



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



REPUBLIC
OF PANAMA

2022 Summary Assessment Report

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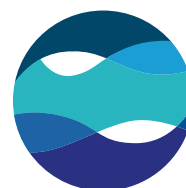
Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this assessment. All information was believed to be correct as of January 2023. Nevertheless, the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) cannot accept responsibility for the consequences resulting from the use of this 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 partnership 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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TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information assesses the level of information that national authorities in Panama publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.



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The 2022 Republic of Panama **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.”

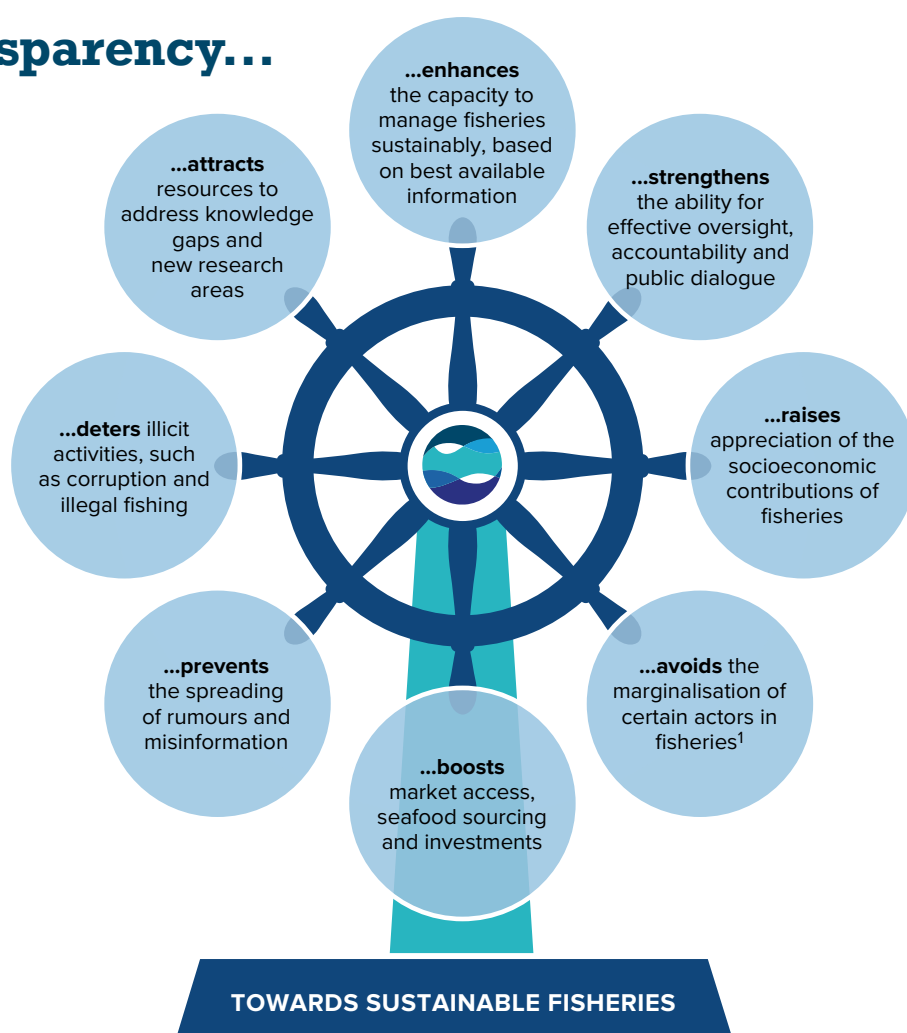
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010



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).



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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 Panama, **access to information is a fundamental right recognized in Article 43** of the *Political Constitution of the Republic of Panama*², and in *Law No. 6 that dictates norms for transparency in public administration*³, which details the scope of the information that must be disseminated by the State in its Article 10. Also noteworthy is the principle of publicity (Article 9), which defines the information that State institutions are obliged to make available on their respective websites.



- Since 2018, Panama is a member country of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**⁴, 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.
- Since 2017, Panama is a member country of the **Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST)**⁵, which is one of the world's leading initiatives to improve transparency and accountability in public infrastructure.
- Since 2019, Panama collaborates with **Global Fishing Watch (GFW)** to publish data about fishing operations of their vessels.⁶
- As of today (March 2023), the government of Panama has not committed to join the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)**, despite the importance of its 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.antai.gob.pa/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/constituciondepanama.pdf>

3 <https://www.antai.gob.pa/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Ley-6-de-22-enero-2002.pdf>

4 <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/panama>

5 <https://infrastructuretransparency.org/where/cost-panama/>













6 <https://globalfishingwatch.org/es/programa-transparencia-latinoamerica-panama/>

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the first time that Panama 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 Panama's 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 marine fisheries sector of Panama.



