



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

30th meeting of the FiTI International Board

5-6 June 2025, Berlin/Germany

Meeting Minutes

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Date & Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thursday, 5 June 2025 (09.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Central European Time) ▪ Friday, 6 June 2025 (09.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Central European Time)
Venue	<p>Marriott Courtyard Berlin City Center, Axel-Springer-Straße 55, 10117 Berlin, Germany</p> <p>The meeting was conducted in a hybrid format, allowing participants unable to travel to Berlin to participate in the meeting via Zoom.</p>
Supporting document(s)	None
Language	The language of the FiTI International Board is English. Simultaneous translation between English and Spanish was provided for this meeting (translators connected via Zoom).

Outcomes of meeting

1. Welcome and administration

The Chair of the FiTI International Board, Valeria MERINO (herein referred to as 'Chair'), opened the 30th International Board meeting by welcoming all participating Members and Observers. The Chair stated how delighted she was to meet everyone in person after almost 2 years since the last in-person Board meeting in Brussels/Belgium.

In her opening remarks, she highlighted the importance of transparency and collective engagement, noting the progress made by the FiTI over the last years. She thanked all Board Members and observer organisations for their continuous contribution to the FiTI and recognised their substantial input and time commitments to ensure an efficient and meaningful Board operation in the benefit of the organisation's mission. The Chair also acknowledged the efforts of government representatives and partners who continue to support and advocate for transparency in the fisheries sector.

The Chair stated her sincere appreciation to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the non-profit organisation Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), which organised a [memorable 10-year Anniversary event for the FiTI](#) the day before this Board meeting. She also recognised the additional contribution from Brot für die Welt for this Board meeting, among other things, covering interpretation and travel costs for the Board's small-scale fisheries representatives.

The Chair briefly emphasised potential priorities for the following years, including the strengthening of the FiTI Standard to ensure it remains practical yet ambitious and implementable; moving from 'push to pull' by further incentivising countries to join the FiTI voluntarily; empowering stakeholders, in particular small-scale fishers, to utilise publicly available information and engage in policy discussions; and to better embed transparency efforts into national systems to withstand political changes.

Afterwards, apologies were noted prior to the meeting from Board Members Rocío Parra CORTÉS and Estelle JONES (both stakeholder group Government Sector), from Tony LAZZARA (stakeholder group Business sector) and from Ketakandriana RAFITOSON, Umair SHAHID, Daniel SKERRITT and Annie TOURETTE (all stakeholder group Social Sector). Dan, Ketakandriana, and Umair delegated their decision-making powers to the Chair, as shown in Appendix I. Some of the mentioned Board members planned to attend some of the Board sessions online.

After all eligible participants joined, Sven BIERMANN, Executive Director (ED) of the FiTI International Secretariat (herein referred to as ‘Secretariat’), determined that a quorum for this meeting was reached¹:

Pro-rated attendance of Board Members ² :	At least two Board Members per stakeholder group?	Attendance of Observers:
13.8 out of 18 votes	Yes	3 out of 3

The Chair noted that prior to this meeting, Board Members did not have concerns or anticipated contentious issues about any of the points included in this agenda.

2. Re-election of Board Member

The Chair stated that the re-election of Annika MACKENSEN for a second term in the FiTI International Board (stakeholder group: Government sector) continues to be supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Annika was elected to the Board in May 2022, and her first term concluded in May of this year. Annika expressed in writing her interest in serving a second term on the Board to the Chair, as required under the [FiTI’s Membership Policy \(version 1.0, 2 July 2024\)](#) as well as stated in the [‘Call for 2024 membership election to the FiTI association’](#). Annika has not changed her stakeholder affiliation.

The Chair emphasised Annika’s considerable contributions to the FiTI as a member of the Board during her first term, among them:

- Serving on a previous Board Committee for electing new Board Members;
- Serving on the Board Committee that reviewed and sent a recommendation to the Board in relation to the first validation process of Mauritania;
- Promoting within the German government and particularly with the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), fisheries transparency, and

¹ 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.’

² 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, pro-rated voting powers for this FiTI International Board meeting were determined, as shown in Appendix I.

communicating the FiTI's progress. Her input informed the BMZ's decision to become a key supporter and donor to the FiTI;

- Supporting Secretariat in its implementation efforts, in particular in West Africa (e.g. Mauritania, Senegal, Liberia), identifying synergies; and,
- Initiating discussions between the Secretariat and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) regarding the opportunity of having a GIZ-financed senior professional working for the FiTI in the Southeast Asia region.

The Chair recalled that the FiTI International Board approved the shortlisting of Annika for re-election to a second and final term via Board Circular No. 19.³ Based on this decision, the Board's Election Committee, comprising the Chair, Board Member Tony LAZAZZARA, and World Bank Observer, Kristín GUNNARSDOTTIR VON KISTOWSKI, conducted an online interview with Annika.

Based on this interview and Annika's previous track record as an engaged and committed Board Member, the Election Committee is persuaded that Annika will continue serving the FiTI as a Board Member at the same level of commitment and contribution she has already demonstrated, and submitted a recommendation to the FiTI International Board to approve her re-election.

After a brief discussion, the participating Board Members reached the following decisions by consensus:

Decision [BM-30_2025_D-01]:

The International Board approved the re-election of Dr Annika Mackensen as a FiTI International Board Member (Government sector) for a second and final term, effective immediately.

Afterwards, the Chair invited Annika to join the Board meeting, congratulated her on her re-election, and thanked her for her unwavering commitment, valuable contributions, and personal dedication to the FiTI's mission, not only in her capacity as a government representative, but as someone who embodies the core values of the initiative.

Annika expressed her sincere appreciation for the trust and support shown by her fellow Board Members and observers and thanked everyone for her re-election.

³ Decision ID: BC-19_2025_D-01.

3. Reflections on the changes to the upcoming FiTI Standard 2.0

After an initial team activity, conducted as a 'Pub Quiz' by Karine YOUNG from the Secretariat, the Chair asked the ED to provide some initial reflections on the changes to the FiTI Standard 2.0.

The ED started by welcoming all Board Members and Observers (on-site and online) and recalled that since its first release in April 2017, the FiTI Standard has shown to be *an effective framework* to improve public access to government information. At the same time, the landscape for transparency in fisheries has evolved significantly. New international agreements have raised the bar what information governments are expected to make public (such as the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies or CITES); so have stakeholder interests and demands (for example, regarding beneficial ownership transparency. FiTI implementations in several countries – including two FiTI Compliant countries and four FiTI Candidate countries, which resulted in 16 FiTI Reports published by six National Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSGs)⁴ – as well as 13 TAKING STOCK transparency assessments⁵ conducted by the Secretariat have also produced significant learnings and delineated improvement opportunities.

In July 2023, the [FiTI International Board decided to revise the FiTI Standard](#) (current version 1.1) and established a dedicated Working Group to oversee the review of the FiTI Standard and make a recommendation to the FiTI International Board on how to update it to version 2.0. The Group initially comprised the Chair, Board Members Joacim JOHANNESSON, Rocío Parra CORTÉS, Hugh GOVAN, Dawda Foday SAINÉ and Daniel SKERRITT, and Observers Julien MILLION and Marcio Castro DE SOUZA. Furthermore, three members of the Secretariat (Sven BIERMANN, Andre STANDING and Karine YOUNG) joined and supported this Working Group.

The ED emphasised that the envisioned FiTI Standard 2.0 will continue to build on and further strengthen the existing Standard. The updated version will still have at its core the FiTI's principle of *progressive improvement* (i.e. countries are not expected to have complete data for every transparency requirement of the FiTI Standard from the beginning; instead, national authorities must disclose the information they have, and where important gaps exist, improvements over time must be demonstrated), as well as the importance of *National Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSGs)* as part of national FiTI implementations. The ED highlighted the following four particular working areas for updating the FiTI Standard:

⁴ Seychelles, Mauritania, Madagascar, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Sao Tome and Príncipe.

⁵ These [TAKING STOCK transparency assessments](#) evaluate the level of information that national authorities publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.



With regards to **Addressing procedural challenges for FiTI implementing countries**, the ED noted that the updated FiTI Standard 2.0 will, inter alia,

- Require that countries committing to the FiTI must reach the status of a FiTI Implementing country (previously referred to as a FiTI Candidate country) within 18 months of the date on which they officially expressed their interest to join the FiTI;
- Allow countries to use existing multi-stakeholder platforms for their implementation, if such platforms meet core collaboration requirements as described in the FiTI Standard; and,
- Enhance the process of implementing the FiTI Standard by transferring the responsibility for producing annual transparency assessments from countries to the Secretariat, which would also lower the associated financial cost.

