the information must be organised and published by themes, items, in sequential or chronological order, etc., without grouping or generalizing, in such a way that the citizen can be correctly informed and without confusion." Likewise, the principle of disclosure of public information (Article 1) which defines access to information as a right and all institutions that generate or possess information of interest are responsible, with certain exceptions for confidentiality reasons.



- Since 2018, Ecuador is a member country of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**², demonstrating the government's commitment to become more open to its citizens by implementing principles and practices that promote transparency and access to information, as well as civic participation, accountability and public integrity.
- In 2020, Ecuador joined the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)**³, which is the global standard for good governance of oil, gas and mineral resources.
- In December 2021, the government of Ecuador communicated its commitment to join the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)** to promote transparency in the marine fisheries sector.



The importance of public access to government information is also emphasised in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 16.10 of the SDGs calls on all states to adopt legislation or policies guaranteeing the right to information, which is essential not only for the achievement of Goal 16, but is an enabler to achieving other SDGs.

² <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/ecuador>

³ <https://eiti.org/ecuador>

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the first time that Ecuador has been assessed regarding the online transparency of its marine fisheries sector.

This TAKING STOCK assessment covers 12 thematic areas of fisheries management, as defined by the FiTI Standard.⁴

The **FiTI Standard** is the only internationally recognised framework that defines what information on fisheries management should be published online by national authorities. The **FiTI Standard** was developed over two years in a global multi-stakeholder endeavour. Its objective is to contribute to the sustainability of marine fisheries by increasing the accessibility and credibility of national fisheries management information.



For this assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been broken down into a total of **38 transparency elements**.

⁴ <https://www.fiti.global/fiti-standard>

⁵ An overview of these 38 transparency elements can be found in the section '[Key findings](#)'

This assessment evaluates whether basic information on Ecuador's marine fisheries sector is **freely available** on government websites, whether it is **up to date** and whether it is **easy to find**.⁶



Additionally, this assessment:

- Considers whether information is published in a way that renders it easy to **(re)use**, e.g. to download, search and filter;
- Documents instances of **'good transparency practices'**, where published information allows non-experts to draw reliable conclusions;⁷ and
- Proposes practical **recommendations** to improve online transparency around Ecuador's marine fisheries sector.



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This assessment is intended to support national authorities in Ecuador to improve transparency in fisheries management and to stimulate interest in fisheries among a wide range of stakeholders.

It also establishes a comprehensive benchmark for evaluating progress over time.



⁶ For more information about the assessment's methodology, please refer to <https://www.fiti.global/taking-stock>

⁷ For example, national authorities may utilise innovative techniques to help visualise information, such as online information systems or fact sheets.



Public disclosure of information cannot be directly equated with actual progress towards sustainable fisheries management.

A lack of transparency in fisheries management is not always a deliberate state of affairs. Governments with poor levels of transparency are often viewed negatively, as if driven by the desire to hide information from public scrutiny. However, what may be perceived as opacity or secretive practices is often the result of other factors, such as the complexity of the fisheries sector, a lack of technology, expertise and staff, or legal concerns. Some government ministries or national agencies, particularly those that are underfunded, may not prioritise transparency. Unfortunately, these arguments can also be used as a convenient excuse to avoid scrutiny.

A low level of transparency in this TAKING STOCK assessment may not be a sign of wrongdoing, but rather highlights an opportunity for national authorities to enhance disclosure to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational success regarding the sustainable management of marine fisheries.

Transparency should also not be misinterpreted as a direct indicator for ethical behaviour, such as honesty and integrity.

This assessment is therefore not an end in itself. Instead, it takes stock of current disclosure practices against an internationally recognised transparency framework – the FiTI Standard – with a view to starting a conversation with all relevant stakeholders in Ecuador's marine fisheries sector.

The ambition is that this and future **TAKING STOCK** assessments will contribute to making government transparency the global norm in fisheries management.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON MARINE FISHERIES IN ECUADOR



Length of coastline:⁸
2,859 km

Exclusive fishing zone:⁹
1,079,901 km²

Marine Protected Area:
144,123 km² | 13.35%



Recent developments relevant to Ecuador's marine fisheries sector



Following the commitment made at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) by Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso, in January 2022 the Galapagos Marine Reserve has been expanded by 60,000 km² of marine protection.



In October 2022, Ecuador's National Multi-Stakeholder Group for FiTI was launched, comprised of representatives from the public sector, private sector, and civil society. This is the first group of its kind in Latin America, demonstrating Ecuador's leadership in the region in promoting fisheries transparency.



Ecuador's fisheries authority published the Regulations of the Organic Law for the Development of Aquaculture and Fisheries, which is key to sustainable fisheries management. The publication of this instrument had been pending since October 2020.

⁸ Corresponding to the continental coastline (1,603 km of estuarine coastline and 1,256 km of ocean-front coastline), not considering island coasts.
⁹ Including the EEZs of the island territories.