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This assessment is intended to support Panama's national authorities 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.

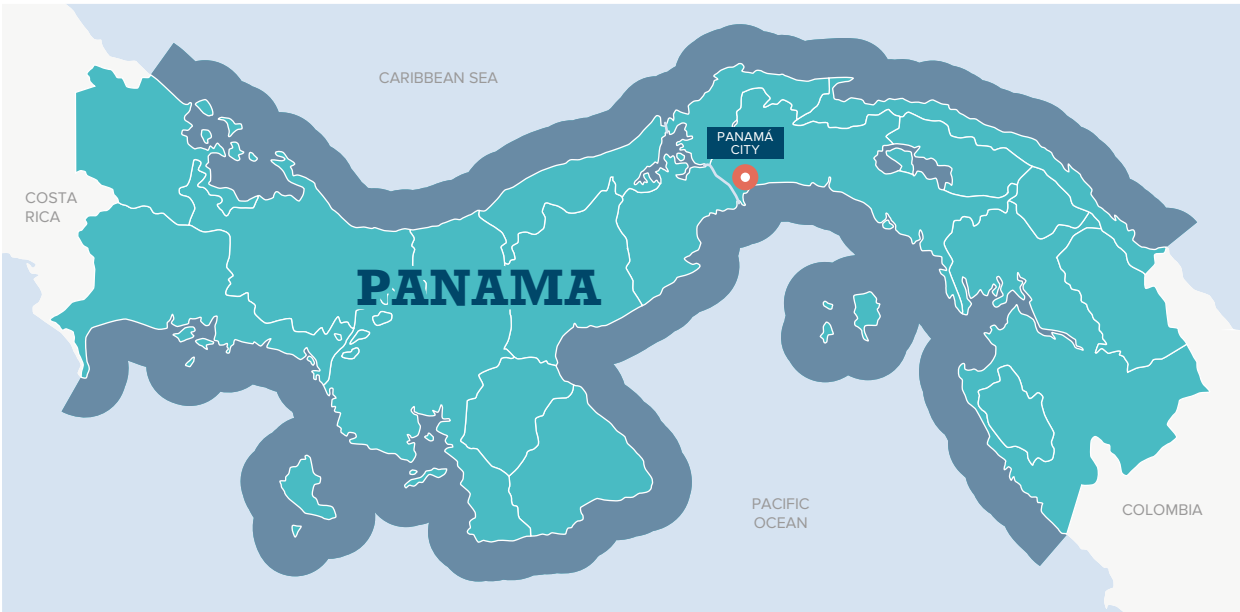
A low level of transparency in this TAKING STOCK assessment may not be a sign of wrongdoing, but rather highlights an opportunity for national authorities to enhance disclosure to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational success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

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 PANAMA



Length of coastline:¹¹
2,988.3 km

Exclusive fishing zone:¹²
319,824 km²

Marine Protected Area:¹³
98,228 km² | 30.07%

Recent developments relevant to Panama's marine fisheries sector

In March 2021, the President of Panama passed the Law that regulates fishing, aquaculture and dictates other provisions, updating the previous regulation of 1959. A participatory process is currently underway for its regulation.

In December 2022, the National Commission for Responsible Fishing was established as a requirement of the new fisheries law in force. It consists of government institutions, the fishing sector and civil society.

In 2019, the European Union assigned a "yellow card" to Panama due to risks related to illegal fishing. Following this, the country has been implementing a series of actions to strengthen compliance with fishing regulations and to combat illegal fishing.

11 Corresponding to 1,700.6 km of Pacific coastline and 1,287.7 km of Atlantic coastline. Source: National Institute of Statistics and Census of Panama

12 Source: National Naval Air Service of Panama

13 Source: Ministry of Environment, Panama



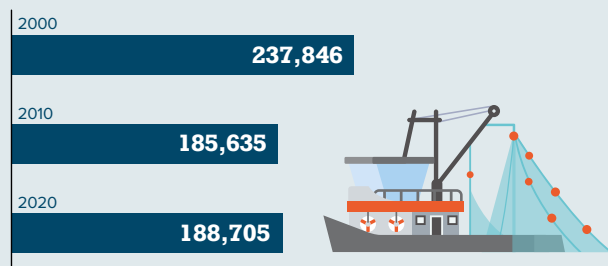
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The marine fisheries sector in Panama plays an important role in fulfilling the economic, employment, food security, and nutrition needs of its citizens.¹⁴



Capture fisheries production

(tonnes, live weight)

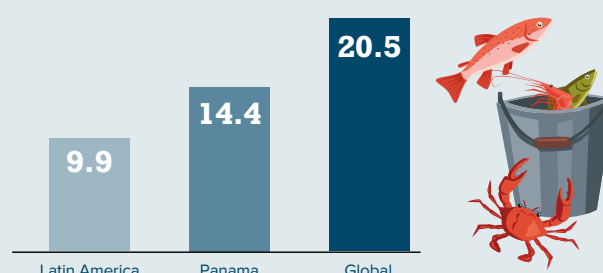


Panama is the largest fishing nation in Central America (based on catch volume).

Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022

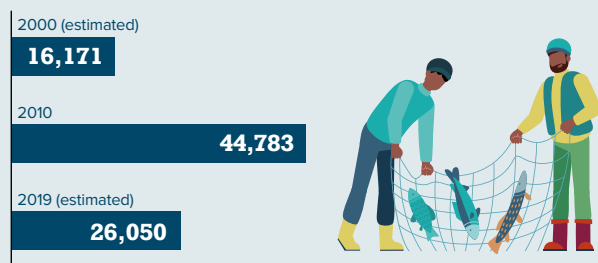
Fish available for consumption

kg/per capita



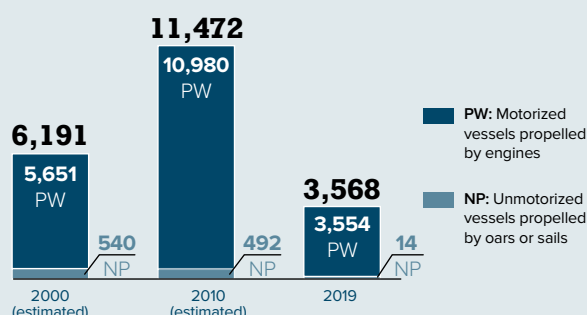
Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022, FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile – Panama 2019

Number of fishers



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

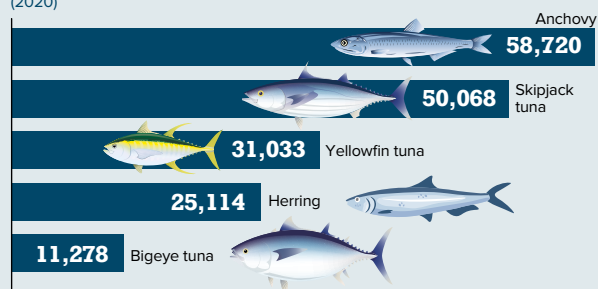
Number of fishing vessels



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

Top 5 species

(2020)



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

Export of fish and fish products

Panama is the **3rd largest exporter** of fishery products in Central America, after Honduras and Nicaragua.



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

¹⁴ 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 Panama'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



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Our assessment shows that national authorities in Panama place certain efforts on publishing fisheries management information online. However, a significant amount of information is not publicly accessible, and the quality of what is available online should be further improved.



For **17 out of 35** applicable transparency elements, national authorities in Panama publish information online ('Public access'), albeit with varying quality.



For **14** transparency elements there is no information published.



For **4** transparency elements no information has yet been produced by Panama's national authorities.

Not produced

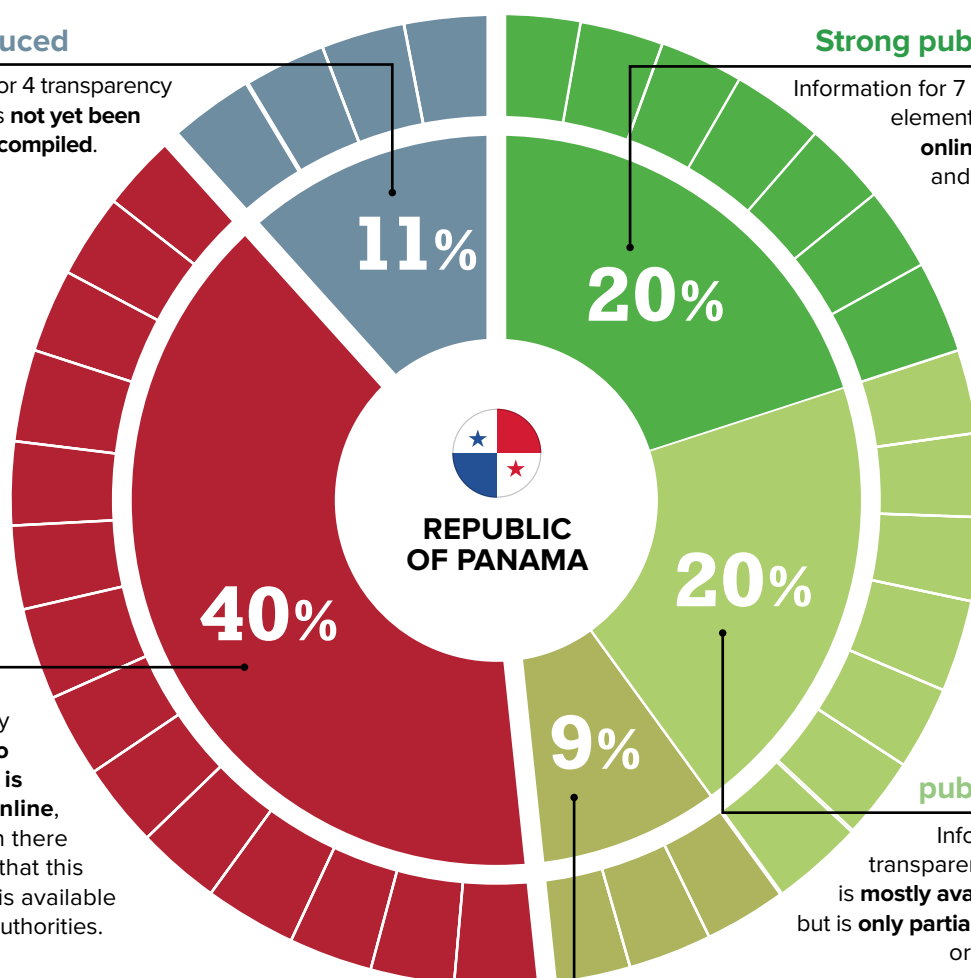
Information for 4 transparency elements has **not yet been collected or compiled**.

