



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



Republic of
Mauritius

2022 Summary Assessment Report

© **2022 Fisheries Transparency Initiative.** All rights reserved.

Researchers: Nancy Ng Ping Cheun (Fisheries Transparency Initiative)

Reviewers: Dr Andre Standing, Will May (Fisheries Transparency Initiative)

Design: weeks.de Werbeagentur GmbH



This 'TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information' assessment of the Republic of Mauritius (2022) has been funded by Irish Aid.

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 November 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.

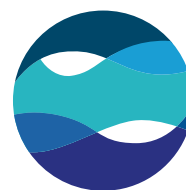
The ideas, opinions and comments contained in this assessment are the sole responsibility of the FiTI and do not necessarily represent or reflect Irish Aid policy.

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.



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

www.fiti.global

TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries

Management Information assesses the level of information that national authorities in Mauritius publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.



CONTENTS

Sustainable fisheries need transparency	04
About this assessment	07

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON MARINE FISHERIES IN MAURITIUS 10

KEY FINDINGS 12

Public access to fisheries information	12
Giving meaning to transparency: Notable examples	15

A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION 18

Available online?	19
Up to date?	21
Easy to find?	22
'Good transparency practices'	23

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAURITIUS NATIONAL AUTHORITIES 24

Transparency needs trust	26
ANNEX: Assessment procedures	27

Mauritius' 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.”

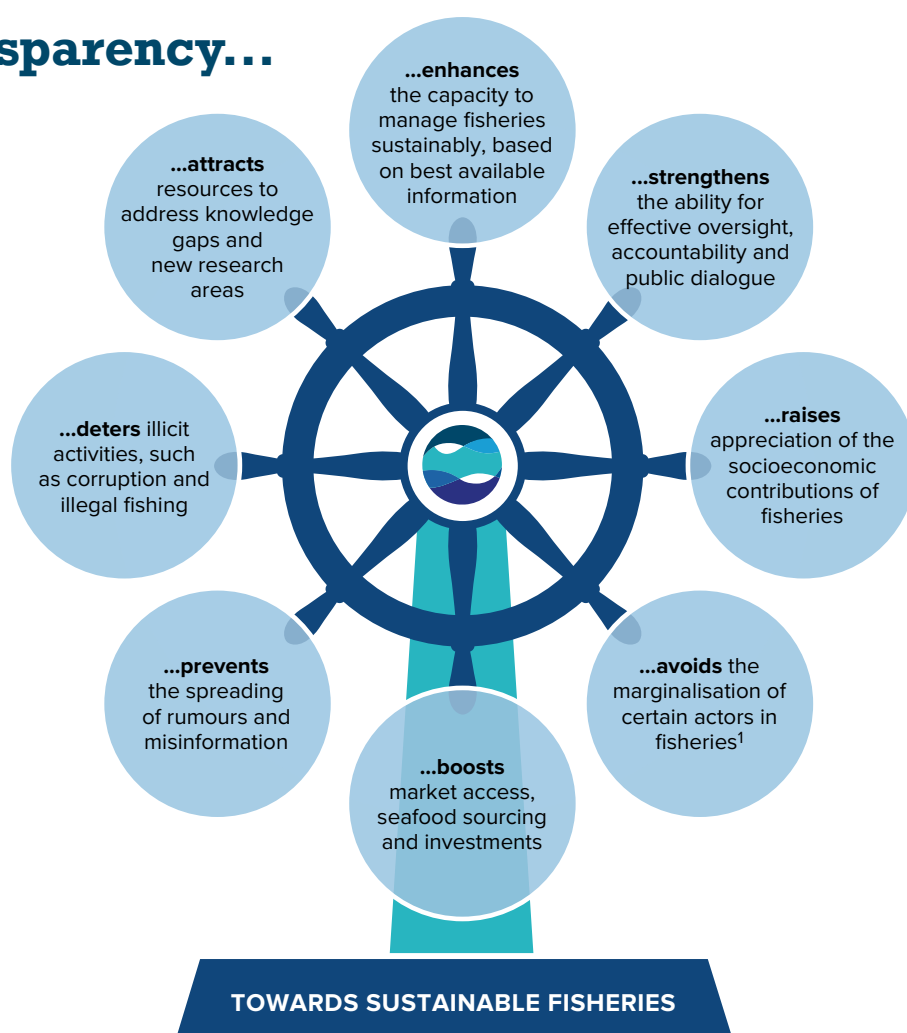
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010



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).

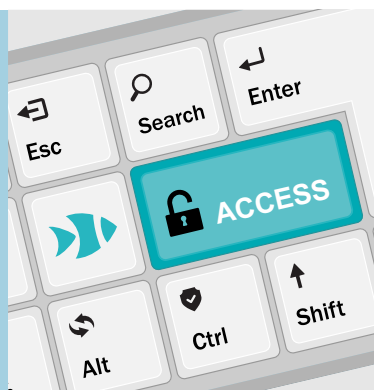


Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

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.



Though there are currently no legal instruments guiding the government on best practices of information disclosure, the notion of access to information – particularly through online platforms – is gaining traction in Mauritius. In 2016, a Freedom of Information Bill to improve public access to and the use of information was brought forward by the government. Though the bill did not pass at the first attempt, changes are reportedly being incorporated into a second draft which should eventually be tabled for approval in the National Assembly.² In the meantime, several tools – such as the **Digital Government Transformation Strategy 2019-2022**³ and the **National Open Data Policy**⁴ – have been developed by the Mauritian government which enable information to be freely accessed online, as open-by-default.⁵ In its **2020/21 Annual Report**⁶, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping also underlined a number of projects intended to **digitalise its services and internal administration**, which is expected to ultimately lead to increased transparency in the management of the fisheries sector.

