



Fisheries
Transparency
Initiative

TAKING STOCK:

Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information

Assessment methodology

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

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

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The following document is a reference for those seeking to understand the methodology of the ‘TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information’ assessments. For questions or comments regarding this document, please contact Mrs Nancy Ng Ping Cheun (TAKING STOCK Coordinator) at nngpingcheun@fiti.global.




Introduction

Fisheries may have been slow to catch on to the global movement towards transparency, but the concept is now widely accepted as being fundamental to sustainable fisheries management. Acceptance, however, does not necessarily equate to enjoying priority status. Many governments still fail to disclose even basic information about their fisheries sector, such as laws, permits, fishing agreements, stock assessments, financial contributions, catch data, and subsidies. Moreover, not all fishing companies are reliably reporting on catch volumes or payments to governments. To add to that, the data that is publicly available is too often incomplete, outdated, unverified, or not intuitively understandable. This affects government capacity to efficiently manage their fisheries, as well as the ability of citizens to engage in effective oversight, accountability and public dialogue.

Transparency is also often misperceived as a feature of governance to which national authorities can voluntarily choose to commit. In fact, the provision of accessible, timely and credible information on a country's marine fisheries is increasingly a legal requirement to which governments are bound to adhere, stemming, among other things, from Freedom of Information laws. Such laws are frequently based on three key principles: access to public participation, access to justice and access to information. The latter implies that the public should be able to obtain environmental information (including information about their country's fisheries sector) with only limited, explicitly defined exceptions arising from confidentiality claims and security matters. Consequently, by failing to publish basic information about its marine fisheries sector, a country may not only be falling short of international commitments and market expectations, but also of its own national legal requirements.

The importance of public access to government information is emphasised in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 16.10 of the SDGs calls on all states to adopt legislation or policies guaranteeing the right to information, which is essential for both the achievement of Goal 16 and as a catalyst for achieving other SDGs.

Addressing these shortcomings and contributing to sustainable fisheries management was a key motivator in establishing the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI). The objective of the FiTI is to ensure that timely, credible, and understandable information on fisheries management is made available for the benefit of governments, companies, civil society organisations and the wider public.



Implementing the initiative at a country level requires stakeholders to work together to ensure compliance with the [FiTI Standard](#), an internationally recognized framework that addresses distinct thematic areas of fisheries management, grouped into 12 thematic areas. Evidence that information is provided for these areas is documented in an annual FiTI Report. Information published in these reports is seen as trustworthy, as it is collectively vetted by a country's National Multi-Stakeholder Group, which comprises equal numbers of representatives from government, business, and civil society.

However, those governments that are still not giving sufficient priority to enhancing transparency in their fisheries need further nudging. For this reason, the FiTI has developed a new diagnosis tool, which assesses the level of information disclosure by governments against the FiTI Standard. This tool is known as [TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information](#). These assessments seek to provide an overview of what governments publish regarding a number of key fisheries management areas. They further intend to provide a sound basis of information to spark interest among various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

To note, these assessments can be undertaken for any coastal country – they are not limited to those already engaged in implementing the FiTI Standard.

Overview

- ➔ The TAKING STOCK assessment analyses whether national (federal) information is proactively **published online by national authorities** on their own websites. Regional or local information is not part of the assessment.

While it is expected that most data would be published by the country's Ministry of Fisheries (or equivalent), other relevant national authorities, such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Trade, and statistical agencies etc. are also covered.

- ➔ **What is assessed?** The country's marine capture fishery is assessed against 39 transparency elements derived from the 12 thematic areas of the FiTI Standard.¹

- ➔ **How is it assessed?** Every transparency element is assessed according to the following qualitative criteria²:

- *Is information freely available on government websites? If yes:*
 - *Is the published information up to date?*
 - *Is the published information easy to find?*

Furthermore, the assessment:

- considers whether information is published in a way that allows it to be **(re)used**, e.g. downloaded, searched and filtered;
- documents instances of '**good transparency practices**', where the published information allows non-experts to draw reliable conclusions from it ; and
- proposes practical **recommendations** for national authorities to improve online transparency.

¹ For more information, please refer to section 1.1 of this document.

² For more information, please refer to section 1.2 of this document.

➡ Different **entry points** are used to locate government information about the country's marine fisheries sector, such as:

- central government portal(s),
- standalone websites of national authorities,
- external search engines, such as Google.

Other means of sharing information, such as social media networks or mobile applications, are primarily used to identify sources of information within government websites.

➡ The assessment does **not**:

- capture and display the actual underlying information (e.g. number of vessels);
- attempt to authenticate the accuracy of every detail of the information the government publishes. Instead, it broadly analyses the general context and key features of a country's fisheries sector in order to identify where information exists, but has not been published by the government, and where information that is published is seen as incomplete, unreliable or contradicts other published information;³
- highlight additional (non-governmental) information on the country's marine fisheries (e.g. reports published by research institutes, civil society groups or international organisations);
- determine an overall country score or numerical value that can be used to rank or directly compare countries.

➡ The assessment is typically conducted in the **main language of the targeted country**.

³ For example, the assessment does not verify whether every vessel licenced to fish in a country's waters actually appears on the national registry. However, through extensive background research, major omissions will be highlighted, such as if an entire sub-sector or fleet is not listed.


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- ➡ The assessment results are **published in two reports**: a **Summary Assessment Report** and a **Detailed Assessment Report**.
 - ➡ The assessment is conducted as a **desk study** by a lead researcher, followed by a **peer review** of national and international experts.
 - ➡ The assessment process does not rely on input or contributions from national authorities. However, national authorities are informed prior to an assessment and have the option to **comment on initial findings** prior to the publication of the results.
 - ➡ The overall assessment **process** is overseen by the FiTI International Secretariat.

Transparency in fisheries management is not static, and will **evolve further over time**. This is just as applicable to the 12 thematic areas of fisheries management set forth in the FiTI Standard, as it is to the qualitative criteria against which these requirements are analysed during this assessment. It is therefore expected that the methodology of the TAKING STOCK assessment will also evolve with time. It will be the role of the FiTI and its partner organisations to regularly review and enhance it.