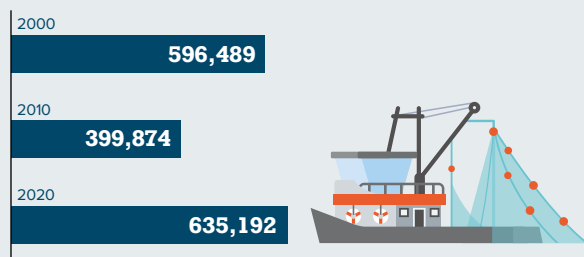


REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR

Ecuador's marine fisheries sector plays a pivotal role in fulfilling the economic, employment, food security, and nutrition needs of its citizens.¹⁰

Capture fisheries production

(tonnes, live weight)

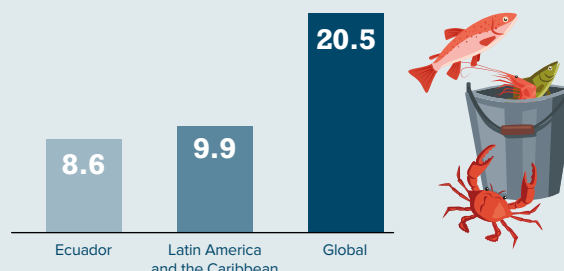


Ecuador is the 6th largest fishing nation in Latin America and the Caribbean (based on catch volume)

Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022

Fish available for consumption

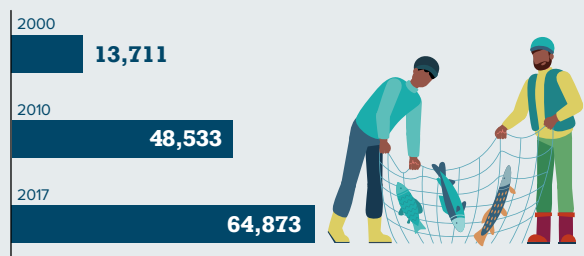
kg/per capita



Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022, FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile – Ecuador 2019

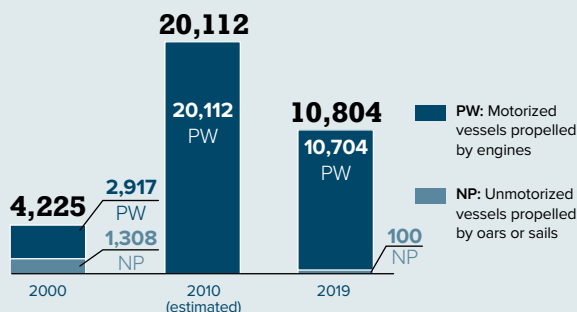
Number of fishers

(estimates)



Source: FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics 2019 (published in 2021)

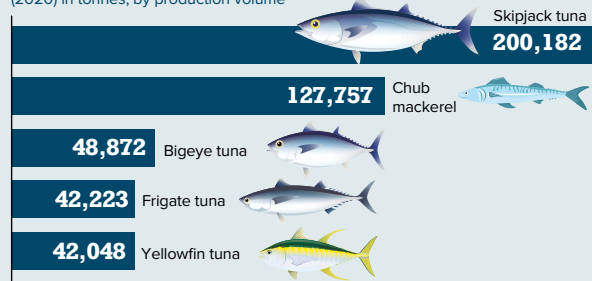
Number of fishing vessels



Source: FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics 2019 (published in 2021)

Top 5 species

(2020) in tonnes, by production volume



Source: FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics 2020 (published in 2022)

Export of fish and fish products

Ecuador is the **2nd largest exporter** of fishery commodities in the Americas, after Chile.



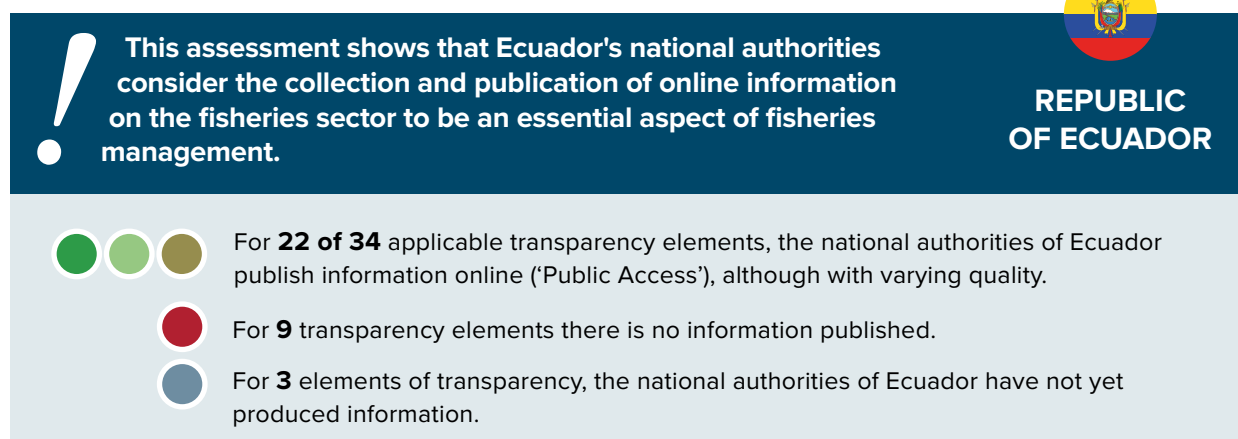
Source: FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics 2020 (published in 2022)

¹⁰ This information reflects international statistics (e.g. from the United Nations FAO), which in some cases may differ from national statistics. In addition, this report does not state the contribution of Ecuador's fisheries sector to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although this is a common way of expressing the economic value of fisheries, GDP is not sufficient for fully representing the overall social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of the sector.