- Mauritius is not a member country of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**.
- As of today (November 2022) the Mauritian government has not committed to join the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)**.



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://defimedia.info/freedom-information-bill-we-need-proceed-great-care-and-caution-says-pm>

3 <https://cib.govmu.org/Documents/Reports/Digital%20Government%20Strategy%202018-2022.pdf>

4 <https://president.govmu.org/Documents/Strategies/Mauritius%20Open%20Data%20Policy%20May%202017.pdf>

5 Open-by-default denotes that all information and data published by the government can be freely (re)used unless indicated otherwise.













6 <https://blueeconomy.govmu.org/Documents/Publications/Annual%20Report%202020-2021.pdf>

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the first time that Mauritius 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.⁷

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.

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|-----|--|------------------------------------|
| #1 |  | Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents | #7 |  | Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade |
| #2 |  | Fisheries Tenure Arrangements | #8 |  | Fisheries Law Enforcement |
| #3 |  | Foreign Fishing Access Agreements | #9 |  | Labour Standards |
| #4 |  | The State of the Fisheries Resources | #10 |  | Fisheries Subsidies |
| #5 |  | Large-Scale Fisheries | #11 |  | Official Development Assistance |
| #6 |  | Small-Scale Fisheries | #12 |  | Beneficial Ownership |

For this assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been broken down into a total of **39 transparency elements**.⁸

⁷ <https://www.fiti.global/fiti-standard>

⁸ An overview of these 39 transparency elements can be found in the section '[Key findings](#)'.

This assessment evaluates whether basic information on the Mauritian marine fisheries sector is **freely available** on government websites, whether it is **up to date** and whether it is **easy to find**.⁹



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;¹⁰ and
- Proposes practical **recommendations** to improve online transparency around the Mauritian marine fisheries sector.



This assessment is intended to support national authorities in Mauritius 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.



⁹ For more information about the assessment's methodology, please refer to <https://www.fiti.global/taking-stock/methodology>.

¹⁰ 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.

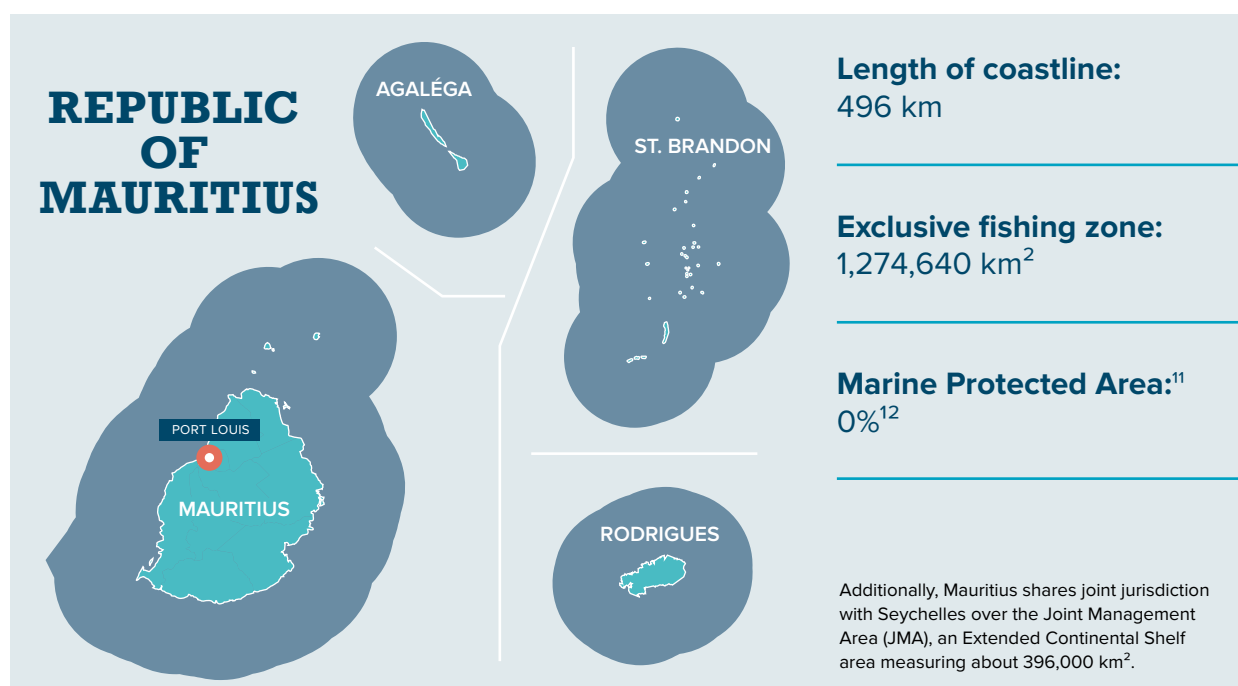
A low level of transparency in this TAKING STOCK assessment may not be a sign of wrongdoing, but rather highlights an opportunity for national authorities to enhance disclosure to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational success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

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 MAURITIUS



Recent developments relevant to Mauritius' marine fisheries sector



The Government of Mauritius plans to implement a new Fisheries Bill to replace the current Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 2007. According to the 2020/21 Annual Report of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (MoBE), the new bill will be accompanied by efforts to digitise fisheries information – such as fishing licences and catches of artisanal fisheries.



In 2021, the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping announced in his annual budget speech plans to attract investment to develop a national fleet of industrial tuna fishing vessels, and to increase the fleet of semi-industrial fishing vessels targeting banks fisheries from 35 to 100 by 2026.



As indicated in the national three-year strategic plan published in 2018, Mauritius has been engaged in the development of a comprehensive Marine Spatial Plan. However, as of November 2022, there are no published reports on this plan or the outcomes of public consultations.