The FiTI pursues several objectives through the **TAKING STOCK assessments**:



- ➔ **Providing a useful baseline for countries that are beginning the process of increasing transparency in fisheries management.** Getting started with the FiTI requires all stakeholders to have a general understanding of what information is already in the public domain and what is missing. The results of the TAKING STOCK assessment will therefore provide a credible benchmark to demonstrate improvements over time. Furthermore, the results will also help significantly with the preparation of the country's first FiTI Report, once the country has been granted its official FiTI Candidate country status.
- ➔ **Sparking interest among stakeholders from countries hesitant to enhance transparency.** Conducting the TAKING STOCK assessment will demonstrate strengths as well as improvement opportunities in the levels of fisheries management information accessible online. This serves as an entry point for debates with national and international stakeholders regarding prospects for greater transparency in the management of the sector.
- ➔ **Contributing to global debates and building a knowledge pool of transparency in fisheries management.** As these TAKING STOCK assessments will be conducted in many countries, including those that may not yet be ready or willing to implement the FiTI, they will gradually yield a global picture of transparency levels in the fisheries sectors of governments across the world. Currently, few empirical studies exist on levels of transparency in fisheries, with much analysis relying on anecdotal information. Furthermore, the assessments will promote aspects of open government and open data.



While the FiTI envisages for these TAKING STOCK assessments to become an important reference point for increasing transparency in fisheries management within countries and around the globe, it is also clearly recognised that **public disclosure of information cannot be directly equated with actual progress towards sustainable fisheries management, nor with core principles of ethical behaviour, such as honesty and integrity.**

A lack of transparency in fisheries management is not always a deliberate state of affairs. Governments with poor levels of transparency are often viewed negatively, as if driven by the desire to hide information from public scrutiny. However, what is perceived as opacity or secretive practices can often be the result of other factors, such as the complexity of the fisheries sector, a lack of technology, expertise and staff, or legal concerns. Some government ministries or national agencies, particularly those that are underfunded, may prioritise neither transparency in general nor access to information through digital means (e.g. websites). Unfortunately, these arguments may also be used as a convenient excuse to avoid scrutiny.

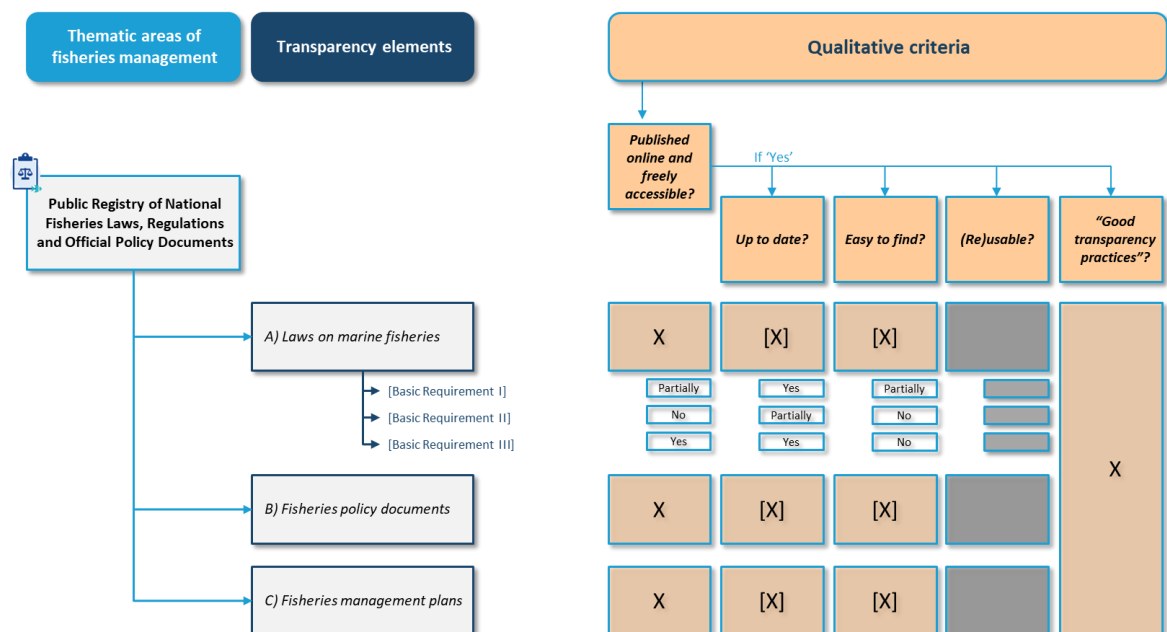
A low level of transparency in a TAKING STOCK assessment should therefore not immediately be interpreted as a sign of wrongdoing. The assessment rather aims to highlight potential opportunities for national authorities to enhance online disclosure of information to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational and implementational success regarding the veracity of information and ultimately the sustainability of marine fisheries.

Furthermore, these assessments are based on a core principle of the FiTI: progressive improvement. This means that countries are not expected to have complete data for every transparency requirement from the beginning. Instead, public authorities must disclose the information they have, and where important gaps exist, they must demonstrate improvements over time.

The assessment is therefore not an end in itself. Instead, it takes stock of current disclosure practices against an internationally recognised transparency framework – the FiTI Standard – with a view to starting a conversation with all relevant stakeholders in the country’s marine fisheries sector.

1. Assessment methodology

This ‘TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information’ assessment analyses 39 different transparency elements according to a set of qualitative criteria, as illustrated below:



1) Thematic areas and transparency elements

Assessing the online transparency around the management of a country's marine fisheries sector is the main focus of this research⁴. A country's current situation is evaluated against the **12 thematic areas** of the FiTI Standard (as shown below), a **widely recognized and accepted framework**, which defines for the first time what information on fisheries should be published online by national authorities.⁵

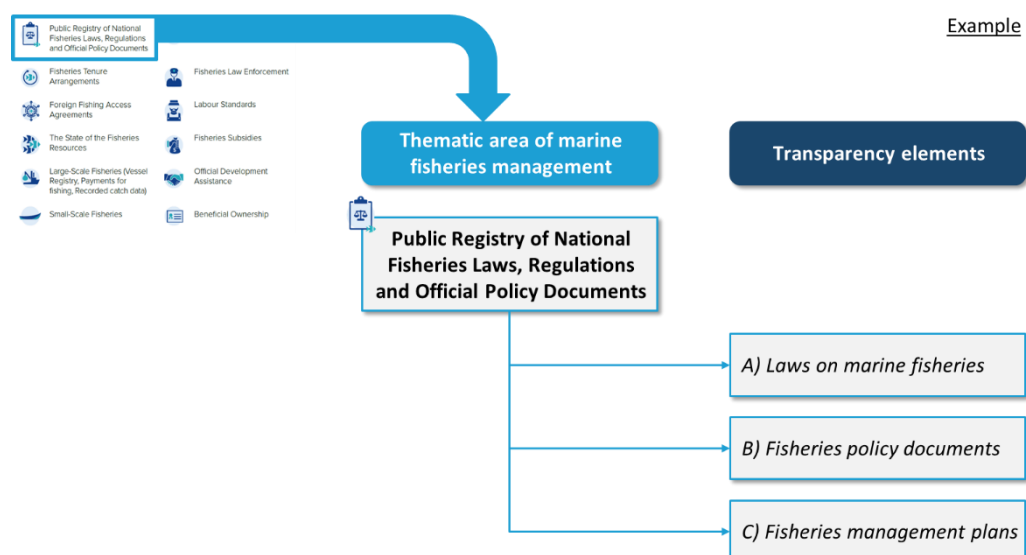
⁴ Information on inland fisheries and aquaculture are not considered during this assessment.

