

FiTI supports implementation of WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies with new Fisheries Information System (FIS)

Cabo Verde, Events, Ghana, Madagascar, Sao Tome and Principe

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By Sven Biermann • 19 September 2025

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**Navigating Digital Frontiers:
Tech for Fisheries Data and
the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**
18 September, 09:00 AM CEST, ROOM S3, WTO

WTO OMC | WTO PUBLIC FORUM 2025

				
Mr. Andrea Mastromatteo Director, Rules Division, WTO	Mr. Marcio Castro de Souza Senior Fishery Officer, FAO	Ms. Pinar Karakaya Economist, FAO	Mr. Sven Biermann Executive Director, FiTI	Mr. Théo Girard Regional Manager, Skylight

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19 September 2025. The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) participated in the **2025 Public Forum of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**. Over 4,200 participants registered for this year's event at the WTO headquarters in Geneva.

At a special General Council meeting earlier this week (15 September), WTO members also celebrated the **entry-into-force of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS)**, which commits members to prohibit subsidies that contribute to illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, impact overfished stocks, or are associated with fishing on the High Seas where the resources are not under the management of regional management organisations. The AFS is the first WTO agreement to focus on the environment and only the second multilateral agreement reached at the WTO since its inception.

Represented by its Executive Director, Mr Sven Biermann, the FiTI participated in the Public Forum's official working session on **"Tech for Fisheries Data and Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies"**. Chaired by the Director of the Rules Division at the WTO, Mr Andrea Mastromatteo, and alongside

colleagues from the **UN-FAO** and **Skylight**, the session focused on how digital tools are increasingly being used to help gather, analyse and disseminate fisheries-related information to strengthen responsible management and inclusive governance.

In his intervention, Mr Biermann emphasised the important and positive role transparency can play for sustainable fisheries. Beyond treating transparency solely as a tool to fight illegal activities (such as IUU fishing), public access to information plays a foundational role for advancing democratic governance, civic engagement and accountability in fisheries. The importance of transparency is also emphasized in Article 8 of the AFS.

Mr Biermann recalled that significant progress has been achieved in several countries over the last five years through the implementation of the **FiTI Standard**, the only internationally recognised framework of what governments should publish when it comes to fisheries management information. Fishing access agreements, fiscal information, data on a country's small-scale fisheries sector, stock assessments and the composition of the industrial fishing sector – to name just a few examples – are now proactively being published by governments in the public domain.

While those are notable examples which demonstrate the political will of governments to use transparency as a prerequisite for sustainable fisheries, Mr Biermann also emphasised that many countries still lack a suitable online infrastructure to ensure that published information has a lasting and positive impact on the fisheries sector. Amongst others, this includes challenges to consolidate fisheries data in a unified, web-based point of access, over-reliance on static reports – which are often very long, difficult to find, and restrictive on frequent data updates – or the lack of summarised and visualised information to facilitate public understanding and appreciation of the fisheries sector.

To support FiTI implementing countries in overcoming these challenges, Mr Biermann announced the launch of a new web-based Fisheries Information System (FIS). This platform will allow countries to share information about their fisheries with the public and display information in ways that will help the public use and understand the information. The hosting and maintenance of the FIS will be provided free of charge, while the data will only be displayed on government websites. It is anticipated that the FIS – which is modelled after the FiTI Standard – will be of particular interest for low- and lower-middle income countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which often lack financial, human and technical resources to provide information to the general public online.

Given its comprehensive nature for addressing key areas of fisheries management, Mr Biermann highlighted that the FIS can also support countries in their reporting obligations under the new **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**. The subsidy section of the FIS has been modelled after the mandatory provisions of AFS's Article 8.1 (a). He recalled that the obligation to notify fisheries subsidies in the WTO context was not introduced with the AFS. Instead, subsidies information already must be notified under the **WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM)**. The novelty with the AFS is the obligation to provide, as part of these regular subsidy notifications under the ASCM, fisheries-related information (i.e. 'type or kind of fishing or fishing-related activity'). With a very easy and intuitive way to upload or enter data into the FIS, the system will help countries to structure their subsidy information and operationalise transparency under the AFS. For each subsidy programme, this includes, inter alia, the name of the programme, its governing legislation, the responsible authorities, timeframe, form and type of the subsidy programme, as well as fisheries-related information, such as the targeted sector, beneficiaries and fleets of the subsidy programme or the targeted species.

However, beyond simply fulfilling transparency-related requirements, Mr Biermann emphasized that the FIS will also support countries in the implementation of the overall AFS. As the FIS does not

only focus on fisheries subsidies, several other aspects, including those deemed to be made public 'to the extent possible' under AFS's Article 8.1 (b) are already part of the FIS. This includes information on stock assessments (and which of those have been assessed as overfished), conservation and management measures in place for the relevant fish stocks, and catch data by species in the fishery for which the subsidy is provided. Such a comprehensive stance on fisheries transparency will aid national authorities in understanding whether the required mechanisms and data sources are in place to fulfil the different requirements of the AFS and, if not, identify implementation gaps.

In closing, Mr Biermann shared the exciting news that the governments of **Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Madagascar** and **Ghana** have already expressed their interest in using the FIS. It is anticipated that these countries will display their fisheries data online within the next 6-9 months.



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