¹¹ Under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14.5, countries (including Mauritius) committed to conserve at least 10 per cent of their coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

¹² <https://nairobi.convention.org/clearinghouse/node/421> (N.B. information on total marine protected areas in Mauritius differs according to other sources)



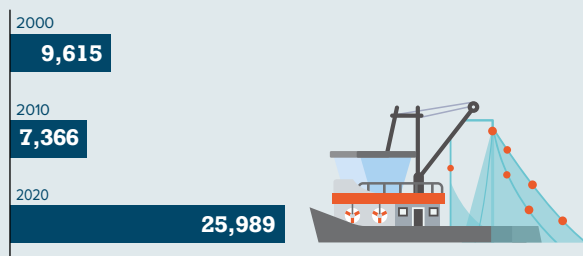
**REPUBLIC OF
MAURITIUS**

The marine fisheries sector in Mauritius plays an important role in fulfilling the economic, employment, food security, and nutrition needs of its citizens.¹³



Capture production for species

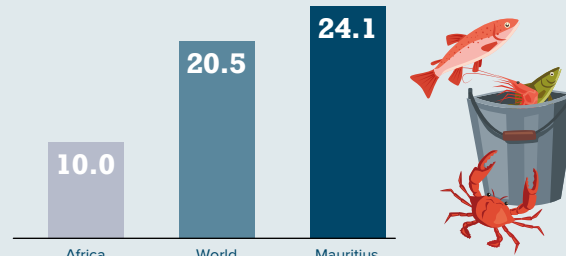
(tonnes, live weight)



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles - Mauritius, 2018

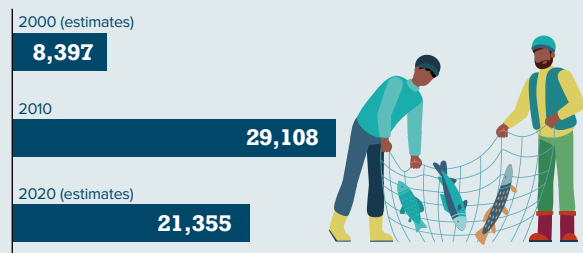
Fish available for consumption

kg/per capita



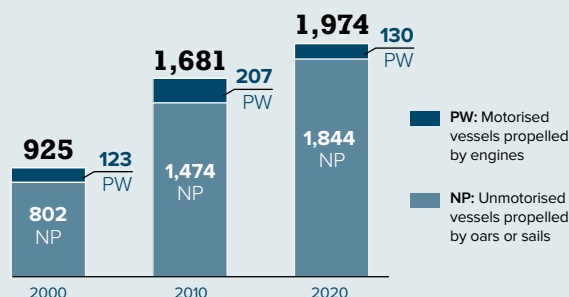
Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020, FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile - Mauritius 2019

Number of fishers



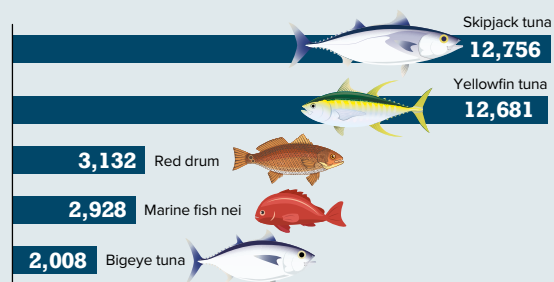
Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics

Number of fishing vessels



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics

Top five species



Source: FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile - Mauritius 2019 (in tonnes, by production volume)

Export of fish and fish products

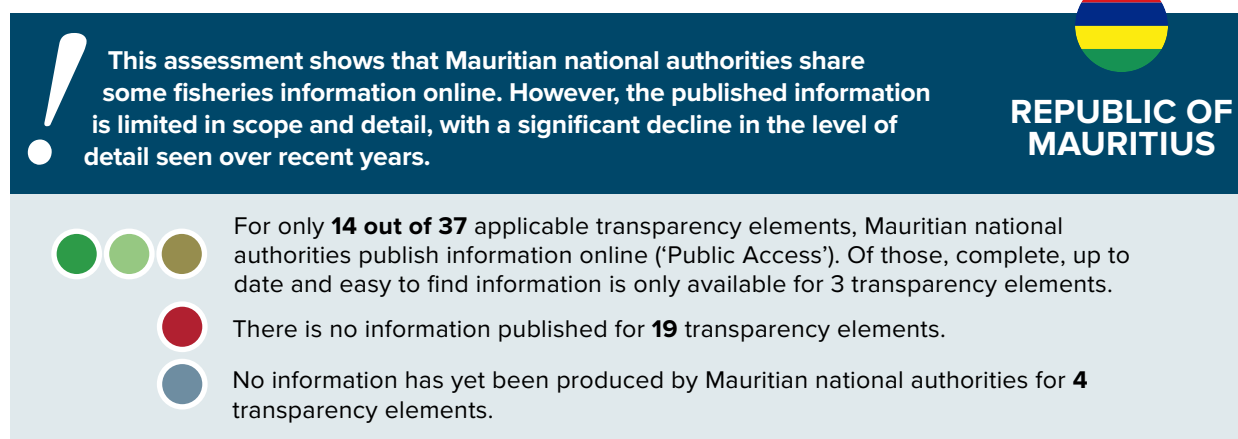


Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2019 (published in 2021)

¹³ 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 the Mauritian 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 4 transparency elements has **not yet been collected** or **compiled**.

Strong public access

Information for 3 transparency elements is **available online, up to date** and **easy to find**.

