



Fisheries  
Transparency  
Initiative

# 23rd meeting of the FiTI International Board

8 February 2024, Conference Call

## Meeting Minutes

ID: BM-23\_2024\_MM

**Provided by:** FiTI International Secretariat

**Date:** 04.05.2024

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<b>Date</b>	8 February 2024
<b>Time</b>	Noon – 2.10 p.m. Universal Coordinated Time (UTC)
<b>Venue</b>	Conference Call (Zoom)
<b>Supporting document(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letter sent to the Co-Chairs of the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency, including Annex (dated: 20 December 2023)</li> </ul>

## Outcomes of meeting

### 1. Welcome and administration

The Chair of the FiTI International Board, Valeria MERINO (herein referred to as ‘Chair’), opened the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Board meeting by welcoming all participating Members and Observers and by wishing everyone a happy and prosperous New Year.

Apologies were noted prior to the meeting from Board Members Hugh GOVAN (stakeholder group: Business Sector) as well as Maisie PIGEON, Ketakandriana RAFITOSON, Umair SHAHID and Ahmed SENHOURY (stakeholder group: Social Sector). Voting powers were delegated as shown in Appendix I. Furthermore, apologies were noted from all observer organisation, UN FAO, World Bank and Open Government Partnership.

After all eligible participants joined, Mr Sven BIERMANN, Executive Director (ED) of the FiTI International Secretariat (herein referred to as ‘Secretariat’), determined that a quorum for this meeting was reached<sup>1</sup>:

Pro-rated attendance of Board Members <sup>2</sup> :	At least two Board Members per stakeholder group?	Attendance of Observers:
13.3 out of 18 votes	Yes	0 out of 3

The Chair also emphasised that Board Members were requested to voice to her their concerns or anticipated contentious issues about any of the points included in this agenda before this meeting. This way, such aspects could be incorporated into the discussion, additional information could be gathered, and time in the agenda could be allocated if needed. Board Members communicated no such concerns or feedback before this meeting.

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with article 14 (7) of the constitution of the association of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (as of 13 May 2021): ‘No binding decision shall be made in an FiTI International Board meeting unless a quorum is present at the time of making the decision. Half of the total number of members (including proxies), with at least two members from each stakeholder group, forms a quorum.’

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with article 14 (13) of the constitution of the association of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (as of 13 May 2021). ‘Every member has one vote, unless the current total number of members is not equally distributed among the stakeholder groups stated in Article 8. In such a case, voting power shall be determined on a pro-rated system, ensuring that all stakeholder groups have equal voting power.’

As not all 18 seats have been filled for this Board meeting, the pro-rated voting powers for this FiTI International Board meeting were determined as follows:

- **Government sector:** Currently four Board Members → each Board Member carries 1.5 votes.
- **Business sector:** Currently five Board Members → each Board Member carries 1.2 votes.
- **Social sector:** Currently six Board Members → each Board Member carries 1 vote.

## 2. Updates from the FiTI International Secretariat

The Chair recalled that on the night of 7 December 2023, the FiTI's headquarter offices in the Providence Industrial Area of Seychelles were totally destroyed due to a massive explosion at a nearby construction and quarrying company.

The Chair asked the ED to provide a brief overview of the material and financial losses incurred, its current working mode for Seychelles-based staff as well as its endeavours to reestablish a physical office in the Seychelles.

The ED started by confirming that the office was fully damaged, and the Secretariat lost its entire physical infrastructure. At the same time, and most importantly, none of the Secretariat's staff were injured, as the explosion occurred in the middle of the night and not while everyone was in the office.



As the Secretariat comprises of a globally distributed team of fisheries and governance experts – located in several countries as well as in its Seychelles-based headquarter – and therefore utilises a cloud-based IT infrastructure, no information or documents were lost during the blast, and the operations of the FiTI remain intact. Furthermore, the colleagues from the Secretariat fortunately took their laptops home on the night of the accident and were able to recover a few personal items from the site afterward.

The ED was also pleased to inform the Board that the Government of Seychelles re-confirmed its commitment to provide office space to the Secretariat, once a new site was located. After several sites have been inspected during January 2024, a decision was reached by the Secretariat that it will move back into its old building. It was confirmed to the Secretariat and the Government of Seychelles that this should be possible by mid-April 2024. Furthermore, the Government of Seychelles confirmed that it will graciously replace all the furniture needed for the Secretariat's offices. The remaining damage – estimated at around 6-7k EUROS for IT equipment and office supplies – will be covered out of FiTI's administrative budget. A separate budget line will be included in the Secretariat's 2024 workplan.

Finally, the ED informed all participants that until the Seychelles-based Secretariat staff is able to move back into an office, everyone is working from home. The necessary arrangements have been completed.