⁵ The FiTI standard was developed in a 2-year global multi-stakeholder endeavour to increase the credibility and quality of national fisheries management information.



Each of the 12 thematic areas cover several important subcategories of information. In order to avoid ambiguities during the assessment, these thematic areas are further broken down into **39 transparency elements**.

For example, thematic area #1, ‘Public Registry of National Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents’, is broken down into three separate transparency elements, as illustrated below.



The following table provides a detailed breakdown of the 12 thematic areas into the 39 transparency elements.

Thematic areas for transparency in fisheries management		Transparency elements		
ID	Name	ID	Name	Total count
1.	Fisheries laws, regulations and official policy documents	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries	1.
		1-B	Fisheries policy documents	2.
		1-C	Fisheries management plans	3.
2.	Fisheries tenure arrangements	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small scale)	4.
		2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing	5.
		2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing	6.
		2-D	Sport fishing	7.
3.	Foreign fishing access agreement	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in [country] waters	8.
		3-B	[Country]-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters	9.
4.	The state of the fisheries resources	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations	10.
		4-B	Scientific stock assessments	11.
5.	Large-scale fisheries	5-A	Vessels	12.
		5-B	Payments	13.
		5-C	Catches within [country] waters	14.
		5-D	Catches outside [country] waters	15.
		5-E	Landings in [country] ports	16.
		5-F	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports	17.
		5-G	Discards	18.

Thematic areas for transparency in fisheries management		Transparency elements		
		5-H	Fishing efforts	19.
6.	Small-scale fisheries	6-A	Vessels	20.
		6-B	Licenses	21.
		6-C	Fishers	22.
		6-D	Payments	23.
		6-E	Catches	24.
		6-F	Discards	25.
7.	Post-harvest sector and fish trade	7-A	Imports	26.
		7-B	Exports	27.
		7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries	28.
		7-D	Employment in informal fisheries	29.
8.	Fisheries law enforcement	8-A	Enforcement of laws	30.
		8-B	Sanctions for major offences	31.
9.	Labour standards	9-A	Enforcement of labour standards	32.
		9-B	Sanctions for labour standard offences	33.
10.	Fisheries subsidies	10-A	Government financial transfers or subsidies	34.
11.	Official development assistance	11-A	Assistance for national fisheries development	35.
		11-B	Assistance for foreign fisheries development	36.
12.	Beneficial ownership	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency	37.
		12-B	Beneficial ownership registry	38.
		12-C	Beneficial ownership disclosure in fisheries	39.

2) Qualitative criteria

All these 39 transparency elements are assessed against the following three qualitative criteria:

- » Is information freely available online? *If yes,*
 - » Is the published information up to date?
 - » Is the published information easy to find?

In addition to individual assessment outcomes for each of these criteria, a composite value is determined for all applicable transparency elements.⁶

Available online?

Many disclosure laws and information systems currently in place⁷ are based on reactive transparency, meaning that a question must be asked before an answer is given, or that public information must be requested before being disclosed. On the other hand, proactive transparency encourages the release of public information before individual requests to address questions of public interest.

This initial qualitative criterion therefore assesses each transparency element according to two interrelated aspects:

- ➡ Whether information that is requested by the FiTI Standard is made *available by the government on a public government website*⁸, e.g. of the Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Trade, or a national fishing authority.⁹

The assessment does not cover information that is published exclusively in hardcopy nor information that is published solely by non-governmental organisations, even if this is derived from information provided by national authorities.¹⁰ While it is the case


⁶ For more information, please refer to section 3.2 of this document.

⁷ Including right-to-know, freedom of information and public records laws.

⁸ This includes only official government websites (e.g. with a government domain) over which national authorities have full control on how and when data is published. In case government information is published on intergovernmental websites (e.g. on websites of the FAO or an RFMO), these sites are not considered in the assessment, but mentioned in the Detailed Assessment Report.

⁹ The importance of websites for providing information to the general public is further elaborated in Annex I.

¹⁰ It is, however, acceptable if the actual information is not shown or stored on a governmental website, but a clear link on this website transfers the user directly to another website. For example, the Sustainable Fisheries



in some countries that important information on fisheries is often published via local media (such as in newspapers or through radio presentations), this does not meet the definition of being available online. However, these practices are nevertheless documented within the Detailed Assessment Report.

➡ Whether the published information is *available without any access restrictions*.

To be seen as freely accessible online, information must be obtained without requiring any of the following:

- online registration;
- requesting the data from a civil servant via email;
- completing a contact form;
- paying a fee; or
- other similar administrative processes.

Furthermore, this assessment will not consider any data (e.g. vessel information, catches, financial statistics) or reports (e.g. Annual Reports) that are published online but are *older than 10 years* from the date the TAKING STOCK assessment takes place.

As outlined in earlier sections, the FiTI Standard goes beyond simply defining what data should be published online by national authorities. Each of its 12 thematic areas additionally stipulates a set of basic information characteristics. For example, the FiTI Standard requires countries to publish the total number of small-scale fishers, but this information must also be further disaggregated according to gender and type of occupation.

Partnership Agreements of the European Union (EU) are publicly accessible on the EU website, but may not be stored on the government website with whom the EU entered into such an agreement. If the government shows a clear link to the EU website, this is seen as publicly available.

Accordingly, the 39 transparency elements are broken down into unambiguous basic information requirements. Each basic information requirement must be assessed against the following *five assessment options*: Yes, Partially, No, Not produced, Not applicable.