Strong public access

Information for 7 transparency elements is **available online, up to date and easy to find**.

No public access

For 14 transparency elements, **no information is published online**, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities.
































































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







Weak public access

Information for 3 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?	
							
#1	Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries				Strong public access
		1-B	Fisheries policy documents				Strong public access
		1-C	Fisheries management plans				Moderate public access
#2	Fisheries Tenure Arrangements	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small-scale)				Moderate public access
		2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing				Not applicable
		2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing				Not produced
		2-D	Sport fishing				Not produced
#3	Foreign Fishing Access Agreements	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in Panamanian waters				Not applicable
		3-B	Panamanian flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters				Not applicable
#4	The State of the Fisheries Resources	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations				Weak public access
		4-B	Scientific stock assessments				Weak public access
#5	Large-Scale Fisheries	5-A	Vessels				Strong public access
		5-B	Payments				Strong public access
		5-C	Catches within Panamanian waters				No public access
		5-D	Catches outside Panamanian waters				No public access
		5-E	Landings in Panamanian ports				Moderate 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	Licenses	✓	✓	✓	Moderate public access
	6-C	Fishers	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-D	Payments	—	—	—	Not applicable
	6-E	Catches	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	6-F	Discards	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade	7-A	Imports	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	7-B	Exports	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries	✓	✓	✓	Moderate 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	—	—	—	Not produced
 Official Development Assistance	11-A	Assistance for national fisheries development	✓	✗	✓	Weak public access
	11-B	Assistance for foreign fisheries development	✗	✗	✗	No public access
 Beneficial Ownership	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency	✓	✓	✓	Strong public access
	12-B	Beneficial ownership registry	✗	✗	✗	No public access
	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.



Panama's national authorities pro-actively disseminate some information on fisheries that contributes to public understanding and appreciation of the sector and helps answer some important questions. Notable examples include:

✓	How is the fishing sector regulated in Panama?	The main regulations are available on the Administradora General de la Autoridad de los Recursos Acuáticos (ARAP) portal and the complete list of fishing sector regulations can be found on the Official Gazette portal.
✓	Which vessels are authorised to fish in Panama?	Panama's fishing authority publishes different lists depending on the type of vessel. These lists include also the corresponding fishing authorisations as well as other relevant information, such as owners, validity, etc.
✓	How much seafood is imported in and exported from Panama?	Detailed information on imports and exports of different products, including fishery products, is available through the website of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo (INEC). This information is available in different formats to facilitate various usage scenarios.

Our assessment has only identified a few transparency elements for which information has not yet been produced (e.g. collected or compiled) by national authorities in Panama. Some notable examples are:¹⁵

○	What is the amount of fisheries subsidies granted and who are the beneficiaries?	During the years 2022 and 2023 subsidies have been granted for artisanal fishers, but it is assumed that Panama's national authorities have not yet consolidate such information.
○	Who benefits from fishing in Panamanian waters?	There is no evidence that the national fisheries authorities provide or are in the process of incorporating beneficial ownership rules into the procedures of Panama's fisheries sector.

¹⁵ 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.