Moderate public access

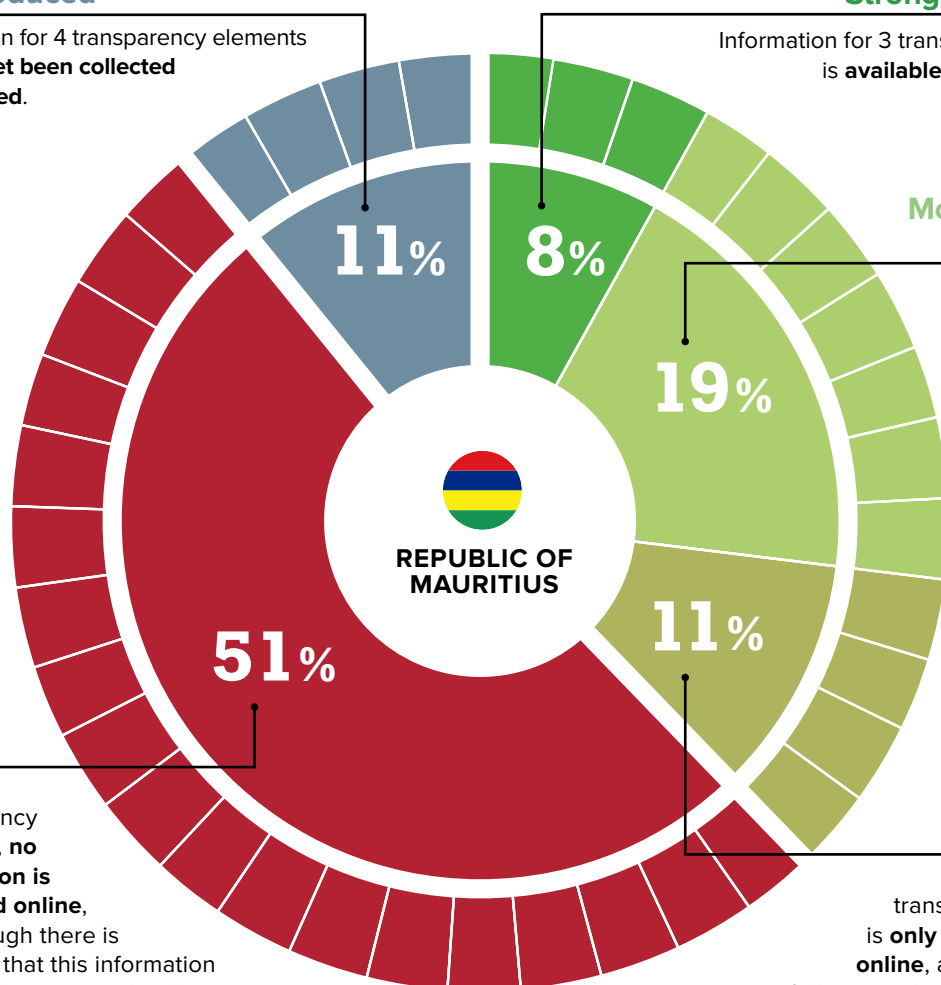
Information for 7 transparency elements is **mostly available online**, but is **only partially up to date** or **easy to find**.

No public access

For 19 transparency elements, **no information is published online**, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities.










Weak public access






Information for 4 transparency elements is **only partially available online**, and is **also neither fully up to date nor easy to find**.



2 of the 39 transparency elements are considered as **not applicable** to Mauritius' marine fisheries sector (see [Annex](#)).

DETAILED OVERVIEW







			  				
Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?		
#1  Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries	✓	✓	✓		Strong public access
	1-B	Fisheries policy documents	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	1-C	Fisheries management plans	✗	✗	✗		No public access
#2  Fisheries Tenure Arrangements	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small-scale)	✓	✓	✗		Moderate public access
	2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing	⚙	⚙	⚙		Not produced
	2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing	✓	✓	✗		Weak public access
	2-D	Sport fishing	✗	✗	✗		No public access
#3  Foreign Fishing Access Agreements	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in Mauritian waters	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	3-B	Mauritius-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters	✗	✗	✗		No public access
#4  The State of the Fisheries Resources	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	4-B	Scientific stock assessments	✗	✗	✗		No public access
#5  Large-Scale Fisheries	5-A	Vessels	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	5-B	Payments	✓	✓	✓		Moderate public access
	5-C	Catches within Mauritian waters	✓	✓	✓		Weak public access
	5-D	Catches outside Mauritian waters	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	5-E	Landings in Mauritian ports	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	5-F	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	5-G	Discards	✗	✗	✗		No public access
	5-H	Fishing effort	✗	✗	✗		No 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	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	6-B	Licences	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-C	Fishers	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-D	Payments	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-E	Catches	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	6-F	Discards	—	—	—	Not applicable
 Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade	7-A	Imports	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	7-B	Exports	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	7-D	Employment in informal fisheries	⦿	⦿	⦿	Not produced
 Fisheries Law Enforcement	8-A	Enforcement of laws	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	8-B	Sanctions for major offences	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
 Labour Standards	9-A	Enforcement of labour standards	✓	✓	✓	Moderate 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
	11-B	Assistance for foreign fisheries development	—	—	—	Not applicable
 Beneficial Ownership	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency	✓	✓	✓	Weak 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.**



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.



Mauritian national authorities proactively disclose some, albeit limited, fisheries information that supports public understanding and appreciation of the sector and helps to answer important questions. Notable examples include:

✓	How effective are government interventions for the development of artisanal fisheries?	In 2018, the National Audit Office conducted a detailed review of the effectiveness of government policies to support artisanal fisheries, highlighting several challenges and policy failures, while providing recommendations to remedy these. The resulting report has been published by the government. ¹⁴
✓	What is the value of fish imports and exports in Mauritius?	The 2020/21 Annual Report of the MoBE provides information on the total value of imports and exports of fish and fish products. This figure is presented as a total amount and further broken down into certain species and product types.
✓	What laws regulate fisheries?	The MoBE publishes, in chronological order, a series of laws and corresponding legislation on its website that provide details on how commercial and artisanal fisheries are regulated.