Assessment option	Qualitative judgement
<i>Available online</i>	
Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard is made <i>available by the government on a public government website</i>; AND ➔ Published information can be <i>accessed without any restrictions</i> (as defined above); AND ➔ Published information is seen as <i>mostly or fully complete</i>.
Partially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard is made <i>available by the government on a public government website</i>; AND ➔ Published information can be <i>accessed without any restrictions</i> (as defined above); BUT ➔ Published information is seen as only <i>partially complete</i>¹¹.
No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard is made <i>available by the government on a public government website</i>; AND ➔ Published information can be <i>accessed without any restrictions</i> (as defined above); BUT ➔ Published information is seen as <i>largely incomplete</i>.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ <i>No information is made available</i> by the government on a public government website, although there is <i>evidence that such information is available</i> to the government.

¹¹ For example, catch information from large-scale fisheries is published online, but lacking information from a certain gear type (e.g. long liners), flagged vessels (e.g. only catches from nationally-flagged vessels but not from foreign-flagged vessels are published) or catches for a certain species (e.g. sharks).

Assessment option	Qualitative judgement
<i>Available online</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard is made <i>available by the government on a public government website</i>; BUT ➔ Published information cannot be <i>accessed without any restrictions</i> (as defined above).¹²
Not produced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard has <i>not yet been collected</i> by the country's government. This relates in particular to scientific data¹³; OR ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard has <i>not yet been compiled</i> by the country's government. This relates in particular to national reports and action plans.
Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Information as required under the FiTI Standard is <i>not relevant</i> to the country.¹⁴

If governments provide clear justifications as to why certain data cannot be released online, this will be documented in the Detailed Assessment Report.

If the assessment finds that no information is published online, either because

- ➔ a transparency element is not applicable to the country,
- ➔ information does not exist yet (i.e. data has not been collected or compiled),

¹² Cases where access to online government information is restricted will be clearly indicated in a country's assessment report.

¹³ For example, transparency requirement #6 of the FiTI Standard requests that a country publishes information on discards in the small-scale fisheries sector. However, some countries may have not yet collected such information, due to financial, personnel or capacity constraints.

¹⁴ For example, transparency requirement #3 of the FiTI Standard requests that a country publishes information on the foreign fishing access agreements it has signed with foreign parties (e.g. government, private sector entities). However, some countries may not have entered into agreements allowing such parties to fish in their territorial waters. Alternatively, a country's national-flagged vessels may not conduct fishing operations outside its own territorial waters. In these two situations, the information requested by the FiTI Standard would be assessed as 'not applicable'.

- ➡ information has not been published by national authorities, despite evidence that such information is available, or
- ➡ information is published but only with restricted access,

then no additional assessments for the other qualitative criteria (see below) will be conducted.

However, if information is assessed as being available online, then the remaining two qualitative criteria will be assessed, independent of the quality of the published information (i.e. even if it is not complete). This means, for example, that if the assessment finds information that has only been partially made available, this partially available information can still be evaluated as 'up to date' and 'easy to find'. This is to avoid compounding the impact of one criterion on the other criteria.

Up to date?

Fish are a renewable resource that can, if sustainably managed, remain accessible and beneficial for future generations. The *timely provision* of information is crucial for public authorities responsible for making management decisions regarding a fishery.

This criterion is assessed according to *four assessment options*: Yes, Partially, No, and Uncertain. Individual time parameters have been established for each of the 39 transparency elements. For example, this assessment analyses whether information that is published by the government in a registry for large-scale fishing vessels is not older than one year.

Assessment option: Qualitative judgement	
<i>Up to date</i>	
Yes	➡ The published and accessible information is seen as <i>fully or largely up to date</i> (as defined according to the individual time parameters of each transparency element). ¹⁵

¹⁵ All published and accessible information will be analysed for whether it is up to date. This means that even if a piece of information has been identified as being incomplete in the first assessment step (i.e. determining if it is 'Available online'), it could nevertheless be assessed as being fully up to date.

Assessment option: Qualitative judgement	
<i>Up to date</i>	
Partially	➡ The published and accessible information is seen as only <i>partially up to date</i> (as defined according to the individual time parameters of each transparency element).
No	➡ The published and accessible information is <i>not seen as up to date</i> (as defined according to the individual time parameters of each transparency element).
Uncertain	➡ The published and accessible information does not provide a clear indication of whether it is up to date or not. ¹⁶

Information that has been assessed as ‘uncertain’ during the initial assessment will be highlighted to national authorities during their review phase in order to seek clarification.

In case multiple sources (e.g. different websites) provide similar information, only the most complete information is considered in the scope of the assessment, even if this information is outdated (unless this information is older than 10 years, as stated above). References to newer information are, however, documented in the Detailed Assessment Report.

Easy to find?

Governments have the responsibility to manage fisheries on behalf of their citizens – and inform them about the current status, opportunities and challenges facing the sector. In the digital age, websites have become one of the most popular mediums through which to provide such information. However, websites are passive communications channels, and stakeholders have to purposely visit the relevant site, and navigate through a range of topics to find the desired content. If this is difficult or time consuming, stakeholders may give up.

Within the scope of this assessment, different entry points are utilised to locate information published by national authorities, such as :

¹⁶ For example, a vessel registry lacks a clear time stamp indicating when its contents were last updated.

- » Through a central government portal, if available;
- » By directly accessing 'landing sites' (or home pages) of national authorities and governmental agencies; and
- » By utilising external search engines, such as Google.

This assessment does not differentiate between whether information was easily found through a central portal (if applicable), a standalone website of a national authority or an external search engine, such as Google. It is seen as sufficient if only one of those search entries locates the targeted information easily.

Other means of sharing information, such as social media networks or mobile applications, are primarily used to identify sources of information within government websites.

This criterion is assessed according to the following *three assessment options*: Yes, Partially, and No.

Assessment option: Qualitative judgement	
Easy to find	
Yes	<p>➡ The published and accessible information is found through <i>minimal effort</i>.</p> <p>This can relate to different scenarios, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information (e.g. a vessel registry) is directly displayed on a government website and this website can be easily found. ○ Information is not directly displayed on a government website, or featured in a navigation menu ('quick links'), but information was found within 3-5 navigational steps ('trial & error'). ○ Information is not directly displayed on a government website, or featured in a navigation menu, but was directly found using the website's own search engine (or filtering system). ○ Information on a government website was directly found using an external search engine (e.g. Google).