Panama's national authorities do not currently publish specific information on a number of key areas for sustainable fisheries management. Notable examples include:¹⁶

✗	How much fish is caught in Panamanian waters?	Our assessment did not find recent public statistics on catches in Panamanian waters. This concerns catches from large-scale, small-scale and artisanal vessels. Catch information is only available online in documents more than 10 years old.
✗	What is the number of artisanal fishers in Panama?	No recent figures on the number of artisanal fishers in Panama could be found, despite the announcement of a census in 2019. According to available information a new census is being planned for 2024.
✗	Who is violating fishing regulations in Panama?	Although there is evidence of violations of fishing regulations and prosecution for fishing and labour offenses, no list or registry of those offenders is published online.
✗	How many transshipments are occurring on Panamanian vessels?	While our assessment found no evidence of occurrences of transshipments, no official information has been published by national authorities that clarifies the situation regarding transshipments.
✗	How many marine resources are discarded by Panamanian vessels?	No information on discards is published online, even though public reports mention such incidences.
✗	What is the level of fishing effort by Panamanian vessels?	Although the number of Panamanian vessels authorised to fish is known, information on the levels of fishing effort (e.g. fishing days, trawling hours, etc.) has not been found.



¹⁶ 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?

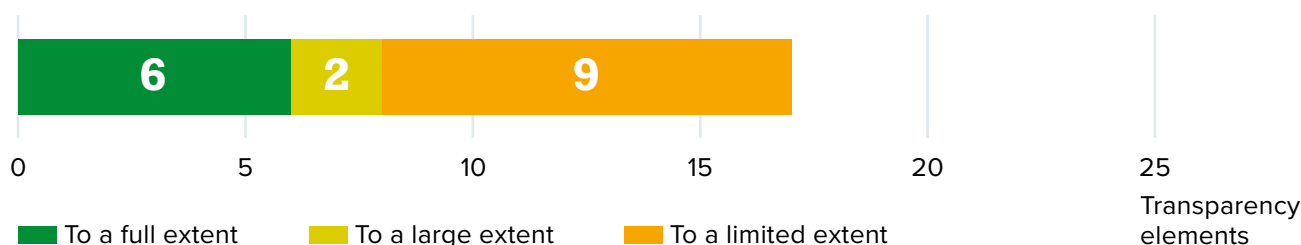


AVAILABLE ONLINE?

**AVAILABLE
ONLINE?**


Panama's national authorities publish information online for 17 transparency elements (i.e. 'Public access').¹⁷ Of those elements, only one-third (35%) fully meet the information requirements of the FiTI Standard.¹⁸

Is information in accordance with the FiTI Standard available online?



There are notable efforts by Panama's fishing authority to increase transparency in the fishing sector. For example, the Administradora General de la Autoridad de los Recursos Acuáticos (ARAP) publishes different **registries with fishing licenses for international service vessels, large-scale and small-scale vessels**. This information makes it possible to know which vessels are authorised to carry out fishing activities, who the owners are, the validity of the licenses, etc.

It should also be noted that legal information is widely available, as information on **laws and regulations applicable to the fisheries sector, fisheries policy documents** and also **fisheries management plans** (when available) can be found on the ARAP website or in the Official Gazette. This information is important to ensure that stakeholders involved in Panama's fisheries sector are able to understand current rules and regulations as well as future priorities and plans by the government.

Likewise, it should be noted that **trade information on imports and exports of fishery products** is published in an extensive manner by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo (INEC), as well as in the Foreign Trade Statistics Query System, among others. Such fisheries trade information is critical to understand better the supply and demand of fishery products or trends in prices.

On the other hand, our assessment was unable to find information on **catches made by Panamanian vessels**. Understanding how many resources have been removed from the marine environment is a critical piece of information to assess the sustainability of fish stocks. During our research we were only able to find information related to **landings in certain fishing ports**, but such information was aggregated to a total volume. Similar, no information was found regarding the number of artisanal fishers involved and the level of employment generated by the sector.

Finally, although there is information about the actions taken to ensure **compliance with fishing regulations**, we have not been able to find information related to non-compliance. For example, **no record of fishing sanctions or labour sanctions** is published online.

¹⁷ From a total of 39 transparency elements, this assessment considers four elements as being 'Not applicable' to Panama's marine fisheries sector, and four other elements are considered as 'Not produced' (meaning the government has not collected or compiled the information requested under this element).

¹⁸ Or it has been found that the published information is incomplete.



UP TO DATE?