KEY FINDINGS

PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



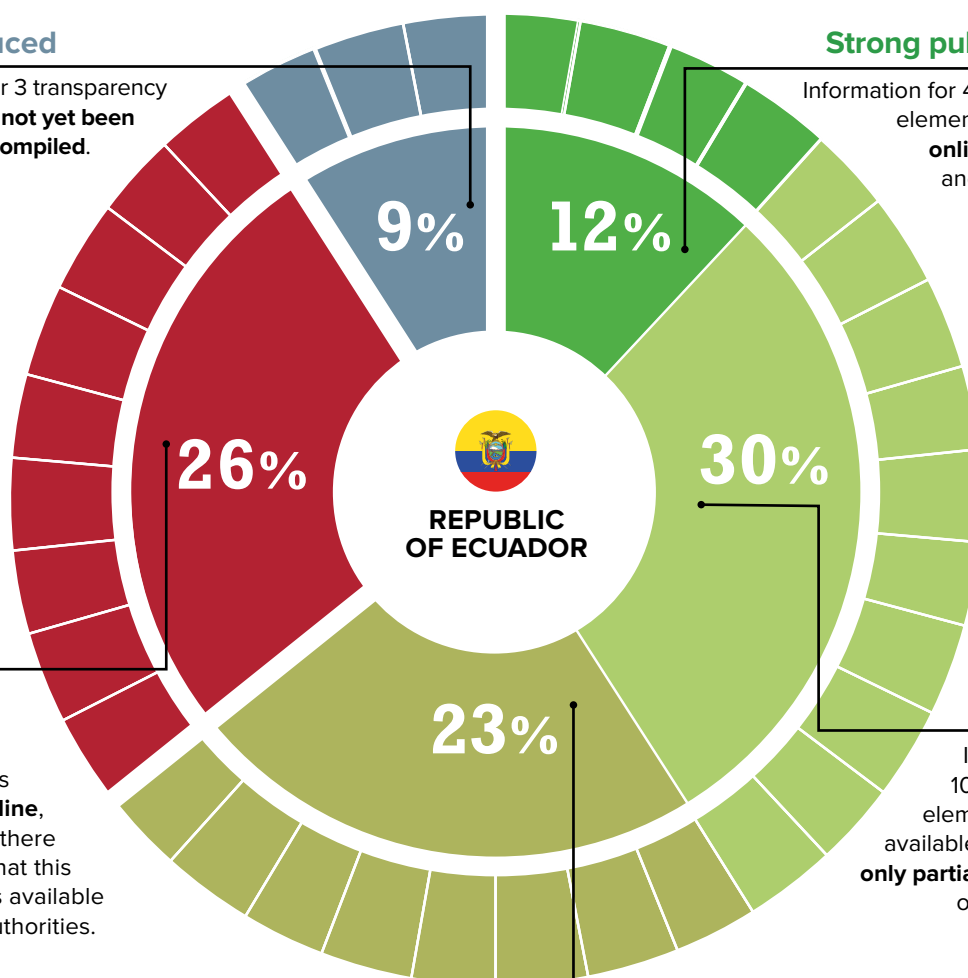
Not produced

Information for 3 transparency elements has **not yet been collected or compiled**.

No public access

For 9 transparency elements, **no information** is published **online**, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities.

4 of the 38 transparency elements are considered as **not applicable** to Ecuador's marine fisheries sector (see [Annex](#)).














Weak public access

Information for 8 transparency elements is only partially available online, and is also **neither fully up-to-date nor easy to find**.










Detailed overview







Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries	✓	✓	✗	Moderate public access
	1-B	Fisheries policy documents	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	1-C	Fisheries management plans	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
 Fisheries Tenure Arrangements	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small-scale)	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing	—	—	—	Not applicable
	2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	2-D	Sport fishing	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
 Foreign Fishing Access Agreements	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in Ecuadorian waters	—	—	—	Not applicable
	3-B	Ecuadorian-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters	—	—	—	Not applicable
 The State of the Fisheries Resources	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations	—	—	—	Not produced
	4-B	Scientific stock assessments	✓	✓	✗	Weak public access
 Large-Scale Fisheries	5-A	Vessels	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	5-B	Payments	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-C	Catches within Ecuadorian waters	✓	✗	✗	Weak public access
	5-D	Catches outside Ecuadorian waters	✓	✗	✗	Weak public access
	5-E	Landings in Ecuadorian ports	✓	✗	✗	Weak public access
	5-F	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports	—	—	—	Not applicable
	5-G	Discards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	5-H	Fishing effort	✓	✓	✗	Moderate public access

 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable



Detailed overview

Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 Small-Scale Fisheries	6-A	Vessels	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	6-B	Licenses	✓	✗	✓	Weak public access
	6-C	Fishers	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	6-D	Payments	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-E	Catches	✓	✓	✗	Weak public access
	6-F	Discards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade	7-A	Imports	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	7-B	Exports	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries	✓	✓	✗	Weak public access
	7-D	Employment in informal fisheries	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Fisheries Law Enforcement	8-A	Enforcement of laws	✓	✓	✗	Moderate public access
	8-B	Sanctions for major offences	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Labour Standards	9-A	Enforcement of labour standards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	9-B	Sanctions for labour standard offences	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Fisheries Subsidies	10-A	Government financial transfers or subsidies	✓	✓	✗	Weak public access
 Official Development Assistance	11-A	Assistance for national fisheries development	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Beneficial Ownership	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	12-B	Beneficial ownership registry	⚪	⚪	⚪	Not produced
	12-C	Beneficial ownership disclosure in fisheries	⚪	⚪	⚪	Not produced

 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable





GIVING MEANING TO TRANSPARENCY: NOTABLE EXAMPLES

The value of this TAKING STOCK assessment does not only lie in understanding what information on a country's marine fisheries is available online, and where gaps exist. Fundamentally, and in very simple terms, **public access to fisheries information is important to help answer critical questions about the sustainability of the sector.**

Examples

Who manages our fisheries?

