



[Fisheries Transparency Initiative, Highway Complex Building, Providence / Seychelles](#)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Committee on Fisheries
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Roma
Italy

Providence, 25 January 2021

34th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (1 to 5 February 2021)

Re: Proposal for a new sub-committee on fisheries management

Dear Chair and Vice-Chairpersons of the Committee on Fisheries,

We would like to express our sincere admiration to you and the colleagues at the FAO for organising the upcoming thirty-fourth session, despite these unprecedented times and logistical challenges.

For millennia, those who dedicated themselves to fishing, whether for food, income or recreation, had no need to worry about the sustainable management of this natural resource. Fish stocks replenished themselves with ease. **This is no longer the case.** The COVID-19 pandemic has struck at a time when the ocean was already under increasing threat from myriad impacts, including climate change, pollution and overfishing.

Governments have the fundamental obligation to manage common resources, such as fish, on behalf of their citizens. But this invokes a complex challenge: to ensure that fishing and fish trade contribute to income, employment, food and nutrition for millions of people, while conserving marine biodiversity for present and future generations.

Public availability of credible information is critical in achieving sustainable fisheries. But transparency has not been a priority so far. Many governments do not disclose even basic information on their fisheries sector, such as laws, permits, fish agreements, stock assessments, financial contributions, catch data and subsidies. And data that is already publicly available is too often incomplete, outdated, or not readily accessible and understandable.



This lack of transparency in fisheries management does not only undermine the **quality and credibility of decision-making** by national authorities. It also diminishes the prospect of effective **oversight and accountability**; it **marginalises or undervalues certain groups or fisheries sub-sectors** (in particular those that involve women), and provides a breeding ground for **corruption as well as misinformation**, rumours and unfair adverse publicity.

Many of the elements included in campaigns for transparency in the fisheries sector are already established in **international agreements on fisheries reforms**¹. The challenge has been that while these texts provided some specific requests for governments to follow, transparency was discussed in a fairly general way. This left much open to debate on exactly what information ought to be made public, by whom, how and why.

Addressing these shortcomings and contributing to sustainable fisheries management was a key motivator in establishing the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI).

The FiTI was established as a distinctive effort that catalyses, complements and supports other national, regional and global efforts for achieving responsible fisheries governance. Since the official launch of the FiTI Standard in April 2017 – an internationally recognised framework that defines for the first time what kind of information on marine fisheries should be published online by national authorities – the FiTI has been working with stakeholders from government, industrial and small-scale fishing, as well as civil society partners to advance the implementation of transparency in marine fisheries management.

While the importance of transparency for fisheries is recognised, it also has to be acknowledged that this can be a quite diverse and potentially confusing subject. A range of issues are now subject to calls for greater transparency in the marine fisheries sector; yet objectives, approaches and expectations for increasing the public availability of information can differ significantly. It is evident that this topic covers an extensive range of quite complicated issues, with much to be resolved in terms of international norms or expectations on how precisely transparency should be achieved, to what level and how it contributes best to sustainable fisheries management.

¹ For example, the need for governments to share information on fisheries is already described FAO's landmark *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* (1995). Transparency is also listed by the FAO as one of the core principles in the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure in Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (2012), as well as the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (2015).



The Fisheries Transparency Initiative has already benefited from conducting a side event at the 32nd session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and from participating as an observer in meetings of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. We therefore understand the importance of COFI's position as the only global inter-governmental forum where major international fisheries and aquaculture issues and recommendations are discussed.

A new COFI sub-committee on fisheries management could therefore allow for much needed in-depth discussions on many important topics (including transparency). This will not only emphasise the need for continuously strengthen ocean governance, but also consolidate technical knowledges and implementation experiences on many important, cross-cutting aspects of sustainable capture fisheries management.

We wish you productive and successful deliberations during the upcoming COFI meeting and look forward to the outcomes of this important virtual gathering.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sven Biermann".

(Sven Biermann)

Executive Director, International Secretariat of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that seeks to increase transparency and participation for a more sustainable management of marine fisheries.

It provides governments, the fishing industry (both large-scale and small-scale), and civil society with an internationally-recognised framework to increase the credibility and quality of national fisheries information.

By making fisheries management more transparent and inclusive, the FiTI promotes informed public debates on fisheries policies and supports the long-term contribution of the sector to national economies and the well-being of citizens and businesses that depend on a healthy marine environment.