Assessment option: Qualitative judgement	
Easy to find	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information is only published as part of a government document (e.g. annual report), but this document as well as the relevant content within the document can be easily found (e.g. through reference in a Table of Content, or a standalone visual presentation).
Partially	<p>➡ The published and accessible information is only found through <i>moderate effort</i>.</p> <p>This can relate to different scenarios, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information is not directly displayed on a government website, or featured in a navigation menu ('quick links'), and information was only found after more than 5 navigational steps. ○ Locating information through the website's own search engine (or filtering system) or an external search engine (e.g. Google) was cumbersome and required specialized knowledge of keywords to yield the desired results. ○ Information is only published as part of a government document (e.g. annual report), but either the document or the relevant content within the document was difficult to locate.
No	<p>➡ The published and accessible information is only found through <i>substantial effort</i>.</p> <p>This can relate to different scenarios, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information (e.g. a vessel registry) is neither found through the government website's internal search engine, nor through an external search engine, but only by chance ('coincidence'). ○ Information is only published as part of a government document (e.g. annual report), but the document as well

Assessment option: Qualitative judgement

Easy to find

as the relevant content within the document was difficult to find.¹⁷

- Information can only be found in documents published in a language other than the country's official language(s).


3) (Re)usability for further analysis

The impact of transparency on improving sustainable fisheries management is not only determined by the act of publishing timely information that is easy to find. The ability of non-experts to draw reliable conclusion from it is equally important. Fisheries information, such as catch volumes or financial data, can be quite complex to interpret, and publishing it exclusively in a disaggregated (raw) format can be both beneficial and restricting in different respects. On the one hand, disaggregated data can limit comprehensibility for a layperson, while at the same time, access to more detailed data may allow those users with more experience in fisheries to compare, combine and follow the connections between different datasets. Moreover, such users may be able to highlight trends and identify social and economic challenges or inequities facing the sector.

While the TAKING STOCK assessment does not delve into concrete 'user scenarios' (i.e. detailing how the format in which a piece of information is presented affects its usability among different stakeholder groups), it does acknowledge the importance of presenting data that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone. Basic and practical aspects of (re)using information, such as the ability to download datasets¹⁸, or search and filter online information are therefore considered. For example, a government may publish a long list of fishing licenses or financial budget data online, which is freely accessible and

¹⁷ For example, information on tenure arrangements requires the review of an entire legal document, or relevant catch information is not well laid out in a document and instead buried in long and technical annexes.

¹⁸ Information can be downloaded at once from the website where it was found. Researchers should select 'No' if many manual steps to download the data are needed, if captchas need to be entered to access subsets of information or if only very few parts of a large dataset can be retrieved at a time (for instance through a search interface).



free of charge. However, when such data is published only as a scanned document (e.g. in a PDF), it restricts the ability of others to further process it (e.g. by aggregating, searching, or filtering).

More advanced features regarding technical interoperability, such as presenting data in a machine-readable format, are highlighted in the ‘good transparency practices’ section (see below).

The extent to which data can be freely used (e.g. via search and filter functions), re-used and redistributed by anyone is only considered for certain transparency elements, (i.e. those that involve financial, vessel and catch information or heavy statistical data).

This criterion is assessed according to the following *two assessment options*: Yes, or No.

The results of this assessment will not be used to determine a composite score for a transparency element (as shown in section 3.1).

4) Good transparency practices

Commonly, transparency is narrowly defined as the act of publishing complete, timely and easy-to-find information. However, it is equally important to publish information in a way that allows non-experts to understand and draw conclusions from it. Therefore, notable examples are also documented as part of this assessment.¹⁹

While there is no clear definition of what a ‘good transparency practice’ consists of within the FiTI Standard, the following efforts are considered in the TAKING STOCK assessment:

¹⁹ The good practices are further consolidated into a global repository by the FiTI International Secretariat, to guide governments seeking to increase the usability of their fisheries management information. This activity is expected to set an example for other countries to follow, gradually raising the transparency bar within sustainable fisheries management.

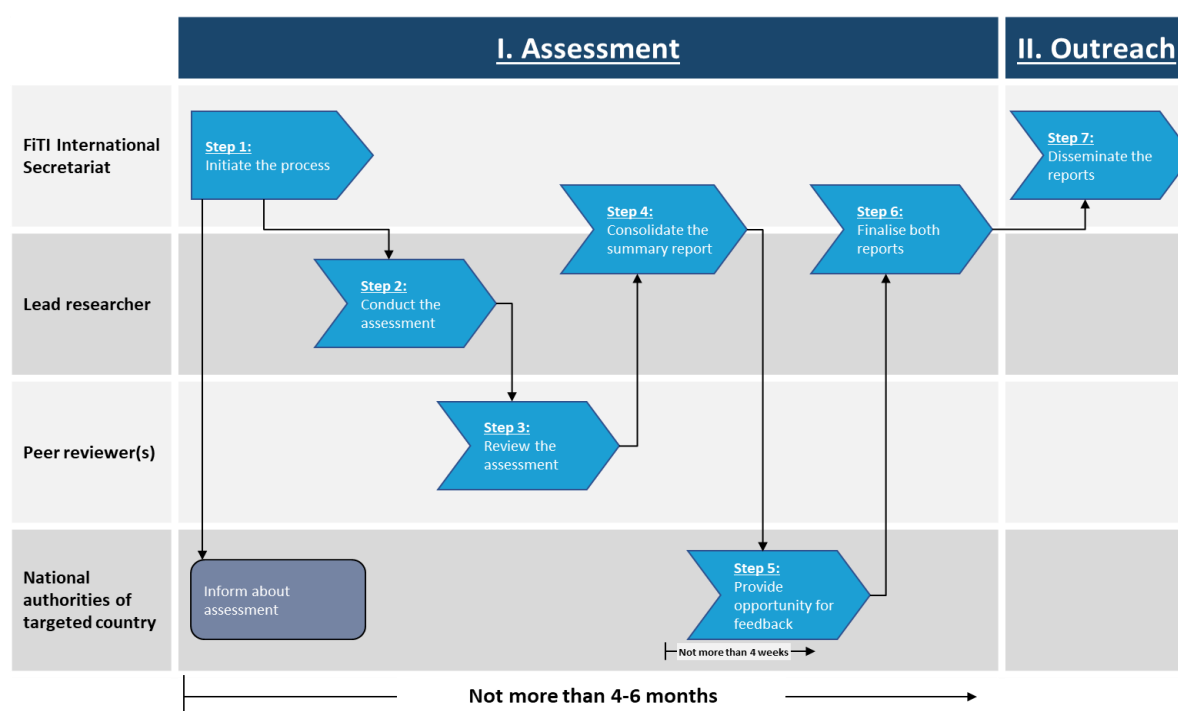
Good transparency practices:	Objective:	Examples:
<i>Comprehensibility</i>	Recognising efforts by national authorities to ensure that (complex) information can be easily understood by a non-expert audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Data is accompanied by short summaries or fact sheets, written in clear, plain language » Additional blogs/media briefings are published by the government to further explain the data » Information is simplified through the use of social media (e.g. data extracts) » Information is visualised through maps, infographics etc. » Information is compared against previous years to identify trends
<i>Granularity</i>	Recognising efforts by national authorities to provide disaggregated sets of primary data (without significant gaps or missing data elements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Payment data on a per-vessel basis » Recorded catch data on a per vessel basis » Detailed information on the recipients of subsidies » Reports or studies on wages in the post-harvest sector