Several members inquired about whether the infrastructure of the Secretariat was insured, whether a health or accident insurance is provided to cover the Seychelles-based Secretariat staff. The ED stated that no infrastructure insurance was used, as the monthly insurance premium would not justify a potential loss of the Secretariat's equipment (given that the furniture was provided by the Government of Seychelles). Furthermore, doubts were raised about whether existing infrastructure insurance would have covered this unique incident. Furthermore, the ED outlined that at the moment, the FiTI is unable to provide any kind of additional insurance coverage for its staff (independent of whether based in the Seychelles' Secretariat or in home offices). Only travel insurance for country missions is provided.

The ED also stated that the FiTI, in solidarity with the people of Seychelles, provided a one-time donation of 7,500 Seychelles Rupees to the governments' '7<sup>th</sup> December Disaster Fund'.

Moving into another subject, the ED informed the participants briefly about a recently launched pilot in collaboration with the non-profit organisation People Powered<sup>3</sup> The ED recalled that early FiTI implementations in several countries, such as Seychelles and Madagascar, have shown that even a significant increase in public information does not directly lead to more (non-governmental) stakeholder involvement in public policy-making. Furthermore, while calls for participation are often and manifold, these calls are not always

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<sup>3</sup> People Powered is a global hub for participatory democracy, and legally incorporated in New York, United States of America, under section 402 of the Non-for-Profit Corporation Law. For more information, please see here: <https://www.peoplepowered.org>. People Powered is collaborating with the social enterprise Participation Factory on this project (<https://participationfactory.com/>).

clearly defined regarding its purpose, why an increase in participation is seen as beneficial or who should be involved in such participatory processes in fisheries.



Through this 12-month project, the Secretariat seeks to increase its impact on sustainable marine fisheries and to contribute towards creating a more inclusive policy-making environment by piloting a participatory support approach for the FiTI National Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSG) of Seychelles and Madagascar. The pilot project is structured into the following three phases:



The majority of the project activities are envisioned to be carried out between January and November 2024. The FiTI and People Powered will fully cover the financial costs for this pilot project.

### 3. Update about the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency

During its last meeting in December 2022, the Board was briefly informed about developments at the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency (CFT)<sup>4</sup>, particularly its recent efforts of approaching governments directly to obtain their endorsements of the CFT’s Charter. This new direction on how the CFT works at the country level is of great concern to the FiTI, as it could dilute global transparency efforts in fisheries management, since the

<sup>4</sup> The Coalition for Fisheries Transparency is ‘an international community of non-governmental advocacy organizations and regional coalitions that work together to improve transparency and accountability in fisheries governance and management.’ According to its mission, the Coalition seeks to ‘support the efforts of civil society organizations on the national and regional level, and to drive progress in fisheries transparency on a global scale.’ <https://fisheriestransparency.net/about-us/>

CFT's Charter includes only high-level principles but does not provide detailed technical guidance on how to implement transparency in fisheries management. Furthermore, the CFT does not have a mechanism to hold governments accountable, unlike the FiTI Standard. It will (and already has) create confusion when the CFT and the FiTI attempt to engage the same governments and other constituencies.

Consequently, the Board approved that the Chair forms and facilitates a Working Group on this matter to provide guidance and advice. The Chair informed that in addition to herself and the ED, the Board Members Andres ARENS, Hugh GOVAN, Umair SHAHID and Annie TOURETTE form this Working Group.

The Chair informed all participants that the Working Group drafted a letter to the Steering Committee of the CFT, not only outlining the FiTI's concerns but also a clear solution approach (i.e. to reference the FiTI Standard in Principle 9 of the CFT's Global Charter). This letter was sent to the CFT on 20 December 2023; the letter was shared with all participants prior to this meeting. Furthermore, the FiTI was asked to participate in the January 2024 Steering Committee of the CFT in order to present the main aspects of its letter to the CFT Steering Committee members and to answer questions. After this meeting, the Chair was informed that the FiTI's request to reference the FiTI Standard in the CFT's Charter was rejected. This rejection was communicated without additional information. The Working Group is currently exploring various options, such as mediation meetings between the FiTI's Working Group and members of the CFT's Steering Committee, as well as reaching out to the CFT's main donors, such as Oceans5. The Chair emphasized that despite this concerning and frustrating development, both sides should continue to engage in the spirit of finding a suitable solution.

Several members of the Board voiced their concerns about this situation – in particular about the CFT seeking government endorsement for their Charter, and the fact that the Charter does not incorporate the interest of the small-scale fisheries (SSF) sub-sector. The Board supported the proposal of the Working Group to continue the discussion with the CFT and asked the Working Group to analyse FiTI's options with the objective of finding an acceptable solution, if feasible. The goal of continuing the conversation and negotiation with the CFT was to prevent future conflicts, avoid confusion between the work of the FiTI and the CFT, and ensure that fisheries' transparency remains a credible and technically sound endeavour, particularly in relation to marine fisheries management and stakeholder participation which is the direct interest of the FiTI. Further, the members of the Working Group would continue to communicate to the CFT that they ought to consider ways to incorporate the interests and needs of the SSF sub-sector. The FiTI had already communicated to the CFT that SSF representatives participated actively in the work that resulted in the creation of the FiTI Standard, and the sub-sector had declared their support

to the goal of having governments publish information about their fishing sector at the minimum of what is required by the FiTI Standard.