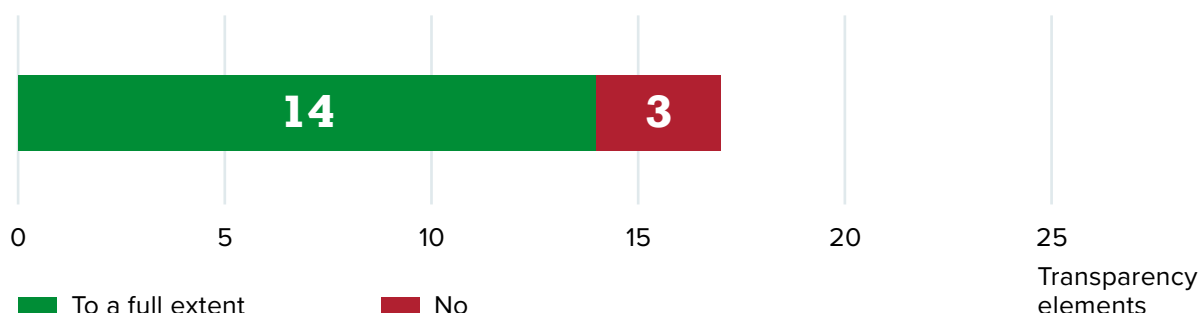
UP TO DATE?



Information published online by Panama's national authorities is considered to be fully up to date for **14 of the 17 transparency elements (or 82%)**.

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?



Our assessment found that most of the available information is up to date, which is positive and noteworthy. For example, the **lists of licenses** are updated periodically, which provides accurate information on who is authorised to fish. There is also strong confidence that the **published regulations** are up to date, as they must be published in the Official Gazette before entering into force. It should also be noted that the **commercial information on imports and exports** corresponds to recent periods.

Unfortunately, there is also important information on Panama's fisheries sector published online, which is clearly outdated, rendering it mostly useless to understand the sustainability of the sector. For example, the only **stock assessment** available online (for small pelagics) was carried out around 5 years ago. Considering that fish and shellfish populations fluctuate from year to year, it is important to update these studies in order to understand the overall health of and trends in fish populations. Similar, **methodologies used for stock assessments** also seem to have not been updated.



EASY TO FIND?

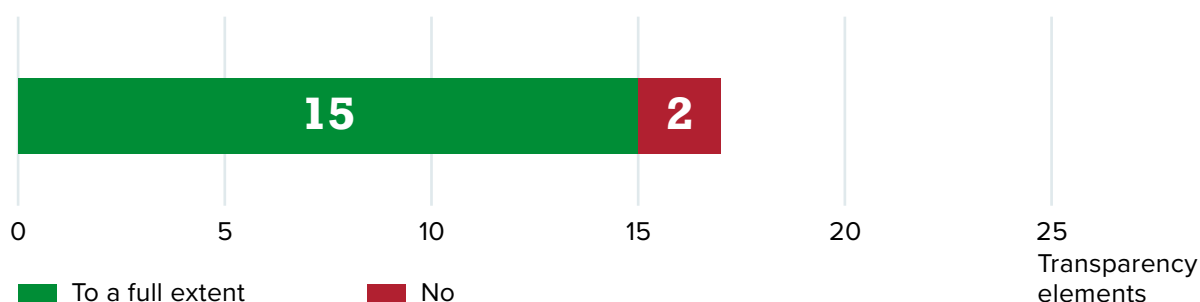
EASY TO FIND?



Information published online by the government of Panama is generally easy to locate, as information for 15 out of 17 transparency elements (or 88%) can be easily found by a layperson.¹⁶

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?



Our assessment found that for those limited transparency elements for which Panama's fisheries authorities publish information, such information is presented in a way that makes it easy to find by non-experts. The homepage of ARAP's portal provides multiple direct links to information of interest, such as the **main regulations in force in the fishing sector or the lists of fishing vessels**. In addition, the vessel lists can be filtered or sorted to facilitate searches. This allows different stakeholders to easily retrieve information about their rights and responsibilities, or to easily find out which fishing vessels are authorised to fish in Panama's waters and their characteristics.

It should also be noted that existing information on **compliance with fishing regulations** is easy to find, and press releases with fisheries-related news are published frequently. Similarly, **trade information** is easily accessible, as INEC makes its information available in detail by tariff heading as well as through automated reports. In this way, different stakeholders can access the information at the level of detail that is most useful to them.

¹⁹ This assessment analysed how easy or difficult it is for a layperson to find information about Panama's marine fisheries sector, instead of stakeholders with a background in fisheries and therefore holding a unique advantage in their capacity to locate the information.

On the other hand, our assessment found certain improvement opportunities regarding the provision of information online. For example, **scientific information on stock assessments and methodologies** are considered to be difficult to find, as this requires to consult technical documents. It is therefore important that such information, which indicates the state of exploitation of fisheries, can be easily located and understood, so that stakeholders are aware of the status of species. Likewise, the information related to **payments made by vessels** has been difficult to find, as it is again only accessible in financial and budget execution reports, which may not be intuitively consulted by laypersons.

It is important to emphasise that although our TAKING STOCK assessment focuses on access to **online** information, Panama's fishing authority shares information of interest through its social media networks, and also participates constantly in interviews in which it shares information with stakeholders.



‘GOOD TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES’



Panama's national authorities publish certain information on the country's fisheries sector that go beyond minimum standards and that the FiTI considers as **‘good transparency practices’**.