This assessment identified some transparency elements relevant to Mauritius' marine fisheries for which no information has yet been compiled by national authorities:¹⁵

⊘	How is coastal subsistence fishing managed in Mauritius?	Despite its importance for coastal communities in Mauritius and the fact that it is widely practised, there is no evidence that national authorities have established formal conditions under which fishers can engage in coastal subsistence fishing.
⊘	What is the scale of informal fisheries in Mauritius?	The government does not publish any information on informal employment in the marine fishing sector. This does not mean that informal fisheries are non-existent in Mauritius. Strong evidence suggests that many people catching, supplying, and cleaning fish for local markets are not formally registered with the government. It is therefore likely that this information is not collected by national authorities.

¹⁴ "Performance audit report: Moving towards sustainable artisanal fisheries", National Audit Office 2018: http://download.govmu.org/files/2018/P04_Artanal_Fishery.pdf

¹⁵ 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.

The government of Mauritius does not currently publish information online regarding several key areas of sustainable fisheries management, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities. Notable examples include:¹⁶

✗	How healthy are fish stocks targeted by commercial and artisanal fisheries?	Although there is evidence that national authorities undertake scientific assessments of the health of fish stocks, there is no online information on trends in catches and the extent of overfishing. This includes fishing in the outer regions of the Mauritius EEZ by semi-industrial fishing vessels, as well as inshore fisheries targeted by artisanal vessels.
✗	How many people are dependent on marine fisheries?	Although the MoBE publishes the total numbers of fishers and fishing vessels in the country, the data is not reliable and fails to reflect the true number of people engaged in marine fisheries, including those involved in subsistence fishing and the post-harvest sector. Additionally, data is not provided for the fisheries sector on the island of Rodrigues.
✗	Which industrial and semi-industrial fishing vessels are licenced to fish in Mauritian waters?	Although there is evidence that the MoBE maintains a register of industrial and semi-industrial foreign- and Mauritian-flagged vessels licenced to fish in national waters, there is no vessel registry or licence information publicly available. Details of the three access agreements Mauritius holds with the European Union (EU), the Federation of Japan Tuna Fisheries Cooperative Association and the Republic of Seychelles are also not shared publicly by national authorities. ¹⁷
✗	What is the extent and impact of fisheries subsidies?	Direct financial support is provided to the fisheries sector through grants and access to credit for the purchase of new semi-industrial fishing boats, as well as for the installation and management of fish aggregating devices (FADs) for coastal fisheries. However, public information on the value of these transfers and their outcomes is limited and inconsistent.
✗	How sustainable are efforts to increase catches from atolls and islands in the outer regions of the Mauritius EEZ?	As part of a drive to reduce pressure on coastal lagoons, national authorities in Mauritius have promoted fishing in the offshore bank areas and continue to expand these efforts through subsidies. However, limited information is provided on resulting catches and the sustainability of fish populations, despite previous research conducted in the 1990s that raised concern about the depletion of fish stocks in these regions. Fisheries management plans have been undertaken for this fishery but are not published.



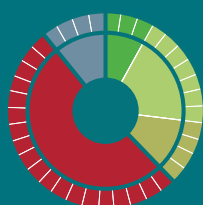
¹⁶ Countries that implement the FiTI follow its core principle of 'progressive improvement', which states that countries are not expected to have complete data for every transparency requirement from the beginning. Instead, public authorities must disclose the information they have, and where important gaps exist, demonstrate improvements over time.

¹⁷ Details of two of these agreements are shared online publicly but only by the corresponding party. The EU-Mauritius Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SPFA) is published by the EU (https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/international-agreements/sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreements-sfpas/mauritius_en) and the Seychelles-Mauritius agreement is published by the Seychelles Fishing Authority as a result of the country's commitment to the FiTI (<https://www.sfa.sc/index.php/e-library/fisheries-report/category/45-mau-sey-agreement>).

A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



REPUBLIC OF
MAURITIUS



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?

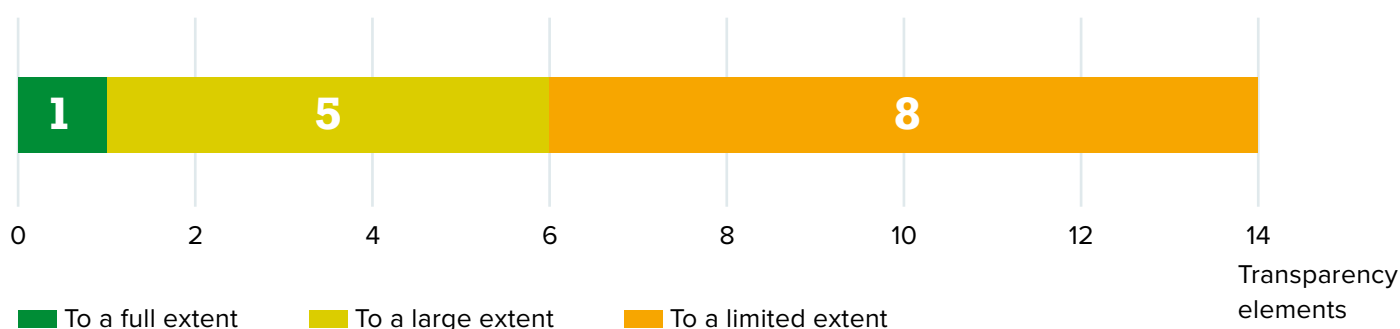


Mauritian national authorities publish information online for 14 transparency elements (i.e. 'Public access').¹⁸ Of those elements, only 1 is seen to fully meet the information requirements of the FiTI Standard.¹⁹

A DEEP DIVE INTO
PUBLIC ACCESS TO
FISHERIES INFORMATION



Is information in accordance with the FiTI Standard available online?



