



Fisheries  
Transparency  
Initiative

# 24th meeting of the FiTI International Board

21 March 2024, Conference Call

## Meeting Minutes

ID: BM-24\_2024\_MM

**Provided by:** FiTI International Secretariat

**Date:** 17.05.2024

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<b>Date</b>	21 March 2024
<b>Time</b>	1.00 – 2.50 p.m. Universal Coordinated Time (UTC)
<b>Venue</b>	Conference Call (Zoom)
<b>Supporting document(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2024 Workplan of the FiTI International Secretariat – draft                      (date: 29 February 2024), file: 'FiTI_IS-WorkPlan2024_20240229.pdf'</li> </ul>

## Outcomes of meeting

### 1. Welcome and administration

The Chair of the FiTI International Board (herein referred to as ‘Chair’), Valeria MERINO, opened the 24<sup>th</sup> International Board meeting by welcoming all participating Members and Observers.

Apologies were noted prior to the meeting from Board Member Annika MACKENSEN (stakeholder group: Government Sector) as well as Observers Marcio CASTRO DE SOUZA (UN FAO) and Julien MILLION (World Bank). Annika delegated her voting power to Joacim JOHANNESSON, as shown in Appendix I.

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:
14.8 out of 18 votes	Yes	0 out of 3

The Chair welcomed the new focal point of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a permanent Observer to the FiTI International Board ((herein referred to as ‘Board), Ms Adna KARAMEHIC-OATES (OGP’s Lead on Policy & Partnerships). Adna briefly introduced herself to the other participants.

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

<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.

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. However, Board Member Hugh GOVAN requested additional clarifications regarding the Secretariat's proposed workplan. This request was addressed by the ED during the meeting (as documented below).

## 2. Approval of financial auditor for 2023

The Chair recalled that as per article 23 (1) of the constitution of the association of the FiTI (as of 13 May 2021), the *'FiTI International Board shall appoint an external, independent auditor to annually audit the finances of the FiTI and to present a written audit report to the FiTI International Board, subject to funding availability. The Executive Director must substantiate the financial inability to perform an annual audit to the FiTI International Board, and the allocation of funds for the annual audit should be given priority in the budgeting process.'*

Based on the instructions given by the Board during its meeting in December 2023, the Secretariat compiled a list of Seychelles-based audit companies. The ED and the Chair emphasised the importance of engaging a reputable accounting firm officially affiliated to an internationally operating audit company to comply with accepted practices for non-profit organizations that received grants from large foundations or are supported by government development agencies. The ED presented three options for the Board to consider. Although the list included very reputable accounting firms, the Board learned that there was only one accounting company based in Seychelles that fulfilled the above-mentioned requirement with services within the available funds. Hence, the Board discussed the matter of available options, considering its previous request to engage a new audit company for the 2023 Annual Financial Statement, and made a decision accordingly.

The participating Board Members reached the following decision by consensus:

### **Decision [BM-24\_2024\_D-01]:**

**The International Board approved the appointment of the Seychelles-based audit company Pool & Patel Chartered Accountants to conduct an independent audit of FiTI's 2023 Annual Financial Statement.**