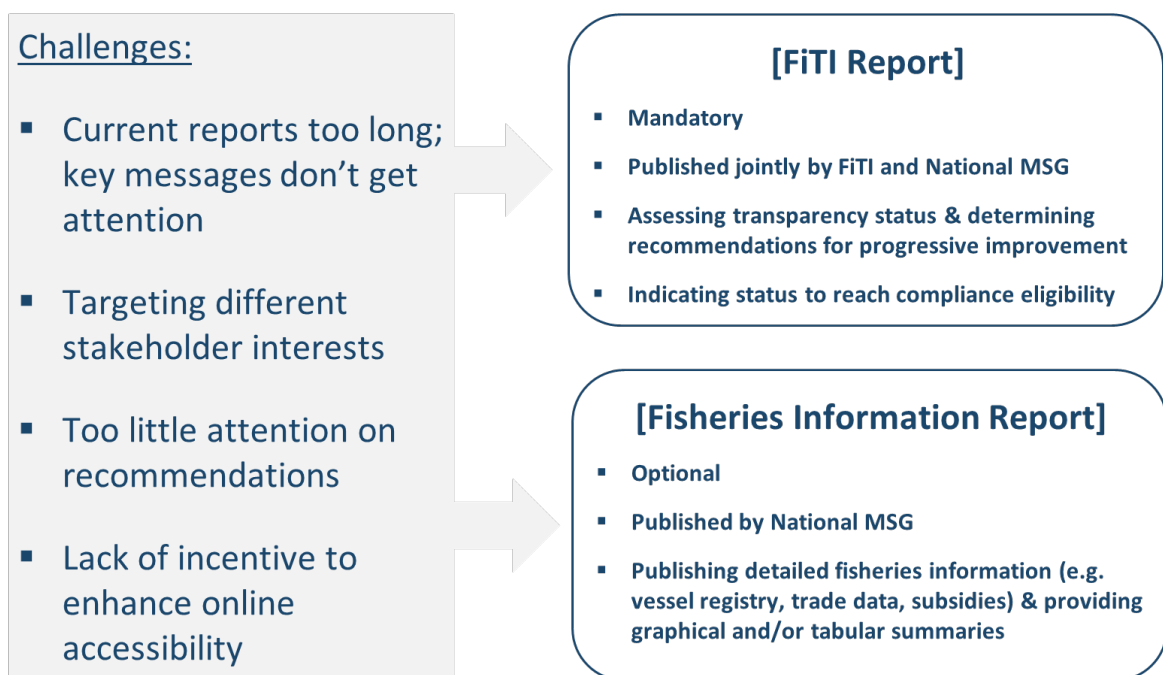
With regards to **Enhancing and updating transparency requirements**, the ED emphasised that the thinking behind this process combines the need for improvements and expansion of technical requirements with a practical approach of what is possible to accomplish at the country level. Thus, while the updated version of the Standard must increase transparency demands on national authorities to keep pace with international developments (e.g. the new WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies) and to address lessons learned from implementing the FiTI, it also must avoid overburdening countries. Currently, the following aspects are discussed within the Working Group:

- *National objectives and targets* for fisheries management;

- Statistical data for *non-commercial fisheries*, including their size and their contribution to catches;
- *Fiscal information*, seeking to combine previous requirements on payments and subsidies with the new requirement that national authorities publish their annual budget documents, as well as information on the use of fisheries revenues, such as those from license payments;
- Information regarding *CITES*, such as the publication of information about the authorisation of trade in listed marine species; as well as
- A more comprehensive approach to *development finance* (rather than just on official development aid).

Furthermore, more prominence should be given to how countries define which fisheries sectors are considered small-scale. This is increasingly relevant given multiple international initiatives that encourage preferential treatment of small-scale fisheries. This might include a dedicated requirement to *publish information on efforts and activities related to small-scale fisheries*, including, if available, a definition of the groups in their countries that are included under this term.

With regards to **Moving from data provision to public understanding**, the ED noted that the updated FiTI Standard 2.0 will feature a new approach for more concise annual reports that focus on countries' progress in meeting the Standard and on the recommendations made by the National MSG.



The ED explained that under this improved approach, the FiTI reporting process will result in a dedicated *transparency assessment and recommendation report (FiTI Report)* as well as a complementary *fisheries information report*, instead of an all-encompassing report as published in previous years. Several motivations have triggered this change in reporting publications.

- After the publication of 16 reports in six countries, it is evident that by combining transparency assessment results with fisheries information as well as recommendations from a National MSG, these reports serve two stakeholder groups with diverging interests: those interested in understanding the level of transparency in fisheries management and those interested in obtaining fisheries information. It is therefore preferable to address these different interests in separate publications. New FiTI Reports will also be much shorter than the previous reports, making them more appealing and increasing their reach to a broader audience.
- Providing comprehensive fisheries management information in a standalone report is not necessary for all countries, as this information is often already published on the websites and reports of their national authorities. The FiTI Standard aims to make information available online to all stakeholders and the public at large, rather than publishing reports. Reports were envisioned in the FiTI Standard as an intermediary solution while countries developed the capabilities to publish the information described in the FiTI Standard online. FiTI's experience has shown that allowing countries to publish their fisheries information in annual reports over several years acted as a disincentive to developing the online tools necessary to publish it. Furthermore, preparing such reports required additional work, which was often performed by consultants who also demanded additional resources, frequently provided by international cooperation.
- As governments improve their capabilities to publish their information online, the importance of an additional standalone report will diminish. The ED highlighted the case of Seychelles, where advancements over the last few years (such as SFA's Fisheries Information Management System) will eventually make the publication of an additional, somewhat overlapping fisheries information report unnecessary. Separating the transparency assessment from the fisheries information report is therefore logical and advisable, as the latter, which is still helpful and necessary for some countries, will eventually become obsolete as online accessibility improves.
- Also, greater emphasis should be given to the National MSG, their recommendations, and their implementation. While these recommendations have been included in previous reports, the new FiTI Report will include a separate chapter titled 'Report from the National MSG' [working title] that focuses on these recommendations. This will be separate from a chapter containing the results of the transparency

assessment. As a result, the FiTI Reports will be co-published by the National MSG and the Secretariat, further emphasising the collaborative nature of the FiTI. Nevertheless, the ED emphasised that these changes will not alter the work of National MSGs, which will continue to review the findings presented by the Secretariat and formulate recommendations for progressive improvements

The ED emphasised that if the Standard 2.0 is approved, the new approach will be piloted in 2025, and that the Secretariat plans to design a new FiTI Report template.

Finally, with regard to **Strengthening compliance validations**, the ED recalled that, in December 2023, the International Board already approved that:

- FiTI implementing countries will no longer be subject to continuous annual reporting cycles. Instead, countries are required to achieve compliance with the FiTI Standard within five years after commencing its implementation.
- Once a country reaches the status of a FiTI Compliant Country, compliance reviews, conducted by the Secretariat, will be conducted every three years to verify that high levels of transparency have been maintained.

These changes are designed to streamline the implementation of the FiTI, while maintaining the rigor of the process. They will also ensure that those who commit to the initiative are rewarded with credible and ongoing external verification of their achievements, while making the process less burdensome

The Chair thanked the members of the Working Group for their significant work on the FiTI Standard and the ED for a comprehensive overview. The following topics were discussed during the ensuing group deliberation:

- Several participants emphasised the importance of avoiding the updated FiTI Standard triggering negative perceptions, in particular perceiving the changes as overburdening countries and/or hindering the implementation of the FiTI in countries. The ED emphasised the importance of clearly communicating to countries what will change and what will remain the same under the updated FiTI Standard. At the same time, the Secretariat must be ready to engage countries that may initially not see the benefits of the new version, given that the Standard must include new requirements to keep pace with international developments. Again, the importance of clear communication, combined with technical support and guidance from the Secretariat, was seen as instrumental.

- Several participants also expressed their expectations that these changes will make the FiTI Standard more appealing to developed fishing nations, in particular from the global north.
- The Chair voiced concerns about the practical challenges countries face in disclosing information related to law enforcement and compliance. In many cases, even administrative violations require legal procedures handled by independent judicial or administrative bodies, rather than by government agencies like a Ministry of Fisheries. These institutions often operate separate information systems and may not share data with other branches of government, let alone with the public. She recommended that the Working Group discuss further how such cases should be treated in the FiTI Standard, possibly by identifying mechanisms to acknowledge these legal limitations without penalising countries. Greater clarity and flexibility may be needed to ensure that transparency requirements are realistic and context sensitive.
- Board Member Roy CLARISSE emphasised that while many countries have ratified key international agreements related to fisheries, the real significance lies in how these commitments are integrated into national legal and regulatory frameworks and implemented. Ratification alone does not ensure implementation, unless international obligations are reflected in local laws and practices. He pointed out that the gap between ratification and implementation is common, and that assessing a country's transparency and compliance efforts requires understanding how, and to what extent, international provisions have been translated into enforceable national rules. Therefore, he suggested that the FiTI Standard should go beyond listing ratified agreements and consider whether and how countries have incorporated and implemented these provisions locally. This could be included either as part of the FiTI requirements or as a matter for the National Multi-Stakeholder Groups to evaluate.
- The Chair emphasised the need to address recurring challenges in the FiTI's validation process. For example, she suggested establishing a pool of highly qualified, pre-trained Independent Validators with strong skills, experiences, and a sound reputation, to be designated for validations across countries to ensure consistency.
- Furthermore, the Chair stated that from her experiences, the success and impact of National Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSGs) depend mainly on three factors: independent leadership, well-trained facilitation, and an environment that allows members to actively engage and participate.

The ED concluded this session by stating that several additional meetings of the Working Group are planned for the second half of 2025, followed by a public consultation phase (November). The goal is to finalise the English version of the FiTI Standard 2.0 by the end

of 2025 and publish it in early 2026, with translations into French, Spanish, and Portuguese released shortly thereafter.

4. Incentives to increase the government's interest in fisheries transparency – growing the demand side

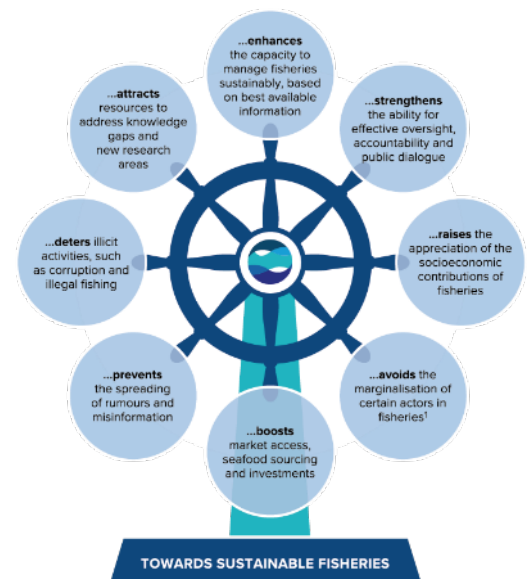
The Chair invited Karine YOUNG from the Secretariat to share lessons learned over the last years on engaging (and persuading) target countries to join the FiTI in order to discuss existing or (if applicable) identify new approaches to incentivise governments to join the FiTI.