Are our fisheries being sustainably managed?

What is the contribution of marine fisheries to our national food security?

How much does my country earn from our fisheries resources?

Who catches our fish?

What is the value of fisheries to our national economy?

How is my country dealing with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing?

How well is the government protecting the rights of people working in the fisheries sector?



Government

Fishers
(Industrial and artisanal)

Media

Parliamentarians

Civil Society Organisations

Academia

Given the complexity of fisheries management, answering such questions is not always a straightforward task. However, by increasing public access to fisheries information, governments provide their citizens and business partners the necessary means to engage in informed public debates.

Ecuador's national authorities proactively disclose certain information about fisheries that contribute to public understanding and appreciation of the sector and helps answer important questions.

✓	How is the fishing sector regulated in the Ecuador?	A list of regulations is available online, including generic fisheries laws as well as specific regulations related to the fishing sector.
✓	Which vessels are authorized to fish in Ecuador?	There is an online registry that provides detailed information regarding the fishing authorisations of the different types of vessels. This includes also the duration of the authorisations as well as general information about the owners.
✓	Who are the authorized fishers in Ecuador?	Ecuador's fishing authorities publish a detailed record of authorised fishers, including the type and number of their permit, their validity and the area to which they belong. The registry also includes data on merchants.
✓	How much seafood is imported and exported?	The Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE) publishes detailed information about imports and exports of different products, including seafood. This information can be downloaded in different formats for further analysis.
✓	How are fisheries laws and regulations being applied in Ecuador?	National fisheries authorities publish information regarding their activities to strengthen the application of and compliance with fishing regulations. This information includes details on the planning of the different activities, including inspections and budget values.

This assessment identified only few transparency elements, relevant for Ecuador's marine fisheries, for which no information has yet been compiled by national authorities. Notable examples include:¹¹

✗	How healthy are Ecuador's fish stocks?	Ecuador's national authorities do not publish a summary report regarding the health of the main marine species in Ecuador. However, it is noted that technical stock assessments do exist.
✗	Who benefits from fishing in Ecuadorian waters?	There is no evidence that Ecuador's national fisheries authorities provide or are in the process of incorporating rules and procedures on beneficial ownership in fisheries regulations, nor that the Ecuadorian government has compiled beneficial ownership data in a centralised registry.

¹¹ Countries that implement the FiTI follow its core principle of 'progressive improvement', which states that countries are not expected to have complete data for every transparency requirement from the beginning. Instead, public authorities must disclose the information they have, and where important gaps exist, demonstrate improvements over time.



The national authorities in Ecuador do not currently publish specific information on several key areas for sustainable fisheries management, such as:¹²

✗	How much fish is caught in Ecuadorian waters?	Only partial information is published online regarding catches in Ecuadorian waters, including for the most important fisheries, such as tuna and demersal species for artisanal fisheries. It has not been possible to find a document that consolidates all the information on catches, such as a statistical yearbook.
✗	How much revenue does Ecuador receive from issuing fishing permits?	Ecuador's national authorities do not publish information on government income from the fishing sector, neither from national nor foreign activities, considering that there are fees that must be paid for the different procedures to access fishing permits.
✗	Who is violating laws and regulations in Ecuador's fishing sector?	Although there is evidence of the transgression of fishing regulations and prosecution for crimes in the fishing sector, it has not been possible to find a list or record of those offenders.
✗	How is Ecuador's government supporting the development of the fisheries sector?	While a list with information on development projects in the fishing sector can be found online on the website of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this information is not currently accessible.



¹² It is possible this information is published by national authorities online, but this assessment was unable to locate it, mainly due to the challenges of searching through government websites.

A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



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Additional important insights can be gained by understanding whether the published information ('Public access') meets basic information requirements, is up to date and easy to find.



AVAILABLE
ONLINE?




UP TO DATE?



EASY TO FIND?



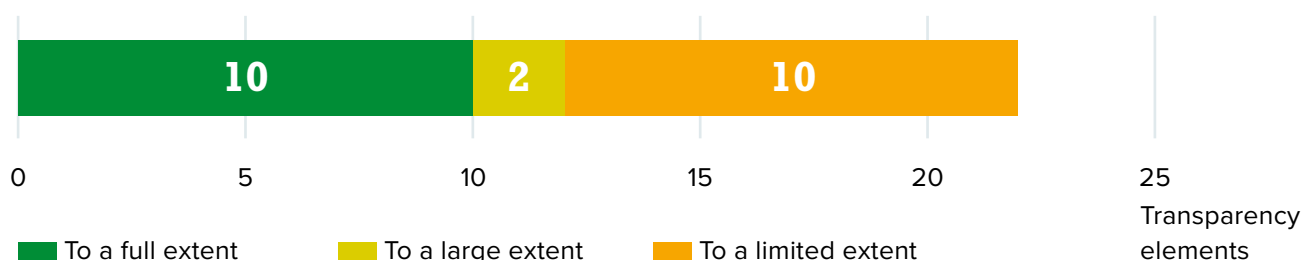
AVAILABLE ONLINE?