Comprehensibility:

Automated reports on exports can be accessed through the INTELCOM platform, which makes accessing and using relevant export information easy.



Granularity:

Through the Foreign Trade Statistics Query System INEC makes highly detailed information on imports and exports available, allowing interested stakeholders to perform in-depth analysis. Furthermore, such data can be filtered online and downloaded to facilitate its (re)usability.



(Re)usability:

Data on landings in Panamanian ports are presented on the country's open data platform, in different data formats and published under Creative Commons licenses.



Finally, this assessment indicates that Panama'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 registries can only be accessed online and there is no download option.

It is worth noting that Panama has an open data platform,²⁰ where data sets are made available. For example, the ARAP publishes data on procedures and certificates. Similarly, the Autoridad Maritima De Panama (AMP) publishes data on landings in Panamanian ports. These publications are made under an open license, such as those developed by Creative Commons.²¹

²⁰ <https://www.datosabiertos.gob.pa/>

²¹ Licences need to be published and linked to open data to ensure that data users can easily find and understand the requirements for accessing and re-using the data. For more information, see: <https://opendatacharter.net/principles/>.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OF PANAMA

While the national authorities of Panama publish some information on the country's marine fisheries sector 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 areas of fisheries management where government information is currently not being published. Publication of this information would strengthen transparency levels and also increase trust in national fisheries authorities. This includes for example:

- Catch statistics of the different types of vessels;
- Information on fishing activity discards;
- Information on the number of artisanal fishers and people employed in the fishing sector;
- Records of sanctions in the fishing sector;
- Register of beneficial ownership in fishing.

2. Address information gaps

Although Panama's national authorities collect substantial information on fisheries, there are important aspects of the fisheries sector where government information is missing, probably due to lack of research or resources allocated for data collection. Information gaps exist on topics such as:

- Report detailing the stock status of different fishery resources;
- Information on recently granted subsidies (amounts and beneficiaries);
- Fishery management plans for other fisheries;
- Detailed socioeconomic data by activity and gender on the impact and contribution of artisanal fisheries.

3. Finish the process of regulating and implementing the new Fisheries Law

Following the approval of the Fisheries Law, a regulatory process has been initiated in which several aspects relevant to the transparency elements considered in this assessment will be specified. For example, procedures that currently have been considered as "not produced" will be regulated, such as licenses for sport fishing, scientific fishing and also some essential aspects such as the payments required for the different types of vessels.

Likewise, the implementation of the law implies the development of the National System of Fisheries and Aquaculture Information and Statistics (Chapter II). This platform would substantially contribute to the systematization of information on the actors involved in the fishing sector and also on their activities. It is therefore important to consider public access to information as part of this regulatory effort.



4. Disseminate fisheries information to the general public

The audience or public that needs access to fisheries information is wide and diverse. For this reason, efforts should be made to make technical documents available in a language and format that is more user-friendly for audiences that do not have an academic, scientific or technical background.

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

In general terms, the following is recommended:

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

5. Promote the articulation of fisheries sector databases and the exchange of information

Information on the fishing sector has been found to be provided by multiple institutions other than ARAP, the sector's governing body. For example, INEC is in charge of commercial and employment information, or information on catches in fishing ports has been found on the AMP website. In this sense, it is suggested that the different institutions linked to the fishing sector could share the information with ARAP, or that its website could be redirected to the original data sources of other sectors. This is in accordance with the provisions of Article 154 of the Fisheries Law, which states that all fisheries information that reaches any government agency must be sent to ARAP, as it needs to be included in the National System of Fisheries and Aquaculture Information and Statistics.

On the other hand, it should be noted that various information on the fishing sector is available in open format under the Creative Commons License on the open data platform. However, it is suggested that this platform could be more widely disseminated and that there is a plan for institutions to progressively publish information on the fisheries sector.

Strengthening the transparency of Panama'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 artisanal fishers, industry and civil society. This can also help to 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).