The **Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (MoBE)** is the main body responsible for the management of the fisheries sector in Mauritius. The website of the MoBE²⁰ serves as the main portal for accessing information on fisheries. From the homepage, it is possible to access pages for fisheries legislation, documentation, and annual reports. The list of fisheries laws found on the page for legislation is comprehensive and **using this list it is possible to understand the rules and regulations governing tenure for commercial fisheries**. However, beyond this, information published online by the Ministry is limited in detail and does meet most of the requirements of the transparency elements. For example:

- There is **insufficient information on existing national policies for the fisheries sector**. The information communicated in annual reports is brief – limited to bullet points only – leaving many aspects of fisheries development in Mauritius unexplained. In addition, although there is evidence that fisheries management plans have been developed, there is no information published on these.
- The 2020/21 Annual Report of the MoBE places emphasis on snapshots of achievements by departments within the Ministry. Consequently, there is limited data on the fishing sector, including information on licences, catches and the results of research by the MoBE.

¹⁸ From a total of 39 transparency elements, this assessment considers two as being 'Not applicable' to the Mauritian marine fisheries sector, while another two elements are considered as 'Not produced' (meaning the government has not collected or compiled the information requested under this element).

¹⁹ The remaining information is found to be incomplete.

²⁰ <https://blueeconomy.govmu.org/SitePages/Index.aspx>

- A lack of any information on the state of fisheries resources in Mauritius is a surprising omission. Growing concerns about how to strategically improve the yield from commercial fisheries while allowing overexploited areas of the sector to recover have meant the government has launched several strategies to reduce pressure on in-shore areas while promoting fishing in the outer regions of the nation's EEZ and expanding the Mauritian large-scale fishing fleet. However, **a lack of national reports on the health of Mauritian fish stocks in the public domain, particularly those located within these new fishing areas, limits public knowledge of the sustainability of these strategies.**
- The data on artisanal fisheries is superficial and published data on the number of fishers is incomplete. For at least ten years, the Ministry responsible for fisheries in Mauritius has **not included data on fisheries in Rodrigues**, although its artisanal sector accounts for a large proportion of the nation's fishers and catches.
- Although the MoBE publishes information on fish trade (imports and exports), what is published is very general in nature and does not include a detailed breakdown of species and countries of origin or destination.
- The MoBE provides an overview of its activities to address illegal fishing, including links to its National Plan of Action to deter and eradicate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, but there is no information on the outcome of patrols and prosecutions for serious offences in the large-scale sector.

The other pages on the website of the MoBE also highlight a disregard for sharing information on fisheries management. The page for 'documentation' links to several documents that appear to be stockpiled, including a list of very old policy documents and annual reports from 2006 to 2009. This archive of old annual reports demonstrates that previous administrations provided more in-depth analyses and data on the fisheries sector. **There is a notable drop-off in the quality and scope of data found in annual reports after 2011.**

In the annual reports dating from 2003 to 2011, data included, among other things, the number and types of registered large-scale vessels, and the licence fees received from these vessels. Similarly, more granular detail was provided on artisanal fisheries, such as fishing effort per day, monthly landings, catches broken down by fishing gear, and the number of registrations by gear type. It should be noted that reports submitted by Mauritius to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission on the activities of nationally-flagged vessels are more detailed than the reports it publishes on its own website.

Finally, the website contains a page entitled 'Publications for fishers', which is blank and contains no information.



UP TO DATE?

UP TO DATE?

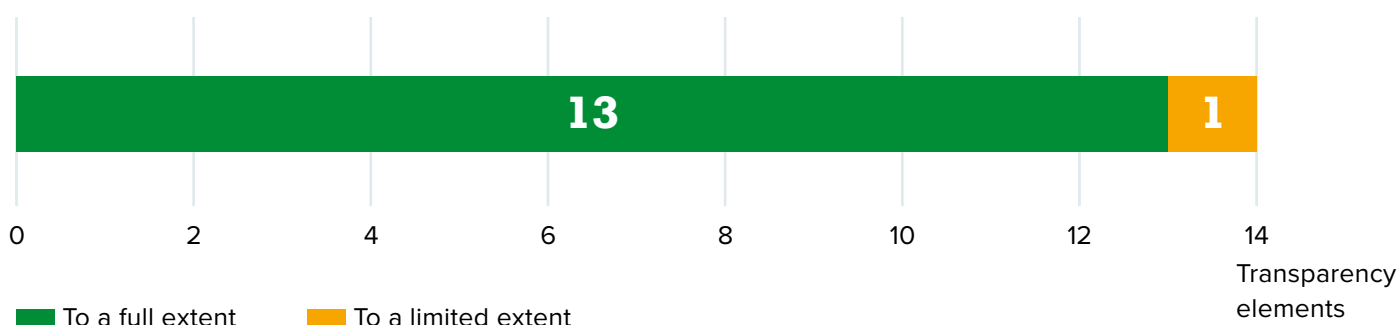


Information published online is considered up to date for 13 of the available 14 transparency elements, as most of this information is contained in the 2020/21 Annual Report of the MoBE.



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?



The publication of an annual report represents a positive effort by the MoBE to share fisheries information to a larger audience. These reports are published on a timely basis and result in the limited data shared by national authorities being up to date.

Furthermore, the list of relevant laws and regulations shared on the MoBE website appears to be up to date.

However, there are pages on the MoBE website that contain outdated information. For example, the page providing information on national fisheries policies includes a five-year strategic plan that is undated but appears to have been developed in the early 2000s and whose deadlines have largely expired. It is difficult to understand why such documents are featured on the page instead of more recent information.

EASY TO FIND?