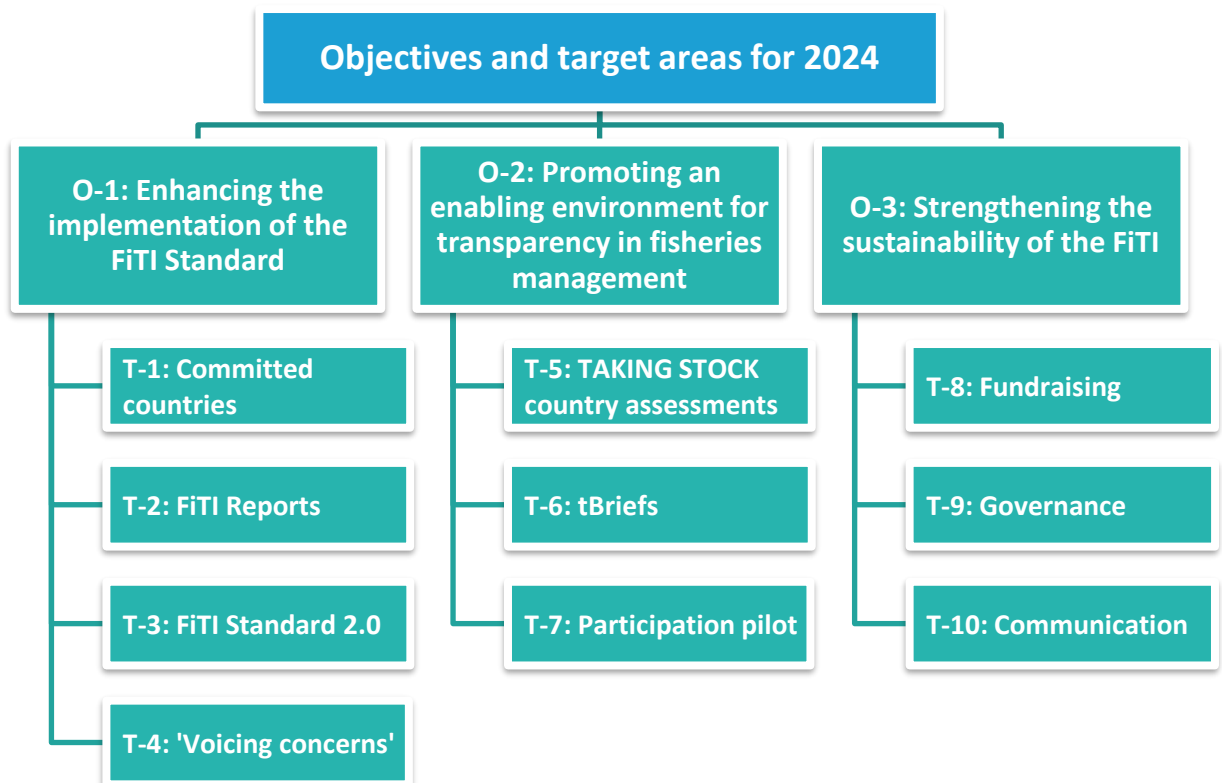
The Board re-stated its expectations that the FiTI's Annual Financial Statement for 2023, including an Audit Report, should be completed and presented to the Board for approval by the end of June 2024.

### 3. 2024 Workplan of the FiTI International Secretariat

The Chair asked the ED to present the key parameters of the 2024 Workplan of the FiTI International Secretariat. As an opening remark, the ED noted that the purpose of this annual workplan is to document the Secretariat’s pursued objectives, core activities, and anticipated financial budget to advance transparency in marine fisheries management globally for the period starting on 01 January and ending on 31 December 2024. The plan is based on the overall resources available and on realistic expectations of what can be accomplished in that time framework.

Furthermore, the workplan serves as a **planning tool** for the Secretariat to ensure the efficient use of resources to achieve its objectives. The workplan also serves as an **accountability tool** for the Board, through which it can approve the Secretariat’s priorities, activities, and budgets, as well as monitor the Secretariat’s work and results against performance indicators.

Based on this proposed workplan, the FiTI International Secretariat plans to pursue **three objectives [O]** with a total number of **10 target areas [T]** in 2024:

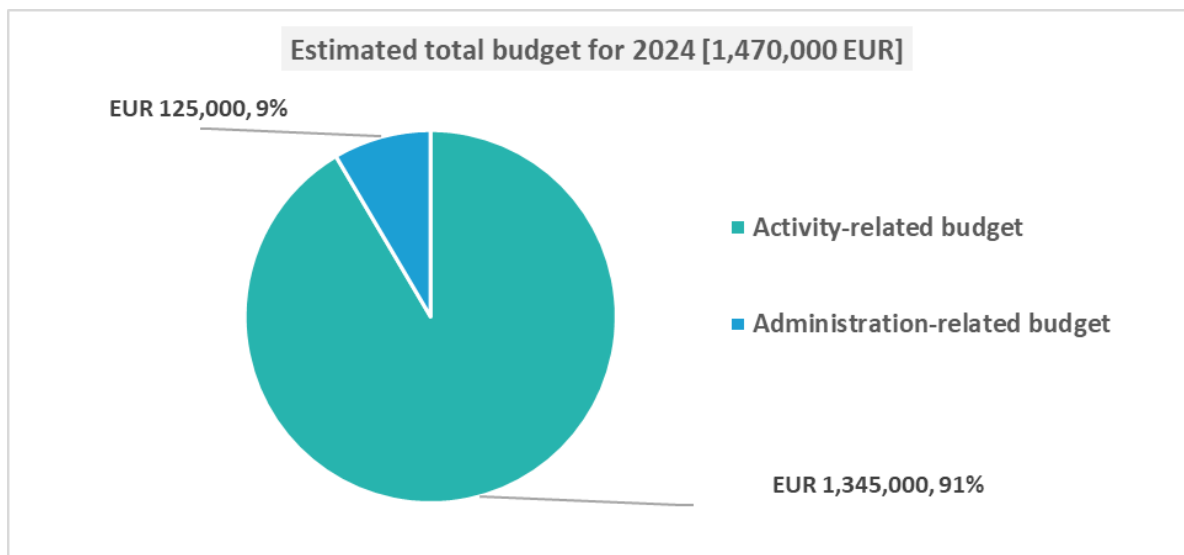


In pursuing these objectives, the International Secretariat strives to accomplish the following highlights within the calendar year 2024:

- Obtain public commitments from 5x new governments;

- Launch an updated version of the FiTI Standard;
- Support the release of 7x annual FiTI Reports;
- Release 4x TAKING STOCK assessment reports, including on China, Vietnam and Indonesia;
- Publish 5x tBriefs;
- Conduct a participatory pilot in two FiTI implementing countries;
- Initiate a fisheries information analysis capacity within the Secretariat;
- Raise up to EUR 500k in additional activity-related funding.

The ED highlighted that in order to pursue these objectives and target areas, an annual budget of 1,470,000 EUR (activity-related budget as well as administration-related budget) is required<sup>3</sup>. This 2024 anticipated budget represents almost a threefold increase compared to the incurred expenses for 2023, which demonstrates the FiTI's ongoing establishment as a global initiative.



The ED highlighted that the total required activity-related budget and administration-related budget for 2024 has already been secured. The ED also provided some brief information on the recently received 3-year grant from the Government of Ireland to “Strengthening climate actions through transparent fisheries management in African Small

<sup>3</sup> The administration-related budget covers general and administrative costs, which are not covered by specific activities (e.g. grants). This includes e.g. accounting and auditing costs, insurances, rent, office supplies. It was noted that the FiTI's annual budgets (as part of this workplan) has been stated in EUROS instead of USDs, given that the majority of funding over the next years will be received in EUROS.

Island Developing States (IDS)”, with a total grant volume 600k EUROS. The Board congratulated the ED and the Secretariat for this achievement.

Additional information was provided to the Board regarding the detailed breakdown of these objectives and target areas into concrete activities, deliverables, and cost allocations. As part of this information, the ED also clarified that the administrative budget includes a one-time budget of approximately 6k EUROS to replace office equipment and supplies, which were destroyed during the December 7<sup>th</sup> explosion.

The Chair thanked the ED and the Secretariat for preparing the workplan, and expressed her expectations that these objectives and target areas will again contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of the initiative.