Karine recalled that the global movement for transparency and open government data has been recognised and valued for many reasons. In addition to transparency being most prominently linked to enhancing effective oversight and accountability, it is also seen as fundamental to modern ideas of democratic governance, improving public service delivery, and citizen engagement.

Therefore, engaging in the FiTI should appeal to all stakeholders who appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries, in terms of food & nutrition security, employment⁶, its value to national economies (e.g. revenues, currency inflow), and its cultural significance. Fisheries is also a core pillar in developing sustainable Blue Economies in these countries.

Promoting these positive features of fisheries lies at the heart of the FiTI, unlike other initiatives that seek to position fisheries transparency primarily as a tool to counter illicit activities, such as IUU fishing or corruption.

At the same time, Karine stated that the Secretariat still spends a significant amount of its time persuading governments to join the initiative. She recalled that the government is the primary entry point for a national FiTI engagement. While civil society and business are important actors in a successful implementation process, the Secretariat can only move forward once a government has formally committed to the FiTI, because the national body that collects and must publish the information is the government. A key outcome of these




⁶ With particular importance for low-income fishing communities and the role of women in fisheries supply chains.

conversations is how the FiTI can effectively incentivize and communicate the value of transparency to governments. She emphasised four typical pathways through which the FiTI engages with (or motivates) governments, often in an interrelated approach:

- *Inherent understanding:* Countries that already place importance on transparency and stakeholder participation for enhancing fisheries management and governance are natural partners. Engagement in those cases typically focuses on procedural aspects, such as the functioning of a National MSG or the principle of ‘progressive improvement’.
- *Cost-benefit considerations:* Many governments seek clarity on the tangible benefits of joining the FiTI, as well as the associated cost of the implementation of the Standard. Karine emphasised that the Secretariat has been able to showcase the benefits in general terms (as well as through country-specific examples) and also describe the costs of national FiTI implementation, which can be reduced by taking advantage of forms of support offered by the FiTI (e.g. through the ‘FiTI Starter package’ or by accessing the FiTI’s extensive technical assistance). Karine also noted that the Secretariat still needs to clarify several recurring points raised by governments, including:
 - The FiTI does not require any membership or participation fees.
 - Administrative support for National MSGs, while necessary and usually provided by national authorities, should not be seen as a significant additional burden, since such functions are typically embedded in well-established governance systems.
 - The FiTI covers the costs of the annual reporting process and regular validations.
 - Countries are not penalised for not implementing National MSG recommendations, but they must publicly explain why implementation is not yet feasible or prioritized.
 - The FiTI actively assists National MSGs in mobilizing external donor funding for their work plans or additional activities.

While these clarifications are helpful in discussions with national authorities, Karine emphasised that the Secretariat must work harder to communicate the measurable benefits of enhanced government transparency. However, it should be evident that any country that wants to manage its marine resources well needs good data and the engagement of interested parties to make better, implementable decisions. Other reputational or procedural benefits were briefly highlighted:



“Further, the investment climate in Mauritania's fisheries is now seen as more favourable due to a decreased risk of uncertainty caused by the previous lack of information.”

Taken from Mauritania's Compliance Validation Statement

“An inclusive process, which incorporates data and views from the full range of impacted stakeholders both within and outside government, is essential to ensure policies and policy changes are accepted and upheld by fisheries actors.”

“It is not just politically correct to want transparency, it is politically smart”

24 August 2022 · By Anders Stenning



Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),
OECD Review of Fisheries 2020, Chapter 5 'Governing fisheries'

- **Working with Partners:** In some cases, the Secretariat is collaborating with national or international partners, for example the Open Government Partnership (or recently WWF in East Africa), to introduce the initiative to all related stakeholders, and build trust among them and with governments.
- **Grassroots support:** Finally, sometimes spontaneous local pressure from civil society, parliamentarians, national media, or from other local actors plays a supportive role in persuading governments to join the FiTI. However, Karine emphasised that no country has yet joined the FiTI solely based on grassroots pressure.

Karine continued by explaining that the Secretariat is currently developing a dedicated communication campaign (*“beneFITing from fisheries transparency”*) to more effectively frame and convey the benefits of the FiTI, particularly targeting government audiences. The following five key benefit categories have been identified:

- *FiTI contributes to sustainable and equitable marine fisheries through data-driven and transparent management*, e.g. by enhancing the capacity of national authorities to make decisions based on the best available data; by highlighting and gradually mitigating data gaps; giving visibility to marginalized fisheries groups or sub-sectors; or by enhancing data quality due to regular reviews by other multi-stakeholders and exposure to the ‘public eye’.
- *FiTI promotes evidence-based and inclusive governance to ensure the long-term health of marine ecosystems*, e.g. by empowering public debates about sectoral opportunities and challenges; by strengthening the ability of stakeholders to exercise effective oversight; or by reducing opportunities for inefficient and illicit activities

- *FiTI stimulates market-based incentives to contribute to the sector's socioeconomic impact*, e.g. by improving financial performance (e.g. enhanced revenue collection, reduced spending); by reducing time and costs for seafood certifications; or by attracting support from donors.
- *FiTI elevates the fisheries sector's appreciation by emphasising its economic, social and environmental contributions*, e.g. by shielding the sector from , misinformation and unfair publicity; by attracting public and political support; or by changing perceptions about how governments function and for whose benefit.
- *FiTI enhances the internal efficiency, public image & reputation of national fisheries management organisations*, e.g. by fostering an internal culture of openness and trust; by stimulating cross-ministerial collaborations; or by attracting and retaining skilled employees.

The Chair thanked Karine for her excellent presentation and invited participants to share their reflections on this topic, in particular on how the FiTI can better articulate its value to governments that may be sceptical about joining the initiative or believe they are already meet high transparency standards.

During the following rich exchange among participants, the following points were raised:

- Participants acknowledged that the Secretariat has chosen a well-balanced and comprehensive approach for communicating FiTI's benefits. It was also agreed that governments often engage in the FiTI for one or more of the reasons stated above. Karine mentioned that quite often, the initial willingness to engage with the FiTI is grounded in a deep commitment to better management by senior government officials, which is key to the FiTI's success as a voluntary initiative. Participants highlighted the need to better understand what drives these decision-makers to be interested in the FiTI.
- While the idea of a communication campaign to better articulate the FiTI's benefits for countries was very welcome among participants – also to increase the FiTI's overall visibility even further – it was stressed that when engaging particular countries, these often more generic benefit claims need to be further substantiated by context-specific examples. This requires a tailored outreach approach for each individual country and even its key decision-makers. The Chair advised that targeted communication campaigns are much more cost-effective for organisations such as the FiTI.
- Several participants raised the idea of making government transparency a prerequisite for donor funding (e.g. disbursement levels depend on transparency implementation). While this could be a significant leverage, it was cautioned that this

may also reinforce power imbalances if seen as externally imposed. A balanced approach was recommended, aligning funding with transparency principles without appearing coercive.

- Participants also emphasised that the value of transparency should not be communicated exclusively to governments. Instead, early outreach to civil society, the private sector, fishing communities, and the media can help build support, address misconceptions, and reduce resistance before approaching government authorities.
- The ED addressed the ongoing challenge of effectively communicating the benefits of the FiTI (as well as wider transparency or governance efforts). While costs of implementing an initiative like the FiTI are easy to explain, can often be quantified (and are typically relatively low), and can be further reduced by support provided by the FiTI (such as the FiTI's Starter Package), tangible benefits often remain vague, long-term, and difficult to quantify. Unlike other initiatives, the ED stated that the FiTI should avoid making bold, quantitative claims, such as direct links between transparency and improved fish stocks or enhanced economic growth. While current benefits from the FiTI are primarily anecdotal and highly context-sensitive, he stated that the Secretariat is looking into several categories or types of benefits for countries, including quantitative, qualitative, operational, and policy-related benefits. Furthermore, the Secretariat is increasingly highlighting behavioural and institutional improvements triggered by transparency, such as improved coordination within governments or public trust.
- At the same time, the ED stressed that the value of transparency should not only focus on 'cost-benefit' considerations, or as a voluntary act of governments. Instead, governments must see transparency and stakeholder participation as part of their public service obligations, as fisheries transparency should be widely recognised as a government's duty and as a citizen's right.

The Chair concluded this session – as well as Day 1 of this meeting – by inviting participants to share additional feedback, especially regarding language, clarity, or substance, with the Secretariat in writing after the meeting. Such inputs will help refine and strengthen the FiTI's 'beneFITIng' messaging.

5. Strengthening the impact of fisheries transparency on the capacity of the SSF groups to participate in policy dialogues

The Chair opened the second day of the Board meeting by emphasising that small-scale fishing (SSF) organisations have been at the forefront of demanding transparency in fisheries.⁷ Unlike other transparency initiatives, the FiTI has emphasised from the beginning the importance of transparency for advancing the rights and livelihoods of SSF.

However, the role that the FiTI plays in advancing the interests and demands of SSF is not based solely on increasing the visibility of data about SSF (or the lack of it). SSF organisations demand access to information to hold governments accountable and to be included in decision-making. In other words, the publication of statistics on the catches, numbers of people, and licenses issued to fishing vessels or people considered part of SSF is therefore not the only way in which the FiTI promotes the agendas of SSF organisations. Most importantly, the FiTI supports equality and fairness, as the FiTI implementation ensures the availability of information that SSF organisations have long demanded (e.g. access agreements, vessel registries, beneficial ownership, and subsidies), which strengthens their ability to use data and advocate for their own needs and for the sustainability of the sector.