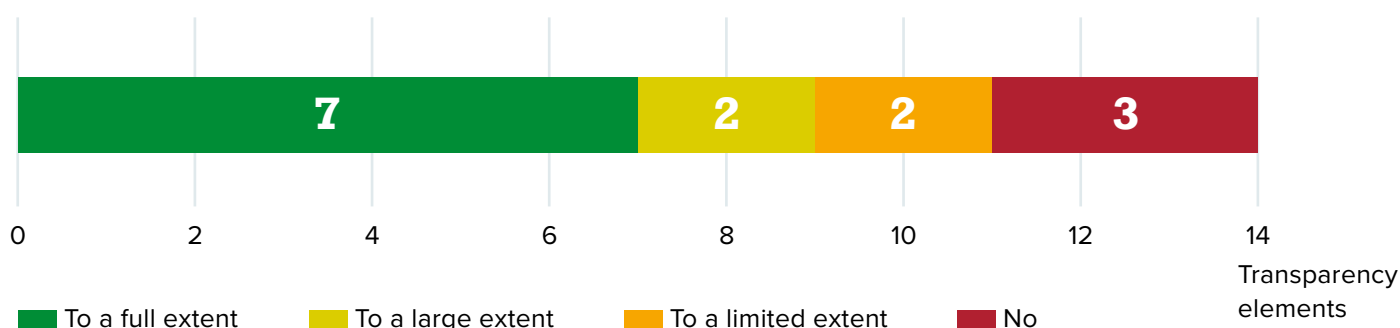
EASY TO FIND?



Only half of the information and data published online by the Mauritian government can be easily located. Given commitments to expand digitised fisheries data, the MoBE will require a modern online portal to ensure this data is accessible to the public.²¹

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?



In many coastal and small-island states, national authorities collate and publish large amounts of data on their fisheries sector. The benefit of this is reduced when information is published in a confusing way and finding information is difficult. Understanding the accessibility of information is therefore a critical component of understanding levels of transparency.

In Mauritius there is very limited data; **what does exist can be found mostly through annual reports of the MoBE**. The current architecture of the MoBE website is limited, and the search function does not work consistently. The website has mistakes in its headings, there is inconsistent use of fonts, and documents are posted in the wrong place. All this suggests that **maintaining the website is not considered important**. As and when the Ministry implements its plans to modernise fisheries information and increase the availability of digitised data, the existing website will have to be improved considerably.

²¹ This assessment analysed how easy or difficult it is for a layperson to find information about the Mauritian marine fisheries sector, instead of stakeholders with a background in fisheries and therefore holding a unique advantage in their capacity to locate the information.



‘GOOD TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES’



Beyond examining different government approaches to publishing complete, timely, and easy to find fisheries information, the TAKING STOCK programme compiles examples where national authorities publish information in a way that is considered as a ‘good transparency practice’.

Unfortunately, no such examples were found for Mauritius.



Finally, this assessment indicates that Mauritian national authorities do not provide features that ensure published information can be easily used (e.g., via search and filter functions), re-used and redistributed by anyone.

However, information can be freely used as per the National Open Data Policy, which allows government data and information to be published as 'open-by-default' under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international licence, with specific requirements regarding citation of source and, where appropriate, adjustments to the original.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OF MAURITIUS

While the national authorities of Mauritius publish some information on the country's marine fisheries online, there are several ways to further strengthen transparency in the management of the sector:

1. Make currently unpublished information publicly available

There are several aspects of fisheries management where government information is currently not being published. Addressing this would raise levels of transparency and trust in national fisheries authorities. This includes e.g.:

- Clear and comprehensive communication of the government's **fisheries management and development policies**, including the expansion of semi-industrial and industrial fisheries and the marine spatial plan;
- Information on **large-scale fishing in Mauritian waters** (vessels, catch data, landings, discards, etc), including a vessel registry;
- Summary information on, and the contracts of, **access agreements** allowing foreign-flagged vessels to fish in Mauritius as well as those allowing Mauritian vessels to fish in other countries' waters;
- Annual reports that summarise and analyse **the state of fisheries resources** and provide an explanation of trends, particularly regarding fish species targeted by commercial fisheries. This should include access to scientific stock assessments.
- More detailed reports on **trade**, including data on transshipments in Mauritius.

Furthermore, information on **fisheries in Rodrigues**, either incorporated into existing MoBE publications or published via a new standalone website.

2. Address information gaps

Although Mauritian national authorities collate some information on fisheries, there are important aspects of the sector where government information has not yet been produced. Information gaps exist on issues such as:

- The number of **men and women engaged in artisanal fisheries**, including those engaged in subsistence fishing and those employed in pre- and post-harvest activities. The MoBE might be able to collaborate with the Department for Statistics to ensure national census and household surveys include questions that better capture this information;
- The allocation and impacts of **subsidies in the fishery sector**, following on from the findings of the National Audit Office.



3. Deliver on the commitment to digitise fisheries information

It is positive that the MoBE has announced its commitment to digitise fisheries information and improve online service delivery, such as for the issuing of permits and licences. This strategy provides the opportunity to design a modern web portal for providing **public access to fisheries information**. Mauritius is encouraged to consult the websites of other coastal and small island developing states to identify best practice examples, including:

- Using multimedia presentations and geospatial information;
- Providing summaries of long texts and introductions to thematic issues;
- Allowing data to be downloaded in machine-readable formats.

4. Finalise the proposed Fisheries Bill to replace the 2007 Act

The proposed Fisheries Bill has been under discussion since at least 2015, based on the recognition that the existing Act is outdated and requires improvements. The draft of the new Bill should therefore be shared with the public. The issue of transparency and public access to information should be included in this Bill, as it was omitted from the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 2007.

Strengthening transparency of Mauritius' marine fisheries sector by, among other things, reviewing and prioritising these recommendations, should be based on ongoing discussions with stakeholders, such as fishers, fishing companies, civil society and academia. This may further help to identify other important information gaps regarding national priorities which have not been covered under this assessment (such as the impacts of climate change or the interactions between fisheries and other sectors in the blue economy).