**AVAILABLE
ONLINE?**


Ecuador's national authorities publish information online for 22 transparency elements (i.e 'Public access').¹³

Of those elements, almost half (45%) fully meet the information requirements of the FiTI Standard.¹⁴

Is information in accordance with the FiTI Standard available online?



Recent efforts have been made by the fishing authority to increase transparency in fisheries management. For example, the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources (SRP) created a specialized website where diverse information can be located, including **detailed records on the different types of authorized vessels and fishers, the list of the most recent regulations and details on different procedures related to the fishing sector.**

Economic information is also made available by the Central Bank of Ecuador, which provides details on **imports and exports**. In addition, Ecuador publishes highly detailed information on the **fuel subsidies** it provides through its public oil company. This information is seen as important, allowing a deeper understanding about how marine fisheries are developed in Ecuador. However, despite the fact that there are such positive examples, it is not possible to find other information, such as the **actual income and payments** made by the fishing vessels when obtaining fishing permits.

Despite the importance of fisheries in Ecuador, it has not been possible to find official consolidated **catch information** by the different fleets. Information is only available for the main species, but there is no complete statistical report that provides details on the capture of different species. In the same way, it has only been possible to find **stock assessments** of the main species in the form of scientific reports, but not as a periodic report so that citizens know the status of their fisheries.

Finally, although there is information on **labor standards** as well as on planned activities to ensure compliance with **fishing regulations**, it has not been possible to find information related to non-compliance regarding both aspects. For example, it has not been possible to find a **record of fishing sanctions or reports on labor sanctions**.

¹³ From a total of 38 transparency elements, this assessment considers four as being 'Not applicable' to Ecuador's marine fisheries sector, whereas three elements are considered as 'Not produced' (meaning the government has not collected or compiled the information requested under this element).

¹⁴ Or it has been found that the published information is incomplete.



UP TO DATE?

UP TO DATE?

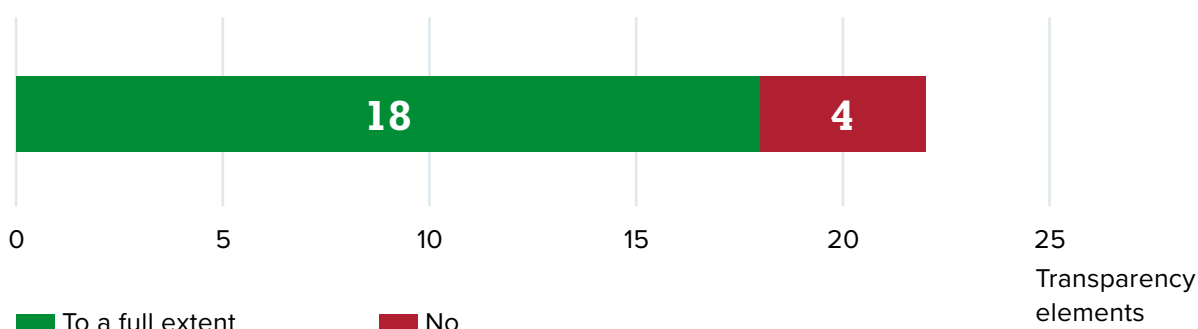


Information published online is considered to be fully up to date for 18 of the 22 transparency elements (or 81%).



Fish is a renewable resource that can, if sustainably managed, remain accessible and beneficial for generations. Those making decisions affecting fisheries must be able to have quick and easy access to the latest available data. The importance of up-to-date information takes on an even greater dimension when it comes to time-sensitive issues such as the production of catch data or scientific stock assessments.

Is the published information provided in a timely, up-to-date manner?



This assessment shows that most of the available information is up-to-date, given that the laws, regulations, and standards have been officially published and updated.

Nevertheless, some transparency elements were found outdated. For example, **management plans** are published, but not always with a clear status of their implementation, making it difficult to know whether there has been any significant update during the process.

Information on **catches and landings** is seen as incomplete, and furthermore outdated, as details of the most recent years are not available. Similarly, certain **stock assessments** for the most important species are out of date. Lastly, the **artisanal fisheries records** are in a process of constant updating, but there is no information when this was done recently.

EASY TO FIND?

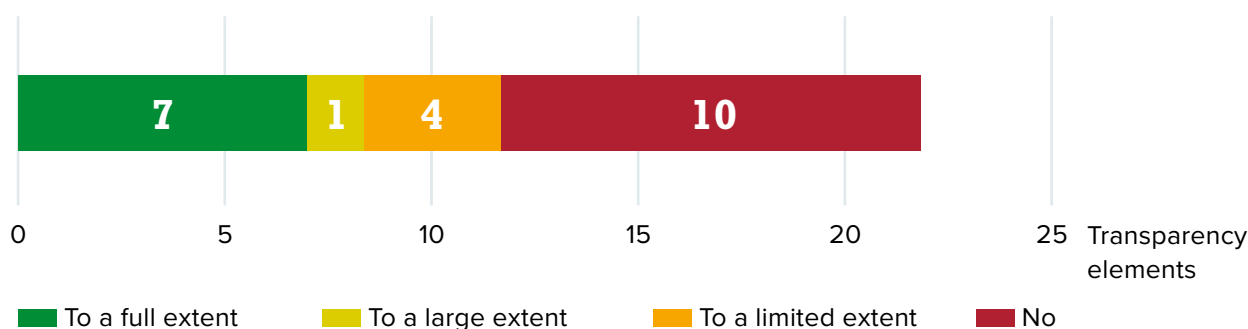
EASY TO FIND?