At the same time, several highly relevant aspects for SSF may not be satisfactorily addressed by a transparency initiative, as it is focused on governance systems rather than on exposing systems of marginalisation and neglect. Also, while there is international momentum behind the requirement that countries develop an official definition of SSF, including the identification of marginalised groups within this category, this has not been explicitly mandated by the FiTI, as it is not at the core of its expertise.

The Chair highlighted that the objective of this session is to explore how transparency initiatives, including the FiTI, can improve advocacy, representation, and governance outcomes for the SSF communities and mitigate harmful consequences. She invited the following three Board Members representing small-scale fisheries to coordinate and facilitate this discussion: Hugh GOVAN, Nestor ROCHE, and Dawda Foday SAINE.

Hugh GOVAN started his intervention by highlighting the ongoing debate surrounding the definition of SSF. It was noted that, globally, approximately 90% of people engaged in fisheries-related work would be classified as SSF. Collectively, they account for nearly half of global fish production and are part of broader value chains that support close to one billion livelihoods. However, Hugh emphasised that, despite their importance, it is

⁷ For example: In a [‘Call for Action’](#), small-scale fishers from six continents call on their governments to, inter alia, be transparent and accountable in fisheries management by publishing relevant fisheries information to the minimum standards of the FiTI.

increasingly evident that marginalisation and neglect in fisheries are partly due to a lack of clarity about how the concept of SSF is interpreted. He briefly mentioned examples where industrial operators sought to present themselves as small-scale to gain political advantage or access to financial subsidies. In some countries, this misrepresentation has allowed large operators to dominate policy discussions, resulting in severe negative consequences for genuine small-scale coastal communities whose access to resources has been diminished.

Hugh also voiced concerns that improved fisheries management measures often result in SSF being the first to face enforcement actions, simply because they are geographically fixed, highly visible, and easier to monitor. In contrast, more mobile and better-connected operators may be able to avoid scrutiny or circumvent regulations. This unequal application of enforcement measures places a disproportionate burden on SSF.

Hugh further noted that SSF frequently lack sufficient capacity to engage with political decision-making processes. Unlike larger industrial fleets and businesses that have direct political access or can engage in lobbying, SSF remain largely underrepresented and cannot make their voice heard. When they do participate in such processes, it often means foregoing essential fishing activities that support their families' incomes and livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, Hugh emphasised that small-scale fishers are often uniquely positioned to contribute positively to fisheries governance and stewardship. Their strong connection to specific ecosystems and resources fosters a natural incentive for sustainable management. Many documented cases demonstrate that SSF, when empowered and included, can serve as effective partners in achieving sustainability and conservation objectives.

Hugh concluded by underscoring the importance of transparency initiatives in clearly distinguishing small-scale fisheries from industrial operators (“we need to know who is small-scale”). While definitions will inevitably vary across national contexts, clarity on this issue is essential to ensure fair representation and to avoid unintended negative consequences resulting from transparency efforts such as additional procedural burdens or disproportionate exposure to enforcement risks.

Next, Board Member Nestor ROCHE provided further insights into the challenges and opportunities for integrating small-scale fishers more effectively into transparency and governance frameworks, with a particular lens in his Latin American experience. Nestor questioned the continued categorization of these fishers as ‘small’, considering the significant contributions they make to food security, poverty reduction, and economic stability.

Nestor also underlined the importance of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication (VG on SSSF), adopted over a decade ago, as a key milestone in defining the sector more clearly. The

Guidelines were recognised for offering detailed guidance on the unique challenges and support needs of small-scale fishers and serve as a reference for many organisations in their advocacy and technical work.

Nestor noted that different countries may apply very different understandings (or definitions) of small-scale fisheries, citing Peru, Ecuador, and Argentina as examples. In some places, definitions are based on fishing methods, in others on the purpose of fishing (subsistence vs. commercial), and in some countries, no official definition exists at all. This definitional inconsistency makes it even more complicated to create reliable national databases or design coherent policies. However, he mentioned that while definitions are important, the lack of data is the more pressing issue.

Board Member Dawda Foday SAINÉ reiterated that, despite their importance, SSF remain marginalised and struggle to compete against larger, more powerful industrial actors. This is often further intensified by fierce competition with other players. He briefly elaborated on two main types of competition confronting SSF:

1. **Intersectoral competition:** Competition between small-scale fishers and other extractive industries, such as oil, gas, mining, and tourism, which increasingly encroach on marine resources and coastal spaces.
2. **Intrasectoral competition:** Competition within the fisheries sector, either against industrial fishing operations or among SSF.

Dawda also briefly noted the aspect of competitive, structural exclusion, where SSF are excluded from access to resources or decision-making processes.

Dawda argued that global endeavours to promote extractive investments often intensify competition for marine and coastal resources, further displacing SSF. He emphasised that this contradicts global commitments such as the United Nations' Right to Food and related international frameworks that promote availability, accessibility, affordability, and stability of food resources. Dawda introduced several transition processes faced by SSF as they are forced to adapt to evolving management systems, such as the establishment of protected areas that limit their fishing grounds. He described this transition briefly in the following three psychological stages:

- The *zone of stability*, referring to a familiar state where fishers know their environment and fishing practices.
- The *zone of uncertainty*, referring to the disorientation that comes with management changes or new regulations.
- The *zone of new stability*, referring to the eventual adaptation to new systems and frameworks.

Dawda stressed that these transitions carry significant psychological and socioeconomic burdens. Without proper strategies and mechanisms in place to assist fishers through these transitions, such as dedicated transition monitoring teams, the risks of social and economic harm remain high.

The Chair opened the discussion by highlighting the main challenge for national authorities: when seeking to better manage and include small-scale fisheries (SSF), one of the first obstacles is understanding the sector's scale and scope. She cited Peru's artisanal fishing sector, with more than 23,000 small-scale fishing vessels operating along the coast (Global Fishing Watch, 2024). A large share of this activity occurs within the informal economy, a long-recognized challenge that affects regulation, traceability, and management (Future of Fish, 2020). Studies also note that Peru's artisanal fishers use numerous landing points, many of which operate without standardized control procedures or formal regulatory oversight, creating uncertainty about the true number of active sites nationwide (PescaEmprende, 2023). Together, the fleet size, the degree of informality, and the fragmented nature of landing infrastructure contribute to significant information gaps in the sector. Hence, governments themselves may be often unaware of the full extent of activities taking place. The geographical scale of coastal areas, whether in Latin America or Africa, makes the task of collecting comprehensive data (e.g. regarding vessels or catches) extremely difficult.

- In the following discussion, several participants stressed that while transparency initiatives like the FiTI can contribute to improving accessibility to information, including by making all data gaps transparent, they cannot substitute the fundamental role of national authorities in data collection. The ED emphasised this point, noting that several national authorities approached in recent years have expressed expectations that the FiTI contribute to primary research and data collection, rather than “just making transparent what is missing”. It is therefore essential to remain conscious of what the FiTI can realistically deliver and avoid setting expectations that go beyond its mandate or capabilities. The FiTI has no intention of collecting data.
- Several participants emphasised that the role the FiTI can play in advancing the interests and demands of SSF is not only based on publishing data about SSF fishing. It is also about meeting the needs of SSF organisations for access to other relevant fisheries information and inclusion in decision-making.
- Following up on the previous interventions regarding the definition of SSF, the ED highlighted that the Secretariat's experience from the last four years shows there are considerable tensions caused by operationalising the concepts of large-scale fisheries (LSF) and SSF where these terms have yet to be defined in laws or policies. The

Voluntary Guidelines (VG) for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication recommends that national authorities define SSF in their countries (including, in particular, marginalised groups in the entire value chain) so that SSF can receive special and differentiated treatment from non-SSF. Yet very few countries have done so. Instead, many FiTI countries use a highly variable approach. National laws and regulations reviewed by the FiTI distinguish among industrial, semi-industrial, commercial, non-commercial, scientific, artisanal, indigenous, customary, coastal/deep-sea, distant-water fishing, and recreational activities. However, not all of them cover all these categories. However, they rarely clarify how the overarching concepts of LSF and SSF apply. Therefore, instead of forcing national authorities to organise statistical data according to LSF and SSF – which is a requirement under the current FiTI Standard 1.1 – it may be more advisable to allow countries to present their statistical information on fisheries according to the type of information, such as vessels, fishers, and catches. The Working Group on the FiTI Standard 2.0 is currently reviewing this issue.

- It was further noted that SSF may have very different expectations regarding fisheries transparency. There are clearly expectations that transparency can help ensure that government decisions, e.g. when licensing industrial fisheries, are not taken without prior, informed consent of small-scale fisher representatives. Similarly, transparency can increase the visibility of parts of the fisheries sector that have been ignored or neglected (e.g. the SSF's contributions to food security). This is where the FiTI can support these information demands. On the other hand, other, often more operational (day-to-day) SSF transparency requirements cannot be met. Examples included transparency regarding daily pricing of fuel, ice, market access opportunities etc. A nuanced communication approach of what the FiTI can contribute to the information demands of SSF is therefore important.
- Finally, Hugh stressed the importance of clear expectation settings regarding the contribution of SSF in participating in the FiTI. In addition to the already mentioned struggle between time for participation and time for fishing that Board members may experience, it was mentioned that SSF may not always feel encouraged to voice their opinions. While there may be regional differences, the FiTI needs to ensure that such concerns – if not being raised on the national level – can be raised by SSF to the international level. The importance of a timely launch of the FiTI's [Compliance Channel](#) was emphasised.