Afterward, the Chair, Members and Observers of the Board provided their feedback on the workplan:

- The Chair stated that the administrative budget of less than 10% demonstrates the operational effectiveness of the Secretariat, given that similar global initiatives often require a much higher operational budget. This is despite the recent change towards a ‘Employer-of-Record’ engagement model for non-Seychelles-based staff.
- Board Member Tony LAZAZARA requested additional clarification from the ED regarding the target of obtaining commitments from 5 new countries within 2024, given that the Secretariat did not engage a new country during 2023. The ED stated that while the Secretariat indeed failed to obtain a new country commitment in 2023, several discussions with country representatives are in advanced stages. Furthermore, the addition of 3 new Regional Coordinators to the Secretariat will increase the FiTI’s presence in key target regions, whereas the addition of a dedicated Communications Coordinator will ensure to raise further the global awareness about the FiTI. It was therefore agreed that the target of 5 countries is indeed a realistic, yet ambitious goal.
- Board Member Hugh GOVAN emphasised the importance of conducting focussed communication campaigns related to the FiTI Standard, the FiTI’s theory of change and to highlight social and economic benefits of increased transparency (e.g. food & nutrition security, economic equality, democratic participation, access to climate finance). Hugh mentioned that investing in communicating this information is not only important to raise the global brand recognition of the FiTI, but also to ensure stakeholders understand better the difference between the FiTI and other fisheries-transparency related efforts, e.g. the Coalition of Fisheries Transparency. The ED responded that the Secretariat’s main focus regarding communication for this year is to consolidate and professionalise FiTI’s outreach efforts across its various media channels (e.g. Emails to FiTI’s global CRM database, Website, Twitter (X), LinkedIn,

Facebook – and eventually also Instagram). This will not only relate to an enhanced frequency of messaging, but also the utilisation of technology to better analyse user behaviour and gain insights for targeted campaigns. For the first half of 2024, this will primarily cover operational messages, such as National MSG meetings, country missions or news & announcements (e.g. Chile joining the FiTI). The second half of 2024 will also include additional communication regarding the FiTI's work, such as information about the FiTI Standard, the concept of progressive improvement, benefits of transparency in fisheries management or core aspects of FiTI's tBrief series.

- Furthermore, Hugh stated that fishers from the global South, given the challenges they face with foreign and often Northern fleets, have previously requested strong consideration of performing FiTI's TAKING STOCK transparency assessments on countries from the EU. This would seem equitable and a redress to the perception that bad governance is only a feature of the South. The ED responded that the TAKING STOCK programme does currently not include funding for EU countries, and furthermore will be reviewed by the end of the year to determine whether any changes are needed (e.g. switching from a country-centred focus to a thematic focus). Nevertheless, the importance of continuing such assessments on key fishing nations – such as the already conducted assessment on the United States or Peru, as well as the upcoming assessments for China and Indonesia – and the expansion to other countries in the future will remain an aspect that the Secretariat will continue discussing with donors.
- Board Member Alfredo SFEIR offered his support to the Secretariat to further discuss growth strategies for the FiTI, addressing internal organisational capacity aspects as well as external funding possibilities.

Afterwards, the participating Board Members reached the following decision by consensus:

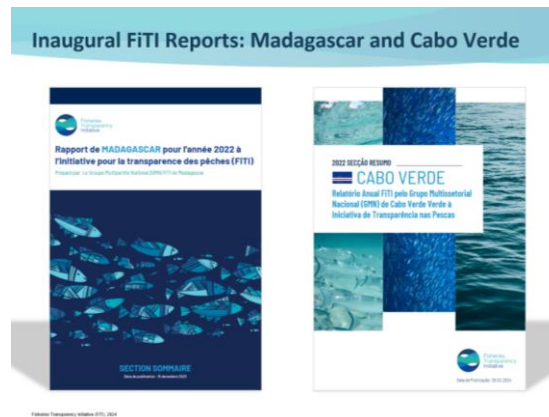
**Decision [BM-24\_2024\_D-02]:**

**The FiTI International approved the 2024 Workplan of the FiTI International Secretariat, including the overall budget of 1,470,000 EUR and the proposed allocation into an activity-related and administration-related budget.**





## 4. Inaugural FiTI Reports from Madagascar and Cabo Verde

Over the last weeks, the FiTI National Multi-Stakeholder Groups of Madagascar and Cabo Verde published their countries' first-ever FiTI Reports (covering calendar year 2022).<sup>4</sup> The Chair requested the ED to give a brief overview of both reports.



The ED stated that, similarly to previously published inaugural reports by Seychelles and Mauritania, these reports provided public access to a range of previously unpublished information while also highlighting a diversity of challenges and information not yet made accessible. Several examples, as indicated below, were briefly described.