Good transparency practices:	Objective:	Examples:
<i>Evaluation and verification</i>	Recognising efforts by national authorities to evaluate certain sectors, activities or agreements according to their contributions, impacts or effectiveness, as well as to verify the accuracy of published information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Complementary evaluations of the economic, social and food security contributions of the small-scale fisheries sector » Project evaluations of public sector projects financed by donors » Independent data audits, e.g., for payment information, which are published on government websites
<i>Stakeholder participation</i>	Recognising efforts by national authorities to include different stakeholder views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Outcomes of any public consultations regarding the negotiations of Foreign Fishing Access Agreements » Information is displayed according to various target groups (e.g. artisanal fisheries)
<i>Technical interoperability</i>	Recognising efforts by national authorities that allow, inter alia, two or more applications to accept data from each other without the need for extra operator intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Data is enriched by meta data » Data is provided in a machine-readable format » Data is released under an open and unrestricted license²⁰ » Data is presented in structured and standardized formats to support technical traceability and interoperability

²⁰ For example, such as those developed by Creative Commons. For more information, please refer to: <https://opendatacharter.net/principles/>.

2. Assessment process

The overall TAKING STOCK assessment is conducted under the supervision and responsibility of the FiTI International Secretariat, with significant input from researchers and reviewers, following a 7-step process:



Step 1: Initiate the process

The assessment is initiated by the FiTI International Secretariat appointing a lead researcher with substantial expertise of governance issues related to the country's marine fisheries sector. A member of the Secretariat may also conduct supplementary research.

Before the lead researcher begins the work, the FiTI International Secretariat officially informs the target country's government of the assessment (e.g. Ministry of Fisheries), emphasising how they have the opportunity to provide input during step 5 of the process.



Step 2: Conduct the assessment

The lead researcher conducts the assessment exclusively through desk research, only analysing publicly available online resources from the target country's national authorities. No input from national authorities is required.

At the conclusion of this step, the findings, background information and scoring decisions are documented in a draft Detailed Assessment Report, which is reviewed by the FiTI International Secretariat.

Step 3: Review the assessment

In order to ensure the objectivity of the assessment, the initial research results (as documented in the draft Detailed Assessment Report) will undergo a peer review process, often including local experts of the target country.²¹ This does not only improve the quality and reliability of the assessment reports, but also ensures that expertise and specific industry knowledge of individuals who do not form part of the FiTI International Secretariat are incorporated. Depending on the complexity of the target country, up to three peer reviewers will be engaged.

Step 4: Consolidate the summary report

Once feedback from the peer review process has been obtained, the FiTI International Secretariat, in collaboration with the lead researcher, will update the Detailed Assessment Report and consolidate the main findings into a standardised, graphically designed Summary Assessment Report.

Step 5: Provide opportunity for feedback

Both draft reports (i.e. Summary Assessment Report and Detailed Assessment Report) are submitted to the relevant national authorities, who are invited to provide feedback on the reports prior to publication. The feedback period should not exceed four weeks.

²¹ TAKING STOCK assessments do not undergo a public consultation phase.



Step 6: Finalise both reports

Feedback from national authorities, if received, is reviewed and, where necessary, incorporated into the reports. The reports are then finalised and uploaded onto the FiTI website (<https://www.fiti.global/taking-stock/countries>).

Step 7: Disseminate the reports

As a final step, the results of the assessment are actively disseminated to a wide audience, to stimulate interest among all relevant national and international stakeholders.

3. Scoring methodology

In the spirit of the FiTI Standard, the TAKING STOCK assessment seeks to identify areas where governments have strong levels of online transparency, and where improvement opportunity exists. Furthermore, by compiling a global repository of ‘good transparency practices’, the FiTI seeks to offer tangible examples to those countries that want to further improve the way information is compiled and presented online.

The purpose of the TAKING STOCK assessment is not to rank countries or reduce the complexity of a country’s fisheries sector to a single numerical score, which may be used in an index. The FiTI acknowledges that the concept of transparency in fisheries management is complex, and there are widely differing contexts countries’ respective fisheries sectors. The FiTI Standard therefore emphasises that the FiTI does not set out to highlight mistakes or weaknesses in decision-making or bad fishing practices. The FiTI does, however, offer an important means for raising levels of openness and public access to information which, in turn, can support countries in achieving or maintaining robust democratic governance and accountability in their fisheries sector.

Consequently, countries are not assigned an overall ‘transparency score’ at the end of the TAKING STOCK assessment.

Instead, for each transparency element, the qualitative disclosure criteria are individually aggregated, to provide information such as:

- » For how many of the transparency elements do national authorities publish information online in an accessible way?
- » How much of the published information is seen as up to date/outdated?
- » How much of the published information is seen as easy or difficult to find?

In addition to these summary scores for the 39 transparency elements (see section 3.1), information is also aggregated for a compound score for each transparency element, showing how the transparency elements are seen when assessing their ‘available online’, ‘up to date’ and ‘easy to find’ results together. This allows a better understanding regarding the overall level of public disclosure, i.e. how many transparency elements have strong, moderate or weak public access, and for how many transparency elements no public information is given at all (see section 3.1).

1) Summary score for transparency elements

As outlined earlier, each transparency element is broken down into several basic information requirements, based on the FiTI Standard. Each of those basic requirements is assessed according to whether information is available online, and if so, whether it is up to date and easy-to-find.