6. Building to last: Exploring the institutionalisation of fisheries transparency

The Chair opened this session by noting that evidence suggests transparency can enhance governance, particularly when backed by robust political and institutional frameworks and stakeholder buy-in and demand. Therefore, institutionalising the national FiTI process presents an opportunity to make fisheries transparency a permanent and impactful feature of government and society expectations. At the same time, it requires deliberate planning and support to overcome political, technical, and financial challenges. The Chair continued by highlighting the importance of viewing the FiTI not as a short-term project, but as a long-term endeavour. She cautioned against linking the FiTI too closely to temporary programmes or development projects that end when funding or external support is withdrawn. Instead, governments should be encouraged to internalize the FiTI Standard as part of their core governance systems, embedding its principles into how fisheries are managed and communicated. She briefly described a vision of moving from a project-based mindset to a sustainable governance model, where:

- Transparency becomes a routine function of public administration.
- Data is not only collected for internal purposes but shared with the public as a standard practice.
- Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSGs) evolve into a permanent fixture of participatory governance, helping to legitimize and explain government decisions based on publicly available data.

The ED complemented the Chair's remarks, stating that the voluntary nature of FiTI has been essential to its success so far – despite criticism from certain donors of being 'too soft' and not pushing sufficiently for regulatory changes. In fact, in several countries (e.g. Seychelles and Mauritania) the FiTI has endured for almost a decade, even though there have been several government administration transitions.

The Chair noted that across diverse country contexts, laws and policies frequently remain unimplemented due to the absence of political will and continuity, institutional memory, or operational capacity. In this context, *institutionalisation* is not understood as a shift toward obligation or rigidity, but as the process of embedding core elements – such as budgetary allocation, institutional mandates, operational procedures, some level of legal backing, or stakeholder participation – into a country's national governance architecture.

Afterwards, the Chair highlighted that the objective of this exploratory session is to open a collective conversation among Board Members and Observers on the concept of institutionalising to ensure the long-term sustainability of fisheries transparency in

countries that implement the FiTI Standard. Rather than seeking consensus or decisions, this session is intended to surface ideas, experiences, and questions to inform further discussion and possible next steps. Participants are invited to share reflections from their own country or stakeholder perspective, including what forms of institutional support have helped or hindered progress on transparency initiatives. She then invited the following participants to kick-off this session with a brief panel, talking about their perspective on how they might understand the 'institutionalisation' of the FiTI: Roy CLARISSE, Tinatin NINUA, Rocio Parra CORTÉS (online), and Cadu VILLAÇA.

Roy CLARISSE noted that while the initial focus of the FiTI is on disseminating information, 'real' transparency requires going beyond publication to include meaningful engagement, something that had been stressed during the previous discussions. He identified leadership and the allocation of budgetary resources as two of the most challenging aspects of institutionalization, particularly in sectors with competing priorities. He also emphasised the critical role of a strong legal and institutional frameworks in promoting transparency in governance. When transparency efforts are anchored in law, it becomes easier to establish processes that are measurable, with clearly defined mandates, objectives, and reporting obligations. He underlined that legal frameworks also help clarify who the key partners are, and the frequency and modalities of engagement with them.

He provided the example of Seychelles, where FiTI-related responsibilities were initially housed within a single department. However, following recent legislative reforms, Seychelles passed new regulations that formally mandate the Seychelles Fisheries Authority to collect and publish key information, such as beneficial ownership and penalize the submission of false or misleading data. This legal evolution is seen as a significant step toward embedding transparency within wider government procedures.

Roy also acknowledged that while the country previously engaged in similar activities, the FiTI helps focussing the attention on issues that may have previously received less priority. For example, Seychelles has now developed a policy on joint ventures and beneficial ownership, triggered by FiTI reporting requirements and a subsequent National MSG recommendation. He emphasised the importance of developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) across government departments to reduce inconsistencies and close data gaps and noted that these processes are also helping the country meet its reporting obligations under international treaties.

As the next speaker, Cadu VILLAÇA emphasised the importance of transparency as a cultural principle, likening it to the concepts of honesty and integrity. Furthermore, he underscored the need for community involvement, particularly in collecting data in remote or under-monitored areas. For transparency to truly function, local stakeholders must be able to trust the data and understand why it is collected and how it influences decision-

making. He also mentioned that while transparency can typically be more easily achieved among large-scale fisheries – due to the visibility of activities and external scrutiny – there still remain gaps where stakeholders seek to bypass regulations. He stressed that transparency mechanisms should protect sustainable practices, particularly as foreign actors increase their presence in Latin American waters.

Drawing from his experience in Brazil, he shared an example of Brazil’s lobster sector. Through the involvement of only 15 companies, Brazil was able to implement a traceability system requiring documentation of every purchase, including buyer identities and logbook entries. This allowed authorities to cross-check production and export data, ensuring full traceability, transparency and compliance. He emphasised that such systems only work when governments maintain them beyond the initial project phase. In the mentioned example, this programme continued even after leadership transitions. He added that the program led to increased income for fishers by encouraging the sale of live lobsters at higher prices, rather than processed ones, thereby adding value to the same resource.

He concluded by emphasising the importance of political will and community support for establishing long-term solutions.

Cadu intervention addressed the challenge of institutionalising transparency by reframing it not merely as a technical requirement but as a governance culture embedded in institutions and communities alike. By likening transparency to honesty and integrity, he underscored that lasting transparency cannot depend solely on rules or disclosure platforms; it must be internalized by those who generate, manage, and use fisheries data. This framing aligned with the panel’s focus, as institutionalisation implies durability over time, across political cycles, and beyond individual projects or leadership.

His emphasis on community involvement in data collection, particularly in remote or under-monitored areas, further illustrates how transparency becomes institutionalised when local actors trust the system, understand its purpose, and see how information feeds into decision-making. Without this social legitimacy, transparency remains formal but ineffective. By noting that large-scale fisheries may appear more transparent due to visibility and external scrutiny – yet still exhibit regulatory evasion – Cadu highlighted the limits of surface-level transparency and the need for institutional mechanisms that close loopholes and protect sustainable practices, especially in contexts of increasing foreign fishing pressure in Latin American waters.

The Brazilian lobster traceability example concretely demonstrated institutionalization in practice. The system’s effectiveness did not stem only from technology or regulation, but from mandatory, routinized procedures embedded in government systems – cross-checking purchases, logbooks, and export data – and, critically, from the state’s commitment to maintain the program beyond its pilot phase and across leadership

changes. His observation that the system increased fishers' incomes by incentivizing higher-value practices reinforced a core point of the panel: transparency becomes sustainable when institutions ensure continuity and when stakeholders experience tangible benefits. His conclusion on political will and community support thus directly encapsulated the essence of institutionalizing transparency – making it durable, trusted, and economically and socially meaningful over the long term.

Afterwards, Tinatin NINUA from the Open Government Partnership (OGP) shared her reflections on how OGP has successfully integrated transparency into public systems. She began by acknowledging how the discussions at the FiTI International Board echoed many of the conversations and lessons learned within the OGP movement. She noted that institutionalization is a core strategic focus for OGP and is tracked as part of its organisational performance framework.

OGP, launched in 2011 at the margins of the UN General Assembly, now comprises 75+ national governments and over 150 local governments. Unlike FiTI, OGP works across multiple sectors, supporting broad open government reforms. However, their experience has provided useful frameworks for embedding transparency norms within government structures, many of which are relevant to the fisheries sector and the FiTI. She briefly highlighted three key pathways through which OGP has observed successful institutionalisation across its member countries:

1. *Government ownership and structural integration*

Institutionalisation often begins by anchoring the OGP process within a clearly mandated government agency or inter-agency coordination mechanism. A successful model combines:

- A dedicated coordinating agency with a formal mandate;
- Sufficient resource allocation (staffing and budget); and
- Civil servants who are entrepreneurial and committed to open government reforms.

She cited the examples of Sierra Leone and South Africa. With both established mandates and structures, Sierra Leone saw stronger progress due to the enthusiasm and ownership of civil servants who became internal champions. Their motivation significantly influenced the quality and implementation of action plans.

2. *Embedding Government–Civil Society Dialogue through Multi-Stakeholder Forums*

The second pathway focuses on the ongoing dialogue between government and civil society, often through permanent multi-stakeholder forums (similar to FiTI's MSGs).

These are based on principles of equality and deliberation, where civil society contributes proposals, and governments provide formal responses, explaining what is accepted or rejected.

These forums have proven particularly resilient during political transitions. Tinatin mentioned the example of Brazil: despite setbacks in open government prioritization during previous administrations, the multi-stakeholder forum continued functioning. This allowed the OGP ecosystem to stay active, pivoting toward technical topics like open science, and immediately resuming more ambitious reforms when a favourable political environment returned.

3. *Legal and policy frameworks*

The third institutionalisation path occurs through laws, regulations, and internal administrative rules. These typically take time to develop. Examples include:

- Brazil's Freedom of Information Act (*Lei de Acesso à Informação*, Law No. 12,527/2011), took over 10 years to pass;⁸
- Nigeria's Beneficial Ownership Disclosure Law (also took over a decade of development).⁹

One notable case was Armenia, where a political transition created a window of opportunity to advance legislation on beneficial ownership disclosure, spurred in part by obligations with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). With high-level political interest, technical support from partners, and executive facilitation, the law passed within two years and has since expanded in scope.

⁸ Footnote added for additional information and clarity: Sanctioned on 18 November 2011, was the outcome of a prolonged legislative and political process rather than a rapid reform. Although the final bill was formally introduced to Congress by the executive branch in 2009, debates and earlier proposals aimed at regulating the constitutional right of access to public information date back to the early and mid-2000s. Civil society organizations and transparency advocates often describe the law as the product of nearly a decade of discussion, negotiation, and resistance within Congress and the executive, reflecting the political sensitivity of institutionalizing transparency obligations across the public sector.