#### 4. Brainstorming regarding new membership policy

The Chair recalled that as per article 11 (10) of the constitution of the association of the FiTI (as of 13 May 2021): *“the aspects regarding the admission, retention, resignation and removal of members<sup>5</sup>, including the determination of qualification requirements for new members, shall be governed by a global membership policy, and the FiTI International Board shall be responsible for enacting this policy.”* However, such a policy has not been established yet.

In order to enable the Secretariat to start preparing such a policy, the Chair presented a brief overview of the key provisions regarding membership within the FiTI’s constitution and then initiated a brainstorming discussion among the participants. The following situations were considered particularly relevant when deciding on this new policy:

- An elected Board Member does no longer work for an organisation that is affiliated with the Members’ initial stakeholder group (e.g. representative nominated by a civil society organisation is employed by a for-profit company);
- An elected Board Member remains within the same stakeholder group, but the Member’s capacity to access knowledge, information, and networks needed to adequately represent his original stakeholder group is changing, e.g. moving from the Ministry of Fisheries to the Ministry of Finance;
- The level of commitment and engagement from the Members’ new organisation allowing the FiTI Board Member to fulfil its responsibilities adequately;
- The existence, identification, management and decision-making around potential conflict of interests or even ethical concerns.

While this list was not considered comprehensive , all participants agreed that it provides a sound basis for the Chair and the Secretariat to develop a draft policy. The Board communicated its expectations to the ED that such a draft policy should be presented within the next two months. The decision-making process for this policy should be via a Board Circular.

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<sup>5</sup> FiTI International Board Members.



## 5. Closing

Due to time constraints, the final agenda item – the approval of financial auditor for 2023 – was postponed to the next (24<sup>th</sup>) meeting. The Chair concluded the meeting by emphasising that the last in-person Board meeting took place in September 2022 in Brussels/Belgium, kindly financed by PROBLUE, an umbrella multi-donor trust fund, administered by the World Bank. Given constraints within the FiTI's budget to provide financial support for the next in-person meeting, the FiTI Chair asked all participants to provide ideas regarding other meeting/financing options for an in-person meeting of the Board within the next 12-18 months. The Chair will contact all Board Members and Observers to gather additional input, e.g. which conference should be targeted where several Board Members would attend anyway.

### The 23<sup>rd</sup> International Board Meeting ended.

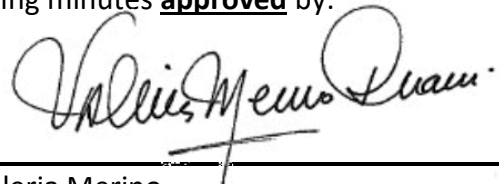
Meeting minutes **provided** by:



Mr Sven Biehmann

Secretary of the meeting; Executive Director of the  
FiTI International Secretariat

Meeting minutes **approved** by:



Dr Valeria Merino

Chair of the FiTI International Board.

## APPENDIX I: List of Participants

### Chair

**Valeria MERINO**

### Stakeholder group: Government sector

**Andres ARENS** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.5 votes]

**Joacim JOHANNESON** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.5 votes]

**Annika MACKENSEN** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.5 votes]

Not excused:

**Roy CLARISSE**

### Stakeholder group: Business sector

**Keith ANDRE** [Voting power for this meeting: 2.4 votes]<sup>6</sup>

**Tony LAZZARA** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

**Dawda Foday SAINÉ** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

Excused:

**Hugh GOVAN**<sup>7</sup>

Not excused:

**Alfredo SFEIR**

### Stakeholder group: Social sector

**Annie TOURETTE** [Voting power for this meeting: 3.0 votes]<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hugh GOVAN assigned his voting power (1.2 votes) to Keith ANDRE as his proxy in an email to the FiTI International Secretariat on 7 February 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh GOVAN was able to participate partly in the meeting.

<sup>8</sup> Maisie PIGEON assigned her voting power (1.0 votes) to Annie TOURETTE as her proxy in an email to the FiTI International Secretariat on 3 February 2024.

Ketakandriana RAFITOSON assigned her voting power (1.0 votes) to Annie TOURETTE as her proxy in an email to the FiTI International Secretariat on 5 February 2024.

Excused:

**Maisie PIGEON**

**Ketakandriana RAFITOSON**

**Umair SHAHID<sup>9</sup>**

**Ahmed SENHOURY**

Not excused:

**Zacari EDWARDS**

### Observers

Excused:

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**, represented by Marcio CASTRO DE SOUZA

**Open Government Partnership**, represented by Joe POWELL

**World Bank Group**, represented by Julien MILLION

### FiTI International Secretariat

**Sven BIERMANN**

### Guests

**None**

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<sup>9</sup> Umair SHAHID assigned his voting power (1.0 votes) to the FiTI Chair as his proxy in an email to the FiTI Chair on 6 February 2024.