For each of the available assessment options, an internal numerical value is assigned²²:

Assessment option	Numerical value
<i>Yes</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Partially</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Not produced</i>	<i>[Blank]</i>
<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>[Blank]</i>

Based on these individual options, an overall assessment result is then determined for each of the qualitative criteria under each transparency element, by applying the following methodology:

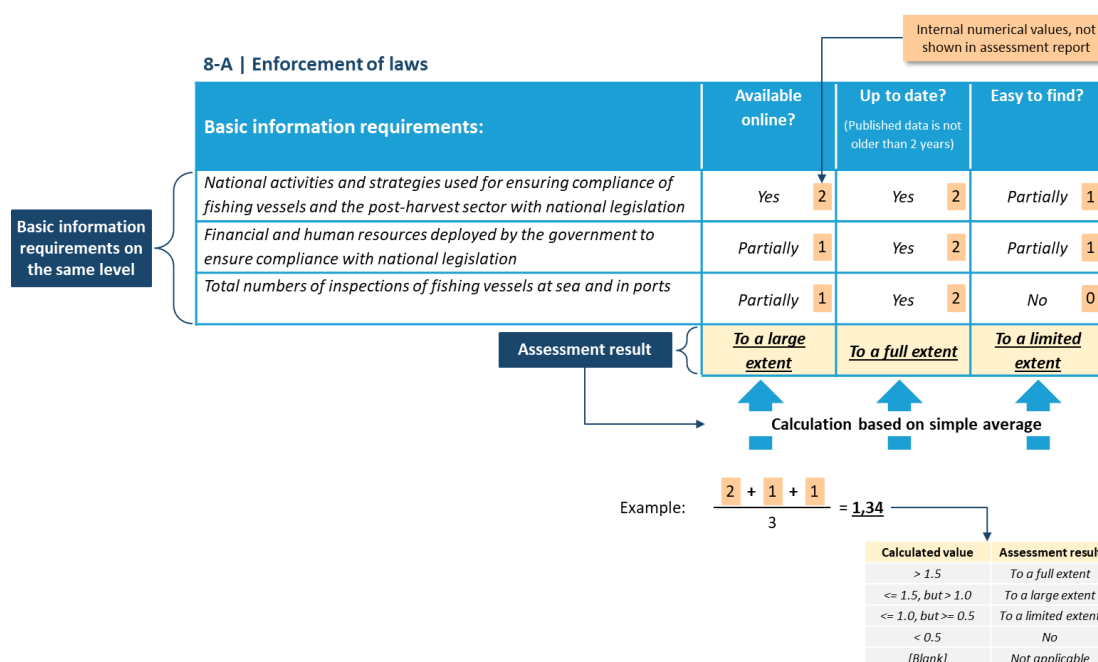
Calculated value	Assessment result
<i>> 1.5</i>	<i>To a full extent</i>
<i><= 1.5, but > 1.0</i>	<i>To a large extent</i>
<i><= 1.0, but >= 0.5</i>	<i>To a limited extent</i>
<i>< 0.5</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>[Blank]</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>

²² The internal numerical values, as well as any calculated value, will not be displayed as part of the Summary Assessment Report.

The scoring methodology to determine the calculated value differs whether the various basic requirements within a transparency element are seen as equal, or are dependent on another, and thus, are displayed in a hierarchical form.

Transparency elements with equal information requirements

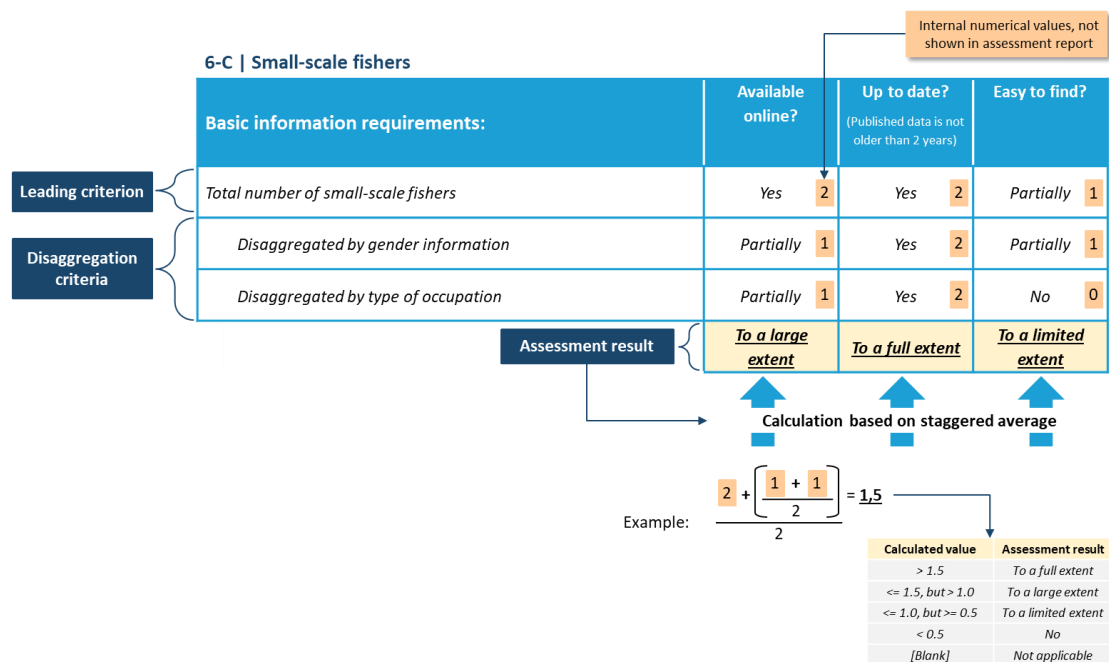
For several transparency elements, their basic requirements are seen as equally important or do not directly depend on each other. As such, these basic requirements are shown on the same hierarchical level. In such a situation, the calculation of summary scores (whether this entire transparency element, e.g. 'Enforcement of laws', is available online, is up to date, and is easy to find), is based on a **simple average calculation**, as shown below.



Transparency elements with dependent information requirements

For other transparency elements, the basic requirements have a leading criterion, which is then further disaggregated by several criteria. In such a situation, the disaggregated criteria are dependent on the leading criterion, and thus, special emphasis needs to be given to the latter.

In these cases, the calculation is not based on an overall simple average, treating all basic requirements with equal importance. Instead, the overall value is calculated as a simple average from the leading criteria and the simple average from all disaggregated criteria.