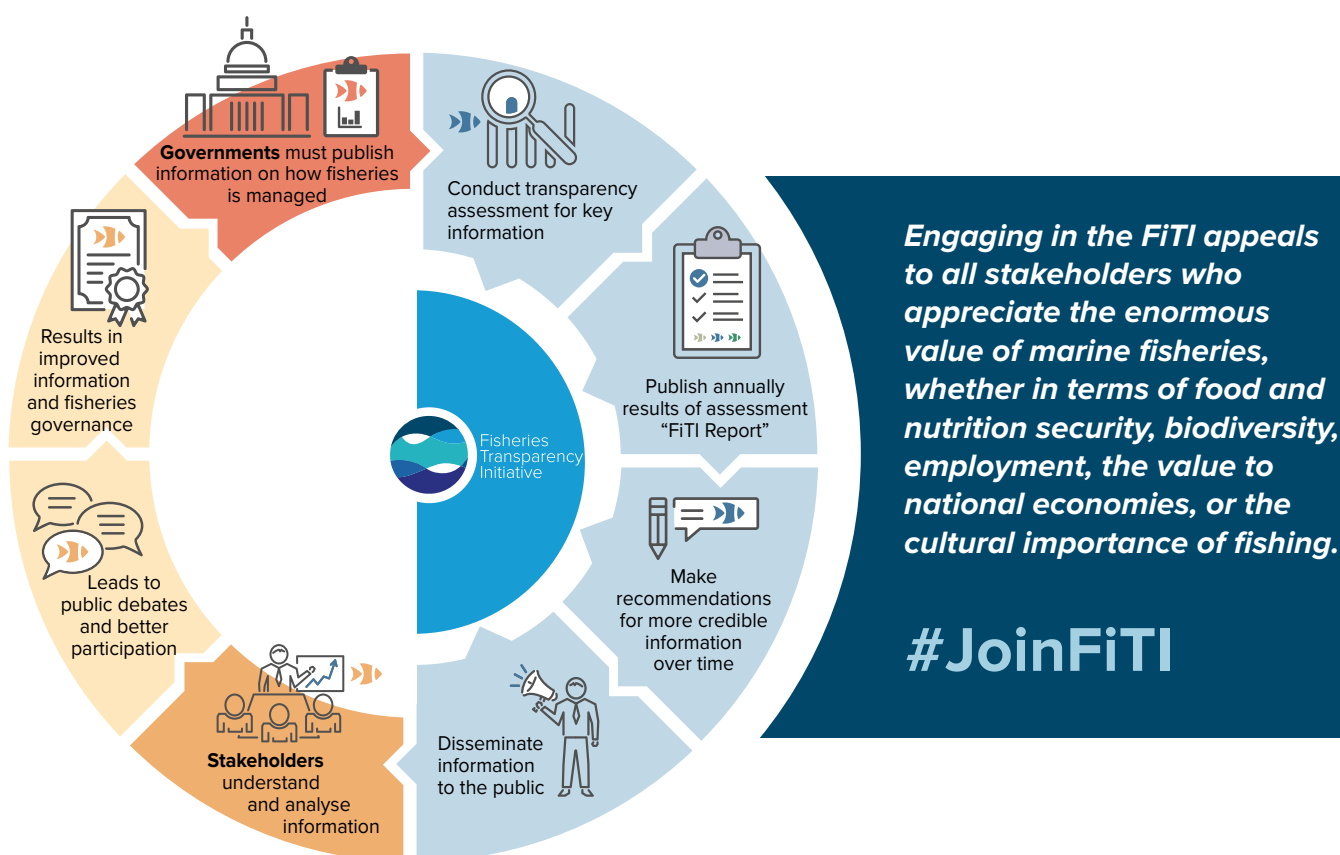
TRANSPARENCY NEEDS TRUST

Public access to information on how Panama's marine fisheries sector is being exploited is fundamental for good governance. This TAKING STOCK assessment provides a sound starting point for national authorities 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 Panama's 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 Panama's national authorities through their own websites and online publications.

This report, the first for the Republic of Panama, 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, several different entry points have been utilised to evaluate whether information on Panama's marine fisheries sector is published online by national authorities, such as:²⁴

- Through the Aquatic Resources Authority from Panama;
- Through the Panamanian government's central portal for open data;²⁵
- By utilising external search engines, such as Google or Microsoft.

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

The assessment was initially conducted between September 2022 and January 2023. The process was officially launched on 1 September 2022, when the General Administrator of the Aquatic Resources Authority from Panama (ARAP) was informed about the assessment, its key parameters and the benefits for Panama.

The Aquatic Resources Authority from Panama was invited to comment on the initial research findings prior to the publication of this report. The time-frame for this review was between 1 and 24 February 2023.

No comments were received prior to the deadline. Therefore, the report was finalized without input from the government of Panama.

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 pro-actively 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, several transparency requirements were considered as not applicable to Panama's marine fisheries, such as:

—	Coastal subsistence fishing	There are not government regulations and fishery obligations related to this sub-sector.
—	Foreign Fishing Access Agreements	Panama's Fisheries Law does not allow foreign vessels to fish in Panamanian waters. Likewise, for the operation of Panamanian vessels in foreign waters, no evidence of bilateral agreements has been found, since the negotiations are made directly by the owners of the vessels.
—	Payments from small-scale and artisanal fishing vessels	According to the procedure established by ARAP to obtain a small-scale fishing license, no payment is required from artisanal fishers. Therefore, it is considered that this information requirement does not apply.



TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries
Management Information



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