Previously unpublished information now available*		Important information not yet published	
	Madagascar (Examples)	Madagascar (Examples)	Cabo Verde (Examples)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive list of fisheries laws and regulations</li> <li>A list of large-scale fishing vessels</li> <li>Total payments for industrial fishing activities</li> <li>Basic information on artisanal fishing in Madagascar (e.g. numbers of boats, payments)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign fishing access agreements with JAPAN TUNA and INTERATUN</li> <li>Recorded annual catches of industrial fishing for all commercial species other than tuna and tuna-like species (e.g. shrimp and prawns)</li> </ul> <p><i>National MSG emphasised that the state of fisheries transparency remains fragile and uncertain insofar as the policies and practices observed for a number of years suggest that it will be difficult to establish long-term lasting transparency.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listing of foreign fishing agreements</li> <li>Information for industrial and semi-industrial fishing vessels (e.g. type of vessels, flag State)</li> <li>Payment information for granting industrial vessels fishing access to Cabo Verde's waters</li> <li>Semi-industrial catch information</li> <li>Basic information on artisanal fishing in Cabo Verde (5 Year Census 2021)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign fishing access agreement with JAPAN TUNA</li> <li>Scientific information on the health of marine resources</li> <li>Key vessel attributes (e.g. ownership)</li> <li>Catch from Cabo Verde waters that land in foreign ports</li> </ul>

Furthermore, the ED stated that both reports required a significant effort to compile. This was due for two reasons: first, challenges on the countries' side, including a necessary mindset shift in making information publicly accessible (which has not yet been adopted by all national agencies or governmental departments), the often time-consuming approval of individual data releases by senior government officials, as well as a significant lack in data quality and the distribution of data sources. Second, both countries also experienced challenges with their external Report Compilers regarding the quality of deliverables and

<sup>4</sup> <https://fiti.global/madagascar-publishes-first-fiti-report-demonstrating-commitment-to-fisheries-transparency>  
<https://fiti.global/cabo-verde-publishes-first-fiti-report-prioritizing-a-transparent-fisheries-sector>

their persistence to obtain available government information, despite significant training and ongoing support through the Secretariat. The ED recalled that in order to address these issues a proposal to have the Secretariat acting as Report Compilers is included in the proposed changes to the FiTI Standard 2.0.

The ED further that while both reports demonstrated a significant first achievement, more work needs to be done in both countries. This includes, inter alia, that both National Multi-Stakeholder Groups put more emphasis on issuing (and monitoring) recommendations for continuous improvements.

Board Member Ketakandriana RAFITOSON – also representing Transparency International Madagascar in the country's FiTI National MSG – confirmed the ED's assessment that significant improvements and institutionalization efforts are needed in the case of Madagascar, especially regarding changes in current practices in the public sector in relation to public participation (e.g. inclusion of CSOs into decision-making). Furthermore, she mentioned that CSOs in Madagascar have been advocating for the adoption of a law granting access to public information for more than 18 years now, and the Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy (MPEB) – Madagascar's FiTI Lead Ministry – should be championing this, given the engagement of the institution towards transparency through the FiTI. So far, it has not been a priority for the MPEB.

At the same time, Ketakandriana mentioned that Madagascar is getting positive responses and financial benefits already from their participation to the FiTI and publication of the report. Board Member Annie TOURETTE added several examples from Blue Venture's experiences, operating in Madagascar and being an observer organisation to the FiTI National MSG of Madagascar:<sup>5</sup>

- As part of the MPEB's efforts to promote transparency, a website was launched to publicly share information about the work of the Ministry. This website also includes a sub-page on the FiTI.
- The MPEB also published the list of industrial and artisanal vessels authorized to fish in 2023, together with the related fees, as well as the list of fishing agreements in force in Madagascar's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- The MPEB has also published the terms of its recent license agreements with Japan and other distant water fleets and has invited NGOs to be active observers of the negotiations with distant water fleets. This is the first time civil society groups have participated in these negotiations, which can be difficult and raise public interest.