2) Score for different 'Public Access' categories

Finally, for those 39 transparency elements where information is published online, an overall 'Public Access' score is calculated. This is an important aspect, as too much weighting in favour of only one qualitative criterion (i.e. available online) might result in a misleading score, in case such information is indeed published online, but is clearly out of date and/or difficult to find.

Based on the summary scores that have been calculated for each of the 39 transparency elements, as shown above, an internal numerical value is assigned:

Assessment result of qualitative criteria	Numerical value
To a full extent	3

Assessment result of qualitative criteria	Numerical value
<i>To a large extent</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>To a limited extent</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>[Blank]</i>

Based on these individual options, an overall assessment result for each transparency requirement is then determined, by applying the following methodology:

Calculated value	Assessment result
<i>> 7</i>	<i>Strong public access</i>
<i><= 7, but > 4</i>	<i>Moderate public access</i>
<i><= 4, but > 1</i>	<i>Weak public access</i>
<i><= 1</i>	<i>No public access</i>
<i>[Blank]</i>	<i>Not produced</i>
<i>[Blank]</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>

The overall assessment score for each transparency requirement is determined by a simple addition of the summary results for ‘available online’, ‘up to date’ and ‘easy-to-find’, as shown below:

6-C | Small-scale fishers

Basic information requirements:	Available online?	Up to date? (Published data is not older than 2 years)	Easy to find?
Total number of small-scale fishers	Yes	Yes	Partially
Disaggregated by gender information	Partially	Yes	Partially
Disaggregated by type of occupation	Partially	Yes	No
Assessment result	<u>To a large extent</u> 2	<u>To a full extent</u> 3	<u>To a limited extent</u> 1

Internal numerical values, not shown in assessment report

Calculation based on simple addition

Example: 2 + 3 + 1 = 6 → Moderate public access

Calculated value	Assessment result
>7	Strong public access
<=7, but > 4	Moderate public access
<= 4, but >= 1	Weak public access
< 1	No public access
[Blank]	Not applicable



Annex I: Information provision on websites vs. social media

The increasing use of information and communications technology has an influence on the collection, processing and distribution of information by governments, both offline and online. Most obviously, it has led to a significant diversification in the methods governments employ to ensure information reaches its target audiences.

The TAKING STOCK assessment recognises websites as a crucial source of information for citizens. It does not, however, dismiss other means of disseminating and accessing information. Alongside government websites, numerous other channels are regularly used by public authorities to share developments, most notably social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. These platforms and channels can facilitate nearly real-time, two-way communications, enabling greater interaction between state and citizen.


Throughout the TAKING STOCK assessment process, these platforms and channels are consulted to not only identify whether information is actively shared by government authorities, but also to determine whether information is available to national authorities in the first place, and whether governments make what information they do hold available and easily locatable for the benefit of the general public.²³

Yet amongst all these different channels and platforms, websites remain one of the most powerful communication channels. The distinction between social media activities and websites, both being used for communicating content, is that websites are often used as the primary information storage. In fact, news items appearing on social media feeds are often linked to an underlying webpage that conveys the in-depth content.

Furthermore, websites are often structured in a similar way, offering global familiarity to users. This makes it easier to locate content.

The ease of navigating websites to locate a specific item is an important feature which is often lacking on social media platforms and in other community engagement activities hosted by government authorities. While these two means of sharing information may prove effective at a specific instance, retrieving the information later at the convenience of the user often proves difficult.

²³ The assessment also acknowledges that information can be disseminated by governments through other methods, such as via community engagement. This could include the dissemination of information via face-to-face outreach activities, focus groups, or public meetings.



For example, social media channels, with their chronological feed, do not provide a clear pathway for retrieving information, especially if a significant amount of time has passed since it was first shared. To retrieve something posted on an active social media page even a few weeks before could require scrolling through an extensive list of newer posts. This may act as a deterrence for transparency.

This is particularly tedious for users given social media's dependence on attention economy. The need for more and more content online, to keep audiences engaged, results in the proliferation of tremendous amounts of content on a daily basis. As a result, information quickly becomes buried on top of each other. These channels are therefore counterproductive if audiences wish to retrieve information at a later date. While certain social media sites provide search functions in which key words can be inserted, the amount of noise generated across these platforms through the social media presence of other organisations frequently masks content sought by users.

It should therefore be acknowledged that social media plays an important role in communicating government information to stakeholders and citizens. Despite this, the scope of these TAKING STOCK assessments focuses principally on government websites as the primary source of information.

Annex II: TAKING STOCK assessment report vs. FiTI Report


A TAKING STOCK assessment report should not be confused with a FiTI Report. Both are FiTI brand products which generally seek to provide insights into the fisheries management information a government publishes online in accordance with the requirements of the FiTI Standard. **However, their objectives, scope and methodologies differ significantly.**

In short, **FiTI Reports** are annual, in-depth reports undertaken by a country's Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) to demonstrate compliance with the standard. These reports provide therefore a detailed look into the availability, accessibility and completeness of information requested by the FiTI Standard. Furthermore, FiTI Reports:

- i. summarise key information on the status of a country's fisheries sector to facilitate public understanding,
- ii. make unbiased recommendations for improving government transparency, and
- iii. establish the extent to which information published online by the government can be seen as credible.

FiTI Reports are a key requirement of the FiTI Standard, meaning they can only be produced by countries that have voluntarily committed to and are implementing the FiTI. FiTI implementing countries must establish a FiTI National MSG, composed of equal numbers of government, business and civil society representatives. It is this group – supported by a Report Compiler – which is responsible for collectively producing its country's FiTI Reports through a multi-stakeholder endeavour, thereby ensuring the report's credibility. The FiTI International Secretariat only provides technical guidance to the Report Compiler and the National MSG.

On the other hand, a **TAKING STOCK assessment report** is a standalone document produced entirely by the FiTI International Secretariat via desk research. A TAKING STOCK assessment is not a requirement under the FiTI Standard – the programme was conceived entirely independently to the FiTI Standard and so assessments can be produced for any coastal country, regardless of whether the country is already implementing the FiTI. A TAKING STOCK assessment is similar to a FiTI Report in the sense that it assesses the level of information published by national authorities on government websites. However, a TAKING STOCK assessment does not attempt to analyse the accuracy or completeness of information published online by a government (or infer its credibility), only to document what is and is not available online.



Though still detailed, a TAKING STOCK assessment is generally less comprehensive than a FiTI Report as it only contains information found on government websites by the FiTI International Secretariat, while FiTI Reports often include previously unpublished information made available by the government of a FiTI implementing country in line with its commitments under the FiTI Standard.