⁹ Footnote added for additional information and clarity: Nigeria's framework for beneficial ownership disclosure has developed incrementally over several years, moving from political commitment to enforceable law and public implementation. Following Nigeria's 2016 commitment at the UK Anti-Corruption Summit to improve transparency around company ownership, the legal foundation was established with the enactment of the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020, signed into law on 7 August 2020. CAMA introduced mandatory disclosure of Persons with Significant Control (PSC)—Nigeria's legal equivalent of beneficial ownership—requiring companies and limited liability partnerships to identify and report natural persons who ultimately own or control them. This framework was operationalized through the PSC Regulations issued in 2022, and further strengthened in May 2023 with the launch of a publicly accessible central register by the Corporate Affairs Commission, making Nigeria one of the first African countries to implement a national beneficial ownership register aligned with international data standards.

Tinatin concluded by emphasising that while there is no single blueprint for institutionalising open government, some common ingredients include:

- Political will and sustained funding.
- Strong civil society engagement and demand.
- Committed civil servants within government who act as reform champions.

She also noted that OGP does not assume that governments are monolithic. Often, political leadership may deprioritize transparency, but progress can still be made through internal champions like civil servants pushing reforms from within. Recognizing and encouraging these individuals has become a key element of OGP's strategy.

Tinatin emphasised that OGP's greatest success in institutionalisation has occurred in countries where open government ecosystems are mature, and where networks of reformers have been built over time. Political transitions continue to pose challenges but also offer critical opportunities to advance structural reforms when timing and support align.

Building on this previous intervention, the Chair offered a personal reflection on the challenges of sustaining transparency efforts, drawing from her extensive experience working across Latin America, particularly in Ecuador, where she played a central role in advancing access to information legislation over a decade-long process. She noted that during this period, not only were access to information laws passed across several countries with the support of Transparency International, but in Ecuador, transparency was elevated to the constitutional level. Legislation was later adopted to empower citizens to take legal action when governments failed to publish or provide requested information. She distinguished between two fundamental responsibilities of the state:

1. The obligation to proactively publish prescribed public information.
2. The obligation to respond to information requests from citizens.

However, she warned that legislation alone is not sufficient. Drawing from Ecuador's recent experience, the Chair explained that even with strong legal frameworks, a government can deliberately dismantle a transparency infrastructure. For example, a past administration in Ecuador halted the publication of mandated information and dismantled digital platforms, thereby reversing progress. A subsequent administration did not reinvest in rebuilding this infrastructure, demonstrating how difficult it is to restore transparency once it has been undermined.

She emphasised that this risk is not unique to Latin America. She pointed to developments in the United States, where scientific and environmental data previously made public by federal agencies has reportedly been removed or hidden due to shifting political agendas.

In response, civil society actors and volunteers have taken it upon themselves to preserve and archive data independently, fearing its permanent loss.

The Chair concluded by arguing that institutionalising transparency requires more than laws; it needs protective mechanisms and social infrastructure. Specifically, she stressed the need to identify and empower local champions or ‘ambassadors’, whether inside or outside government, who will monitor, advocate, and sustain transparency even during politically adverse times. Without such actors, the risk remains that each new administration could reset the process, making continuity and impact difficult to achieve. The Chair also emphasizes the voluntary nature of FiTI. In that context, institutionalisation should emphasize the incorporation of permanent actions, practices, and responsibilities related to collecting, organising, and publishing data as part of the regular management process and not so much depending on the passage of legislation. IT legislation can underpin transparency all the better, but there are other elements much more essential to sustain an Initiative such as the FiTI, including the ongoing support of all multi-stakeholders and the government’s political will.

The following topics and approaches were discussed during the following group deliberation:

- Several participants reiterated that institutionalisation does not necessarily require legislation. While legal codification can be helpful, the FiTI should not require it from its implementing countries. Instead, institutionalisation should be based on several approaches in a flexible “menu” that countries can tailor to their contexts.
- It was also recognized that the strongest and most sustainable institutionalisation approach is the one that emerges organically, from stakeholders themselves, rather than being imposed externally. This is when stakeholders, particularly the government, recognise the value of the FiTI and the national process. This can be a strong foundation for institutionalization.
- The Chair emphasised the growing importance of evidence-based storytelling to support and sustain transparency and open government reforms. She noted that the FiTI and similar initiatives face persistent scepticism, particularly from civil servants who often feel isolated in their efforts. These individuals, she argued, need to be equipped with compelling examples of why transparency matters and how it delivers tangible benefits to them and also to others.
- Tinatin recalled a resource OGP published years earlier titled [*The Skeptic’s Guide to Open Government*](#), which served as a practical tool to help reformers advocate internally by presenting concrete outcomes and persuasive arguments. The Chair stressed that success stories are essential for advocacy, particularly in navigating

bureaucratic environments where new initiatives are met with resistance. While acknowledging that it is often difficult to find such cases and document them thoroughly, the Chair stated that she believes there are many valuable examples already in existence that simply need to be identified, refined, and delivered to the right people in government. These stories can offer both credibility and motivation to those pushing for transparency, especially when political will or institutional support is uncertain.

- Karine shared a practical example from Seychelles, where, despite having a committed FiTI National Lead and a pro-forma National Secretariat, the National MSG process stalled. The issue, she explained, was structural rather than motivational: the FiTI-related responsibilities of the National Secretariat were not included in her official job description. As a result, FiTI tasks were regularly deprioritised in favour of responsibilities that were tied to performance evaluations and bonuses. This case illustrated how minor administrative shortcomings, such as formally including FiTI duties in job descriptions or allocating dedicated time and resources, can significantly impact the long-term functionality of the initiative.
- The ED emphasised that the current discussion on institutionalising the FiTI process reflects a level of maturity that was not possible just four years ago. The early phase of FiTI implementation was intentionally designed to be front-loaded with essential components, including the creation of Multi-Stakeholder Groups (MSGs), National Secretariats, and the formalisation of commitments. At that stage, the focus was on building credibility and demonstrating value through action. Hence, he cautioned against introducing rigid institutionalisation requirements too early. Expecting countries to immediately adopt formal structures or long-term institutional safeguards would be counterproductive. Instead, the FiTI must first prove its usefulness and benefits in practice. Only once that foundation is established does it become appropriate to explore additional stabilization mechanisms.
- To support countries entering this more advanced phase, the ED noted that the FiTI is currently developing a practical note on institutionalisation, already identified as a priority in the upcoming work plan. A matrix is being developed to outline, inter alia,
 - What elements can and should be institutionalised (e.g. National MSGs, National Secretariats, beneficial ownership transparency);
 - How institutionalisation can be achieved (e.g. through job descriptions, budget lines, laws, internal policies, or the designation of champions).

It is anticipated that this discussion will continue during 2025 and 2026.

7. Fisheries Information System (FIS)

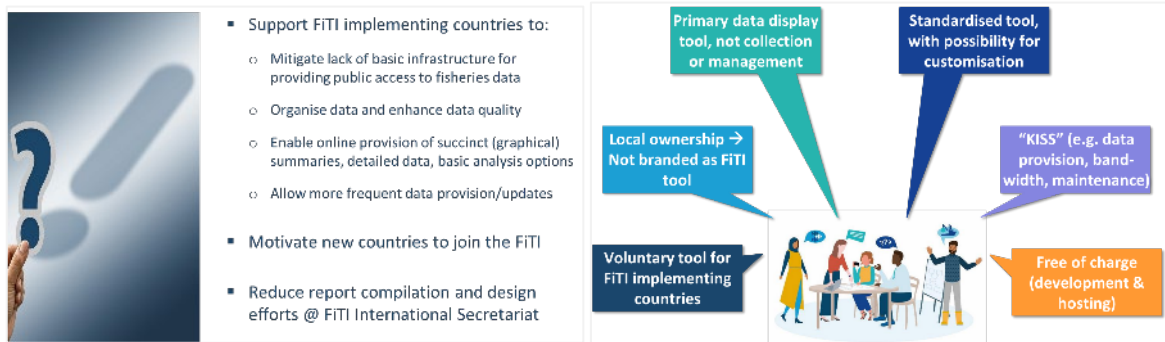
The Chair expressed her enthusiasm about the prospect of offering a Fisheries Information System (FIS) to FiTI countries, and invited the ED to provide an update on the Secretariat's endeavours.

The ED started by emphasising that several current FiTI implementing countries (among them Cabo Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Ghana and Sierra Leone) are struggling with providing information online due to a lack of infrastructure (e.g. no government website). For such situations, the FiTI Standard has initially devised the production of 'FiTI Reports', stating in section B.2.1 *"Where existing information is not published by public authorities in the public domain or is assessed as inaccessible or incomplete, the Report Compiler must seek to collate this information and must present it in the FiTI Report."* At the same time, the FiTI Standard also clearly states that *"FiTI Reports must be used as an interim measure for providing accessible and complete information on fisheries in the public domain."*

While the production of FiTI Reports has significantly enhanced public accessibility and understanding of the countries' fisheries sectors (in particular through the visualisation/summarisation of key information), their preparation is also a cumbersome and time-consuming process for the Secretariat (acting on behalf of a country's National Multi-Stakeholder Group). Unfortunately, although the reports have been very appreciated, utilised, and referenced, consolidating fisheries information in such reports resulted in countries slowing down their efforts to provide information online on their websites or establish websites when they did not have them. This aspect is now becoming even more relevant, as the need to enhance online accessibility will gain further importance due to the change in the FiTI Standard 2.0, which limits the number of years that a country can publish information in reports and not online (max. 5 years). This change also expects countries to provide summarised information, and not just upload detailed data, which requires investment and time for staff to develop such content at the government level.

Inspired by Seychelles' ['Fisheries Information Management System'](#) – which already displays certain information required under the FiTI Standard online – the FiTI has secured funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore foundation and is now developing a global Fisheries Information System (FIS) that will be provided to interested FiTI implementing countries to display information in accordance with the FiTI Standard.