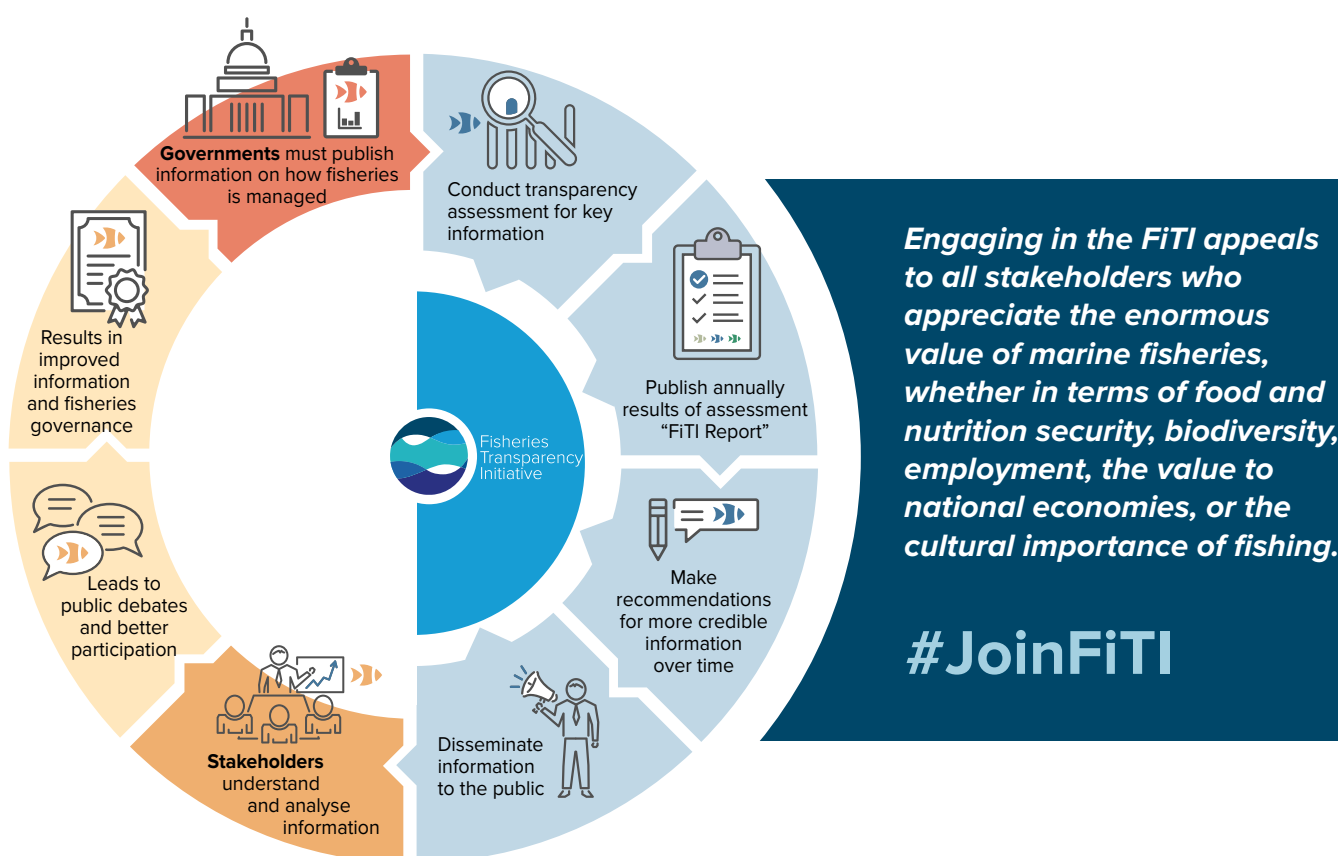
TRANSPARENCY NEEDS TRUST

Public access to information on how Mauritius' marine fisheries sector is being exploited is fundamental for good governance. This TAKING STOCK assessment provides a sound starting point for national authorities in Mauritius 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.



ANNEX: ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

This TAKING STOCK assessment evaluates the disclosure practices of Mauritian national authorities across 12 thematic areas of **marine fisheries management**,²² as defined by the FiTI Standard.

In order to avoid ambiguities during the assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been further broken down into **39 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 information²³ provided by Mauritian national authorities through their own websites and online publications.

This report, the first for Mauritius, 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 Report.

Within the scope of this assessment, two entry points have been utilised to evaluate whether information on Mauritius' marine fisheries sector is published online by national authorities, such as:²⁴

- By directly accessing websites of national authorities²⁵
- By utilising 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 conducted over a period of seven months (May – November 2022). The process was officially launched on 21 April 2022 when the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries, and Shipping was informed about the upcoming assessment, its key parameters and benefits.

The Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries, and Shipping was invited to comment on the initial research findings prior to the publication of this report. The timeframe for this review was between 16 November 2022 and 30 November 2022.

No comments were received prior to the deadline. Therefore, the report was finalised without government input.

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

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

23 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.

24 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).

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

As part of this TAKING STOCK assessment, two transparency elements are considered as not applicable for Mauritius' marine fisheries:

—	Assistance for foreign fisheries development	Mauritius does not provide development assistance to other countries' fisheries sectors.
—	Discards from the small-scale fisheries sector	Most fish caught in Mauritius by small-scale fishers are used for subsistence purposes. It is therefore assumed that discards from the sector are either minimal or non-existent.





Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



2022 Summary Assessment Report
Republic of Mauritius

Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)
Highway Complex Building, Providence
Mahé, Seychelles

Email: info@fiti.global

Internet: www.fiti.global

Twitter: @FisheriesTI

Facebook: Fisheries Transparency Initiative