Information published online by the government of Ecuador is generally difficult to locate, as information for only 7 out of 22 transparency elements (or 32%) can be easily found by a layperson.¹⁵

Governments have the responsibility to manage fisheries on behalf of their citizens – and inform them about the current status, opportunities and challenges facing the sector. In the digital age, websites remain one of the most popular mediums to convey such information. However, websites are passive communications channels, and stakeholders have to purposely visit the site, search for the desired content and navigate to find information. If this is difficult or time consuming, stakeholders may lose interest, leaving potentially important information unread and underutilised.

Is the published information easy to find on a government website from a non-expert point of view?



¹⁵ This assessment analysed how easy or difficult it is for a layperson to find information about the Ecuadorian marine fisheries sector, instead of stakeholders with a background in fisheries and therefore holding a unique advantage in their capacity to locate the information.



During this assessment, several difficulties were identified when searching for fisheries management information, as outlined below:

- » **There are different websites and portals to access information which can confuse the layperson.** For example, as part of a State policy, a single platform for citizen procedures (PUTC) has been created, which provides information on the various procedures that citizens can request from different public institutions. The most important aspect about this platform is that each institution, including the MPCEIP, has a section that provides details about existing procedures. In addition, each institution has its own website, which is often difficult to navigate. The MPCEIP website also includes information on other procedures and online services it offers. Likewise, there is another website for the Viceministry of Aquaculture and Fisheries (VAP), and yet another one for the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources. This makes it difficult to understand where certain information can be found.
- » **Information from the fishing sector has been found in websites of more than 5 different institutions (for example, MPCEIP, VAP, SRP, BCE, EP-Petroecuador, among others).** Since the information is scattered, an interested person without knowledge of the subject can face difficulties in locating information. Also, navigation through these different websites could be more intuitive, as sometimes information is found only after searching several sub-pages.
- » **Only the most recent regulations have a nomenclature that facilitates their search.**¹⁶ It has been possible to find references to regulations that are not so recent, but are still in force and searching them is complicated and confusing since the nomenclature only includes the correlative number. In that sense, to search for a regulation, it is necessary to know the date, year or context of the approved regulation. Without prior knowledge it can be difficult to find past regulations.
- » **It should be noted that the Ecuadorian Government has been making different efforts to facilitate access to information, and one of them is the website of the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources with data and information on the sector.** However, there is still information that is prepared for scientific or statistical purposes, such as those available on the portal of the Public Institute for Aquaculture and Fisheries Research (IPIAP). In that sense, there may still be a gap between the interpretation of the information by the citizens when there is technical information that is not shared in an accessible language.

On the other hand, although the TAKING STOCK assessment objectively focuses on access to online information, it should be noted that the fisheries authority shares information of public interest through its social networks, and also constantly participates in online interviews to share information with stakeholders.

¹⁶ For example, a numbered ministerial agreement, which also indicates the year of issue and the institution that approves it (Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investments and Fisheries -MPCEIP-, VAP or SRP).

‘GOOD TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES’



Notably, Ecuador's national authorities publish certain information on the country's fisheries sector in a way the FiTI considers as **‘good transparency practice’**.

Commonly, transparency for sustainable fisheries management is defined narrowly as the act of publishing complete, timely and easy-to-find information. However, it is equally important to publish information in a way that allows non-experts to understand and draw conclusions from it. There are several positive examples in Ecuador:



Highlights:

- The national registry of industrial vessels is a notable effort by the VAP to make information on fishing vessels in Ecuador more transparent. The per vessel record contains many of the attributes of the FiTI Standard. Searching for information is made easier through the use of filters.
- The SRP and PUTC portals include a list of the type of fishing permits that can be applied for and the requirements for each of them. This information is easily accessible and its navigation is simple.
- The portal of the Central Bank of Ecuador allows for a complete search on imports and exports information. Filters are available to make searching for information easier. Also, the data can be downloaded as a spreadsheet or in PDF format.



Finally, this assessment indicates that Ecuador's national authorities offer only limited features to ensure that published information can be freely used (e.g. via search and filter functions), re-used and redistributed by anyone.

For example, vessel and fisher records can only be accessed online and no download option is offered and filters are limited. Despite this, it is important to highlight that export and import data made available by the Central Bank of Ecuador, which can be filtered online and downloaded. These functionalities could be a reference to other sources of information. Similar functions exist, among others, for catch and trade information.

No information has been found indicating whether the data related to fishing provided by the national authorities of Ecuador are published under an open license without restrictions, such as those developed by Creative Commons.¹⁷

¹⁷ Licenses should be published and linked to open data to ensure users can easily find and understand the conditions of data access and reuse. For more information, please refer to: <https://opendatacharter.net/principles/>.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OF ECUADOR

Marine fisheries in Ecuador are mainly regulated by the national fishing authority, and it is this authority that must provide most of the information; however, other national authorities are also competent, and must also provide access to information from official sites. The Organic Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information, establishes in its Article 1: *“Principle of Publicity of Public Information. – Access to public information is a right of the people guaranteed by the State.”*

The National Development Plan 2021-2025, in its Objective 15 establishes: *“Promote public ethics, transparency and fight against corruption”*, one of its Policies being: *“Promote Open Government that promotes transparency and access to timely and close information to citizenship.”*

The evaluation carried out on the marine fisheries sector of Ecuador, through the TAKING STOCK tool, has allowed us to highlight strengths of the Ecuadorian State in terms of availability and access to information; however, it was also possible to identify opportunities to strengthen transparency mechanisms in the country's fishing sector.