The ED emphasised that the development and deployment of such a system is based on the following rationales and core principles:



He continued by presenting some of the major design characteristic and features of the FIS to the participants:

- **Purpose:** The FIS will mainly help FiTI implementing countries to share online information about their fisheries with the public and display information in ways that will help the public use and understand the information. It is not a system to facilitate administrative procedures, such as issuing permits or licenses, nor a system for government employees to collect data or manage their internal processes.
- **Voluntary tool:** The FIS is intended as a voluntary offering for FiTI implementing countries. Those countries that currently lack a suitable online infrastructure may opt to use this tool to organise and display FiTI-related fisheries information.
- **Architecture:** In very simple terms, the architecture of the FIS can be described by two major components:
 - The *backend* is primarily used for entering or uploading data into the FIS.
 - Each country that opts to utilise the FIS will get its own country instance.¹⁰
 - The FIS itself – and each country instance – are hosted on a FiTI-owned, cloud-based web server.
 - Countries do not require any physical installation (e.g. server) in order to utilise the FIS.
 - Access to the country’s backend requires only access to the internet (web browser); access to the backend is restricted to authorised government users.

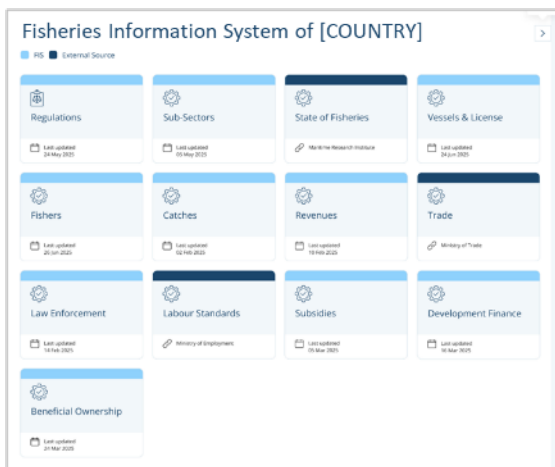
¹⁰ In the context of the FIS, an instance refers to a distinct, country-specific deployment of the FIS platform that operates within a shared technical infrastructure but is logically and functionally separated from other deployments. Each country’s instance consists of its own secure backend environment through which the designated national authorities can upload, manage, and curate their fisheries data, while retaining full ownership and control over that information.

- The countries own and remain in control of their data at all times. The FiTI does not collect or own such data.
- the *frontend* (i.e. website) is used to display the information from the FIS to the general public.
 - Each country that opts to utilise the FIS requires its own website (either with a government domain (e.g. .gov) or – if not possible – a website that is clearly labelled or linked as/to a government website).
- **Costs:** The initial development as well as the ongoing hosting and maintenance of the FIS will be provided free of charge to FiTI countries. In case countries seek to implement significant changes (e.g. such as linking the FIS to their own internal databases), such costs will have to be covered by the countries.
- **'White label' product:** The FIS will not be branded as a FiTI tool, and countries are able to brand their FIS instance (backend and frontend) as theirs, customize it to their needs (e.g. logos, pictures, colours, language) and present it to the public as their own with their name on it and using their own website address (URL). Each government website will include a discreet section explaining that the FIS has been developed with the support of the FiTI and provided to the country at no cost.
- **Target countries:** It is anticipated that the FIS will be of particular interest for lower-middle-/low-income countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which often lack financial and technical resources to provide information to the general public online. Some of those countries expressed such need to the Secretariat staff, so this project was developed to respond to such demand. While it should not be ruled out that other countries will eventually also use the FIS, this target group is at the centre of all design considerations during the development process, for example with regards to low internet bandwidth, limited resources to invest in IT development even countries have the require staff, etc.
- **Scope:** While the main strength of the FIS is displaying large sets of quantitative data (e.g. vessel registries, financial data, catch data, trade data, ODA) – and also visually summarising these datasets in graphics – the scope of the FIS covers all thematic areas of the FiTI Standard, including those where information is provided primarily in descriptive ways (e.g. tenure arrangements). Previous FiTI Reports have been praised for their comprehensive nature, providing key information about fisheries in one publication. The same should be achieved through the FIS, in particular for those countries that currently do not have websites dedicated to this purpose at all.
- **Standardised vs. country-specific content:** The FIS provides standardised forms for entering data into the system, e.g. through manual data entry masks or upload templates. These forms follow the general data requirements of the FiTI Standard

and cannot be modified by countries. However, countries can add additional data fields as well as field attributes. Furthermore, the FIS will already comprise a large number of reports to facilitate data display on government websites.

- **Data provision:** The responsibility for providing information in the FIS lies solely with the public authorities of the FiTI implementing countries. Initially, and similar to the current FiTI reporting process, countries will be supported by the Secretariat to gather information and prepare it for upload/entry into the FIS.

Afterwards, the ED gave a live demonstration of the FIS most recent mock-up.

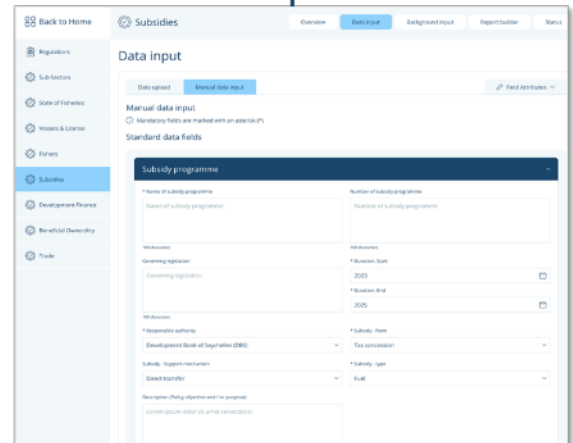


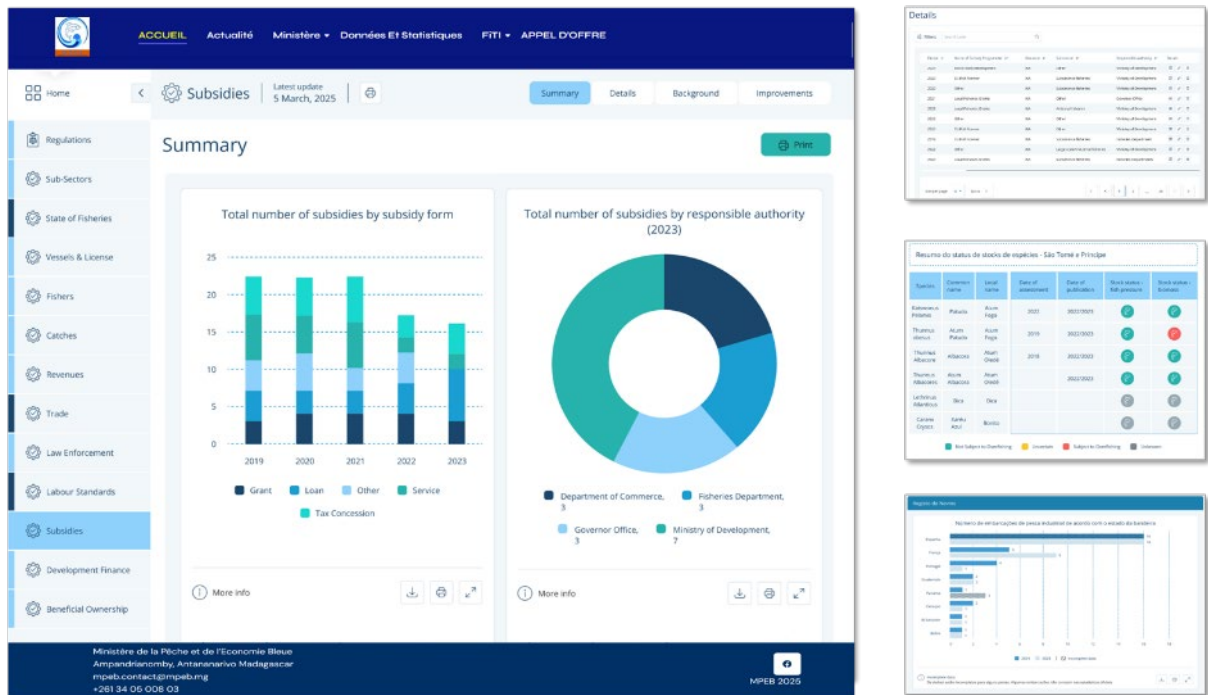
**Version 1.0: 13 different thematic areas
 (modelled after the FiTI Standard)**

**Each thematic area can be activated individually
 (or referenced to an existing source)**

**Simple data provision via spreadsheet upload or
 manual data entry**

**Built-in review procedures to enhance
 data quality**





The ED concluded by stating that commitments from the governments of Cabo Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Madagascar and Ghana have already been secured to use the FIS. It is expected that the FIS will be deployed to all four countries in the first half of 2026.

The Chair thanked the ED and reiterated her excitement about this new, highly sophisticated and comprehensive tool, which could become a ‘game changer’ for countries in organising and displaying data, and a significant incentive for new countries to join the FiTI. This tool will increase transparency and is expected to facilitate constituencies' access to data, enabling them to engage more effectively in policy discussions. The Chair also wanted to recognize the commitment and work of the contractor, Shellcatch, whose team has exceeded FiTI’s expectations.

Several participants echoed the Chair’s excitement and were impressed with the level of detail, scope, complexity, and functionality of this new tool.

8. Upcoming relevant activities and events

As the final agenda point of this meeting, the ED invited the representatives of the UN-FAO (Shirlene Maria ANTHONYSAMY) and the World Bank Group (Kristín GUNNARSDOTTIR VON KISTOWSKI) to share updates on planned activities. He emphasised that while during online meetings, such informative sessions are typically quite limited, and therefore, this meeting

presents an opportunity for Board Members and the Secretariat to hear directly from partner organisations about interesting upcoming events and developments.