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<sup>5</sup> Several examples were provided after the meeting as part of an email exchange between several Board Members, observer organisations and the Secretariat.

- As part of its overall reform efforts, the MPEB has insisted on a review of all distant-water-fleet license agreements and has drastically reduced the number of industrial fishing licenses provided to distant-water-fleets. The MPEB has declined to renew the licenses of the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean longliner fleets, which prior represented the largest fleets fishing in the EEZ, a decision which has resulted in a drastic reduction of industrial fishing pressure in Madagascar's EEZ. The Ministry has instead focused on developing a sustainable pole and line Malagasy artisanal tuna fishing sector and received financing for the development of such a fishery as part of its new EU licensing agreement. Furthermore, for those licenses that have been renewed – Japanese longliners, Seychelles-flagged Spanish purse seiners, and EU mixed purse seiner and longliner fleet – the MPEB has been able to negotiate much better terms for Madagascar, including a reduction in vessel licenses, better compensation for the catch, and increased investment by Japan and the EU in monitoring and surveillance (Madagascar's patrol fleet has tripled in size) and the development of sustainable artisanal fisheries.

The Chair congratulated both countries – Madagascar and Cabo Verde – on this first major achievement and voiced her expectations that some of the identified improvement opportunities will already be included in the countries' next FiTI Reports, covering calendar year 2023, which are due by the end of this year.

## 5. Closing & Outlook for next Board meeting(s)

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking all participants for their continuous engagement and by providing a brief overview of other topics to be addressed during upcoming FiTI International Board meetings (or via Board Circular) within the next three months:

- Approval of a new membership policy via a Board Circular;
- Approval of changes to the FiTI Code of Conduct (in particular regarding the provision for 'Conflict of Interests) via a Board Circular;
- Approval of Candidate Country application for Guinea;
- Approval of recommendations from Working Group 'FiTI Standard 2.0' regarding transparency-related recommendations;
- Approval of decision-making procedural guidelines within the FiTI International Board (e.g. reaching consensus, its meaning and implications);
- Discussion regarding the situation in Senegal.

## The 24<sup>th</sup> International Board Meeting ended.

Meeting minutes **provided** by:

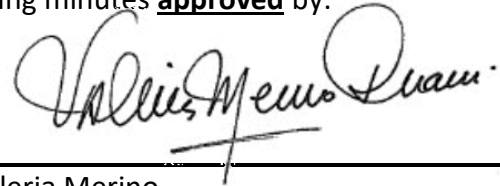


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Mr Sven Bielmann

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

Meeting minutes **approved** by:



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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: 3.0 votes]<sup>6</sup>

#### Excused:

**Annika MACKENSEN**

#### Not excused:

**Roy CLARISSE**

### Stakeholder group: Business sector

**Hugh GOVAN** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

**Tony LAZZAZARA** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]<sup>7</sup>

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

**Alfredo SFEIR** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

#### Not excused:

**Keith ANDRE**

### Stakeholder group: Social sector

**Maisie PIGEON** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.0 vote]

**Ketakandriana RAFITOSON** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.0 vote]

**Ahmed SENHOURY** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.0 vote]

**Annie TOURETTE** [Voting power for this meeting: 1.0 vote]

<sup>6</sup> Annika MACKENSEN delegated her voting power to Joacim JOHANNESON via email on 21 March 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Tony LAZZAZARA participated for the first hour.

**Umair SHAHID**

[Voting power for this meeting: 1.0 vote]

Not excused:

**Zacari EDWARDS<sup>8</sup>**

### Observers

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

**Open Government Partnership**, represented by Adna KARAMEHIC-OATES

**World Bank Group**, represented by Julien MILLION<sup>9</sup>

### FiTI International Secretariat

**Sven BIERMANN**

### Guests

None

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<sup>8</sup> Zacari EDWARDS joined for the last 40 minutes of the meeting.

<sup>9</sup> Julien MILLION informed the Chair prior to the meeting that he will join the meeting 30 minutes late.