1. Make currently unpublished information publicly available

By reviewing which fisheries information on government websites is available, it has shown that there are several aspects that have not been published. In order to generate greater transparency, it is important to publish all available fisheries information as part of the recently initiated implementation process of the FiTI Standard in Ecuador.

Among the topics that are recommended to be published are:

- Information on final beneficiaries
- Information on compliance with national legislation and international standards on labour aspects
- National Action Plans for fishery resources, or fishery management plans
- Catch statistics of the main fisheries of Ecuador
- Information on public sector development projects

2. Address information gaps

Although Ecuador's national authorities collate substantial information on fisheries, there are important aspects of the fisheries sector where government information is absent, likely due to insufficient research or resources allocated for data collection. Gaps in information exist on issues such as:

- Detailed and disaggregated landings of industrial and artisanal fisheries
- Information on discards from the fishing activity
- Detailed socioeconomic data by activity and gender on the impact and contribution of artisanal fisheries



3. Facilitate access to information in the Integrated Aquaculture and Fisheries System

There is information on the website of the Viceministry of Aquaculture and Fisheries and the website of the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources (SRP), the latter recently created with support from the UNDP, which means a valuable effort to make fisheries information transparent. On the other hand, information about research of different fisheries of Ecuador is also published on the IPIAP website. Furthermore, there are also various other government institutions with the responsibility to publish fishery information.

This situation has caused the information to be dispersed on several websites, which also duplicates efforts made by public institutions to upload the same information many times on their sites; making it difficult for users to quickly find information online. Therefore, the main recommendation is to consolidate the Integrated Aquaculture and Fisheries System, in order to simplify searching and accessing fisheries information.

Among the actions proposed to achieve this recommendation, we have, for example:

- Categorize the information available through a system that orders it chronologically and by subject
- Open navigation routes that allow users to go to other official websites related to fishing. For example: Reports on the Health Index of the Oceans, Management Plans for Marine Coastal Protected Areas, Programs and Projects of International Cooperation in Ecuador, list of projects financed by bilateral, multilateral and private donors
- Prepare a catalog of current laws, regulations, decrees and ministerial agreements
- Permanently update the information that is in the Integrated System for Documentary Management of Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Facilitate access to the files of the Scientific Journal of Marine Sciences and Limnology of the National Fisheries Institute, since the links do not work and the documents cannot be downloaded

4. Disseminate fisheries information to the general public

Fisheries data must serve multiple purposes. This ranges from very detailed, granular data sets (e.g. for statistical analysis) to visualisations of high-level aggregated information (e.g. to obtain a general overview of the health of Ecuador's marine fish stocks).

Therefore, greater efforts are required to disseminate the contents of reports and scientific bulletins prepared by the fisheries authority and IPIAP, using simple and direct writing methods, and taking advantage of technological platforms such as websites and social media for a wide dissemination of information that contributes to fisheries transparency. Ensuring that published information contributes to public debate in Ecuador is also a key objective of the FiTI Standard.

In general terms, the following is recommended:

- Prepare informative bulletins, or descriptive notes on the results of research, news, fisheries management measures, among others, aimed at the general public at the national level
- Expand the use of briefing notes (or synthesis documents) aimed at informing the public in general on issues of national importance
- Publish reports and information related to fisheries in open data formats to facilitate their reuse (for example, PDF documents instead of scans)

Strengthening the transparency of Ecuador's marine fisheries sector, among other things by reviewing and prioritizing these recommendations, should be based on ongoing discussions with stakeholders in the sector, such as fisher, industry and civil society, for example as part of the National Multi-Stakeholder Group of FiTI in Ecuador. This can help identify other important information gaps on national priorities, which have not been covered in this assessment (such as the impacts of climate change or the interactions between fisheries and other sectors of the blue economy).