The first round of updates focused on any planned engagement during the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Nice, and any relevant events or initiatives scheduled for the second half of the year. The ED also encouraged participants to flag regional gatherings, particularly those in Latin America and other regions where small-scale fisheries play a significant role.

Kristín started by providing a brief overview of the World Bank's upcoming activities, with a particular focus on one of the side events at the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Nice. This year, the World Bank's flagship event will spotlight Indigenous Peoples, providing a platform for them to share their challenges, rights, and solutions related to their traditional coastal ecosystems. The event is expected to feature diverse representation, with indigenous groups from multiple regions participating, and is being developed in collaboration with UNEP.

She emphasised that this session aligns with ongoing Bank efforts to profile indigenous communities and their ties to sustainable ocean governance. It also intersects with topics such as microenterprises, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection.

Other relevant key focus regions or work areas of the Bank include:

- West Africa, where the Bank continues to maintain a strong presence through an small but dedicated team.
- Thematic engagement in topics such as plastic pollution, carbon accounting, and social protection mechanisms for fisheries-dependent communities.
- Continued cooperation with the UN-FAO, particularly around social protection and employment support in vulnerable coastal populations.
- Possible contributions to discussions on the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction).

Afterwards, Shirlene emphasised the key role that FAO plays at the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Nice and invited the participants to attend some of the FAO-led side events. Furthermore, she flagged the first in-person Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management (FAO), which is expected to be hosted by Iceland in February 2026. The event will focus on small-scale fisheries, emerging trends, and climate resilience, and will likely attract participation from a range of development partners. She encouraged the Secretariat to be present at that meeting.

Specifically with regards to small-scale fisheries, Shirlene proposed to connect the Secretariat with the CAFI-SSF Network, a global network focused on building capacity and improving access to financial services for the small-scale fisheries sector.

Afterwards, the ED thanked both representatives and acknowledged that while the Secretariat does its best to stay informed about FiTI-relevant events and developments, it would be useful for the Secretariat to receive direct input from members about such events, in order to ensure that FiTI is well-positioned to participate in or align with key initiatives, where relevant. In this regard, Dawda Foday SAINÉ mentioned that his organisation, the African Confederation of Professional Organisations of Artisanal Fisheries (CAOPA), will celebrate its 15th anniversary this year with a celebratory event (most likely around World Fisheries Day), and volunteered to present the FiTI at this event.

9. Closing & Outlook for next Board meetings

The Chair closed the meeting by warmly thanking all participants for their engagement and commitment throughout the sessions. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that the ideas, discussions, and energy generated during the Board meeting translate into action, reinforcing the organisation's work in the months ahead.

She expressed gratitude for the ongoing support of Board Members and Observers, highlighting their responsiveness to Secretariat communications, their outreach on behalf of the FiTI, and their efforts to raise awareness of the initiative in diverse settings. She encouraged members to take every opportunity, whether formal or informal to speak about FiTI with potential partners, organisations, or governments that might benefit from or contribute to the initiative.

She reminded participants that growing the FiTI's impact requires more visibility, more champions, and more countries on board. She acknowledged, with appreciation, the visible efforts of several Board Members who already act as informal ambassadors, such as making contacts across government ministries and development institutions and called on others to do the same.

In her final acknowledgments, she extended sincere thanks to:

- Brot für die Welt for their financial contributions to this Board meeting by covering interpretation and travel costs for the Board's small-scale fisheries representatives.
- The hotel and staff for the exceptional hospitality and setting.

- Both interpreters, Anaïs CESTER and Raquel AGUILAR NÚÑEZ, for their excellent translation services, which made the meeting accessible to online participants and non-English-speaking colleagues.
- All Board members and observers, whose active participation made the meeting productive and meaningful.

She ended by expressing hope to see everyone again soon and offering one final thank you on behalf of the Secretariat and the broader FiTI community.

The 30th International Board Meeting ended.

Meeting minutes **provided** by:



Mr Sven Biermann

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

Roy CLARISSE [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

Annika MACKENSEN [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

Joacim JOHANNESON [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

Excused:

Rocío Parra CORTÉS¹¹

Estelle JONES

Stakeholder group: Business sector

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

Nestor ROCHE [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

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

Carlos (Cadu) VILLAÇA [Voting power for this meeting: 1.2 votes]

Excused:

Tony LAZAZZARA

Stakeholder group: Social sector

Excused:

Ketakandriana RAFITOSON¹²

Umair SHAHID¹³

¹¹ Rocío Parra CORTÉS participated partially online.

¹² Ketakandriana RAFITOSON delegated her decision-making power to the Chair via email on June 5th, 2025. She also participated partially online.

¹³ Umair SHAHID delegated his decision-making power to the Chair via WhatsApp on June 5th, 2025.

Daniel SKERRITT¹⁴

Annie TOURETTE¹⁵

Observers

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), represented by Shirlene Maria ANTHONYSAMY

Open Government Partnership, represented by Tinatin NINUA

World Bank Group, represented by Kristín Gunnarsdottir VON KISTOWSKI

FiTI International Secretariat

Sven BIERMANN

Stephanie VOLCERE (online)

Karine YOUNG

Guests

Anaïs CESTER, Interpreter (online)

Raquel AGUILAR NÚÑEZ, Interpreter (online)

¹⁴ Daniel SKERRITT delegated his decision-making power to the Chair via email on May 28th, 2025.

¹⁵ Annie TOURETTE participated partially online.

APPENDIX II: Agenda of the Meeting

The 2-day meeting was chaired by Dr Valeria MERINO, Chair of the FiTI International Board.

Agenda – Thursday, 5th of June 2025

08:30 – 09:00 *Arrival of participants*

		Type ¹⁶
09:00 – 09:15	[I.1] Welcome & Administration	ⓘ / ☑
	<i>Valeria MERINO</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identification of attendance ▪ Brief introduction of participants from OGP and FAO ▪ Determination of a quorum 	
09:15 – 09:30	[I.2] Re-election of Board Member	☑
	<i>Valeria MERINO</i>	
09:30 – 10:30	[I.3] Pub Quiz: ‘What do you know about fisheries transparency?’	ⓘ
	<i>Karine YOUNG</i>	

10:30 – 10:45 *Coffee & Tea break*

¹⁶ ⓘ Agenda item is primarily for information/discussion; ☑ Agenda item requires decision

10:45 – 12:30

[I.4] Reflections on the changes to the upcoming FiTI Standard 2.0



Sven BIERMANN

- Addressing procedural challenges for FiTI Implementing countries (*e.g. introducing a new milestone by when countries must reach FiTI Candidate Status; utilising existing (and suitable) national multi-stakeholder structures*)
- Enhancing and updating transparency requirements (*e.g. national objectives, WTO subsidies, new thematic area structure*)
- From data provision to facilitate public understanding (*e.g. separating transparency assessment from information provision, introducing a requirement for summarised data provision*)
- Strengthening compliance validations (*e.g. reaching compliance eligibility regarding transparency; validation requirements for impact*)
- Next steps
- Questions & Answers

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch break

13:30 – 15:30

[I.5] Incentives to increase the government's interest in fisheries transparency – growing the demand side



Facilitator: Sven BIERMANN

- Setting the scene: International Secretariat's beneFiTing campaign [*Karine YOUNG*]
- Panel discussion [*Roy CLARISSE, Joacim JOHANNESSON and Annika MACKENSEN*]
- Generic benefits vs. country-specific examples
- Questions & Answers

15:30 – 15:45 Coffee & Tea break

15:45 – 16:50	[1.6] Fisheries Information System (FIS)	i
<i>Sven BIERMANN</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Purpose, principles and architecture▪ Timeline & Pilot countries▪ Live demonstration (mock-up)▪ Questions & Answers		
16:50 – 17:00	[1.7] Outlook for Day 2, Closing	i
<i>Valeria MERINO</i>		
19:00 – 21:30 Dinner: FiTI & Friends		

Agenda – Friday, 6th of June 2025

08:30 – 09:00 Arrival of participants

09:00 – 10:45	[II.1] Strengthening the impact of fisheries transparency in the capacity of the SSF groups to participate in policy dialogues	①
	Facilitators: <i>Hugh GOVAN, Néstor ROCHE, Dawda Foday SAINÉ</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Introductory presentation [tbc]▪ Panel discussion [tbc]▪ Questions and Answers [tbc]▪ Final summary session [tbc]	

10:45 – 11:00 Coffee & Tea break

11:00 – 12:30	[II.2] Building to last: Exploring the institutionalisation of fisheries transparency	①
	Facilitator: <i>Valeria MERINO</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Introductory remarks [<i>Valeria MERINO</i>]▪ Panel discussion [<i>Roy CLARISSE, Tinatin NINUA, Rocio Parra CORTÉS, Cadu VILLAÇA</i>]▪ Plenary session▪ Breakout groups	

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch break (incl. group photo)

13:30 – 15:30

[II.3] Vision 2030 – the FiTI in the next 5 years



Facilitator: *Valeria MERINO*

- Brainstorming session to identify key strategic areas to be addressed as part of FiTI's Vision 2030
- Structured plenary discussion to examine each of the priority themes identified
- Next steps

15:30 – 15:45 *Coffee & Tea break*

15:45 – 17:00

[II.4] Next meeting(s), Summary & Closing



Valeria MERINO and Sven BIERMANN

- Address any unfinished business / discuss additional topics identified during the Board meeting
- Update on the current status of the Secretariat's 2025 workplan
- Invite Board Members and Observers to inform about upcoming relevant activities and events
- Outlook on the next meetings and key activities for the Board during the second half of 2025