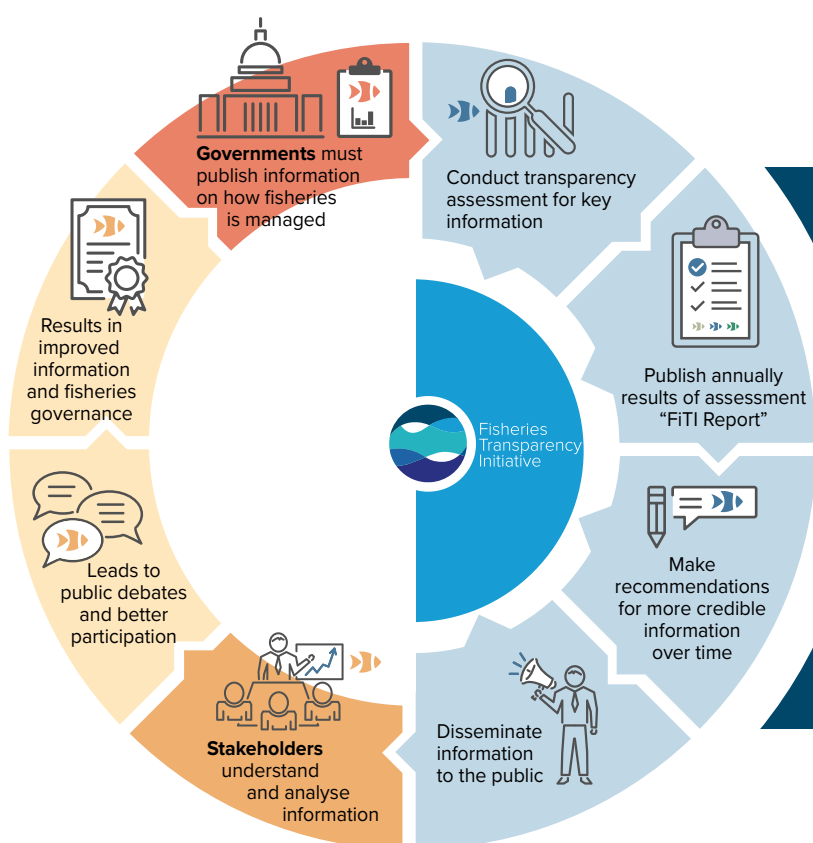
TRANSPARENCY NEEDS TRUST

Public access to information on how the marine fisheries sector in Ecuador is being exploited is fundamental for good governance. This TAKING STOCK assessment provides a sound starting point for national authorities in Ecuador to enhance and maintain high levels of transparency in marine fisheries management. But it does not tell the whole story: challenges still exist that are unlikely to be overcome by a single actor working alone. Such challenges involve determining whether information that is not published online simply does not exist, or whether information that is disclosed is perceived as credible by stakeholders. Addressing such challenges requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

Therefore, a collective effort is needed from all relevant stakeholders to incorporate a variety of perspectives and enhance transparency and trust over time.

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) provides such a unique combination of transparency and participation. The FiTI is implemented in countries through National Multi-Stakeholder Groups, consisting of representatives from government, business and organised civil society. These groups work collectively to:

- » assess the information in the public domain against the FiTI Standard;
- » make recommendations on how to prioritise the closure of information gaps
- » and provide suggestions on how information published by national authorities can be strengthened to further raise levels of openness and public access to information.



Engaging in the FiTI appeals to all stakeholders who appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries, whether in terms of food and nutrition security, biodiversity, employment, the value to national economies, or the cultural importance of fishing.

#ImplementFiTI

ANNEX: ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

This TAKING STOCK assessment evaluates the disclosure practices of Ecuador's national authorities across 12 thematic areas of marine fisheries management,¹⁸ as defined by the FiTI Standard.

In order to avoid ambiguities during the assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been further broken down into 38 transparency elements. For example, thematic area #1 'Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents' is broken down into three transparency elements.

The assessment is focused entirely on the availability of information¹⁹ provided by Ecuador's national authorities through their own websites and online publications.

Within the scope of this assessment, several different entry points have been utilised to evaluate whether information on Ecuador's marine fisheries sector is published online by national authorities, such as²⁰:

- Through the general portal of the Undersecretary of Fisheries Resources (<https://srp.produccion.gob.ec/>);
- Directly accessing the websites of national authorities²¹;
- Using external search engines such as Google.

The assessment was conducted as a desktop study without relying on initial input or contributions from national authorities.

The assessment was initially carried out between April and November 2021 and was later updated after the publication of the Regulations of the Organic Law for the Development of Aquaculture and Fisheries between May and July 2022. The process was officially launched on March 12 2021, when the Viceministry of Aquaculture and Fisheries of the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade and Fisheries of Ecuador was informed about this assessment, its key parameters and the benefits for Ecuador.

The Viceministry of Aquaculture and Fisheries was invited to comment on the initial results of the investigation prior to publication of this report. The timeline for this review was from August 18 to September 9, 2022.

We would like to thank the government for taking the opportunity to provide their comments. Their comments were received on September 16, 2022, reviewed and changes were made, where necessary.

The overall assessment process was conducted under the supervision and responsibility of the FiTI International Secretariat, with significant input from researchers and reviewers.

This report, the first for Ecuador, does not only seek to provide an overview of what the government publishes regarding a number of key areas of its marine fisheries sector. It also intends to provide a sound basis of information to spark interest among various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

The assessment does not try to capture and display the actual underlying information behind each transparency element (e.g. number of vessels), nor does it undertake an independent verification of whether information disclosed online by national authorities is complete or correct. Nevertheless, if compelling evidence of unreliable or contradicting information has been found, it is noted in the Detailed Assessment

¹⁸ Information on inland fisheries and aquaculture does not form part of this assessment.

¹⁹ Kindly note that in the context of this research, the terms '[data](#)' and '[information](#)' are used interchangeably. It is acknowledged that while closely intertwined, they differ in meaning and usage (e.g. data is the raw fact, which should be processed to gain information). However, this difference is not of major relevance for this assessment.

²⁰ Information is only considered available online if it is proactively published on a government website and is available without access restrictions (e.g. the need to register online, request the data from a civil servant via email or pay a fee).

²¹ Either embedded within the central government portal, or as a 'standalone' website.

As part of this TAKING STOCK assessment, several transparency requirements are considered as not applicable for Ecuador's marine fisheries:

—	Coastal subsistence Fishing	There is no obligation to provide information regarding this particular type of fishery in Ecuador.
—	Foreign fishing access agreements	This assessment found no evidence that Ecuador has signed bilateral fishing access agreements in recent times with foreign parties, allowing foreign-flagged vessels to fish in Ecuadorian waters, as well as allowing Ecuadorian-flagged vessels to fish in third-party country waters.
—	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports	Transshipments are prohibited in Ecuador and no evidence was found that they were occurring.



TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



2022

Summary Assessment Report
REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR

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