

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coalition for Fisheries
Transparency



A Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency

A framework for collaboration, justice, and sustainability

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Acknowledgement

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Executive Summary

Fish are among the planet's most important natural resources, yet they face increasing pressure from human activities, threatening not only the health of marine ecosystems, but the livelihoods and food security of those who depend on global fisheries. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that, as of 2021, approximately 37.7% of global fish populations are fished at biologically unsustainable levels.

Several factors contribute to overfishing, including inadequate laws, weak enforcement, and lack of political will. However, one of the most significant causes is the lack of transparency in fisheries. Transparency, in this report, means the open and accessible sharing of information about vessels, fishing activity, and fisheries governance and management decisions. This opacity allows illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing to thrive, prevents open and informed dialogue among fisheries stakeholders – such as governments, fishing communities, industry, civil society, consumers – and complicates efforts to tackle other underlying issues within the sector.

By making information readily available and publicly accessible, transparency sets the stage for numerous benefits. It enhances food security by improving the sustainability of fisheries, secures stable livelihoods for fishers by preventing overexploitation, combats human rights and labor abuses at sea, fosters inclusive participation in decision-making, reduces corruption, strengthens law enforcement, and promotes a more equitable distribution of benefits within society. Transparency achieves these benefits by illuminating the actions of government bodies involved in fisheries management, providing valuable insights into their decisions and the data they rely on. It thereby equips other relevant fisheries actors with the knowledge they need to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes.

In response to the urgent need for enhanced transparency within the fisheries sector, the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency was established in 2022. The Coalition is a voice of global civil society organizations (CSOs) that strive to advance transparency and accountability in fisheries governance and management. The cornerstone of the Coalition's efforts is the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency, which outlines ten policy principles that address the lack of transparency in three critical areas: vessel information, fishing activity, and governance and management. The Charter acts as a guiding framework for governments to implement fisheries transparency policy reforms into law and practice. The Charter embraces a comprehensive understanding of transparency, moving beyond just data collection and provision. It emphasizes the use of data to enable more informed participation by civil society and other stakeholders. This approach extends to driving action throughout the fisheries sector and influencing decision-making processes at the global level.

Commissioned by the Coalition, this report elaborates on the ten Principles of the Global Charter, outlining the context of each, providing practical recommendations for action by governments and CSOs, as well as showcasing real-world examples and their applications. While ultimately intended for adoption and implementation by governments, the Global Charter can help guide and empower CSOs to catalyze change by making their messaging and engagement with governments on fisheries transparency and accountability more collaborative, uniform, and powerful.

Though it is applicable to the entire sector, the Charter is readily implementable in large-scale, industrial fisheries. Small-scale fisheries are no less important, however some Principles will need to be adapted before they can be effectively applied to small-scale fisheries.

Transparency achieves fisheries benefits by illuminating the actions of government bodies involved in management, providing valuable insights into their decisions and the data they rely on.

Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency

Vessel information	1		Require all fishing vessels, refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels (hereafter 'fishing vessels') to obtain unique identification numbers and also provide them to the FAO Global Record, RFMOs and other relevant bodies.
	2		Publish comprehensive and up-to-date lists of fishing vessel licenses (including key vessel information), authorizations, subsidies, official access agreements and sanctions (for fisheries and labor offenses) and also supply this information to the FAO Global Record.
	3		Make public the information on beneficial ownership of vessels.
	4		Stop the use of flags of convenience by fishing vessels by enforcing the UNCLOS Article 91 requirement for a genuine link between vessels and their flag state, and prevent vessels from engaging in illegal fishing and associated crimes regardless of their flag and punish the vessel(s) that do.
Fishing activity	5		Require vessel position to be public (by sharing VMS, or sharing other non-public systems or mandating AIS).
	6		Ban transferring fish between boats at sea – unless pre-authorized, carefully monitored and publicly logged.
	7		Mandate the adoption of robust control systems that ensure seafood is legal and traceable from boat to plate, conforming to relevant catch management measures whose key data elements are made publicly available.
Governance and management	8		Ratify and comply with international instruments that set clear standards for fishing vessels and the trade in fisheries products, including FAO PSMA, ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and ILO C188, and IMO Cape Town Agreement.
	9		Publish all collected fisheries data and scientific assessments in order to facilitate access to information for small-scale fishers, fish workers, indigenous communities, industry associations, and civil society in developing fisheries rules, regulations, subsidies and fisheries budgets, and decisions on access to fisheries resources. Make these processes, policies, and decisions easily accessible to the public and enforcement agencies.
	10		Collect and verify robust data on crew identification and demographics (including nationalities, age, race, and gender), contractual terms, recruitment agencies, location and means of joining vessels, and conditions on vessels as well as publish this information in aggregate form.

By embracing and enacting these Principles, governments can demonstrate their commitment to promoting sustainable fishing practices, protecting marine resources, and advancing participation and equity in the fishing sector. Moreover, governments stand to benefit by increasing the competitiveness of their fisheries products in the global market and safeguarding their crew, consumers, and public from illicit behavior by external actors in the seafood supply chain. As governments move forward with implementing the principles, CSOs emerge as indispensable actors, holding governments accountable for their commitments to transparency, and advocating for the swift and effective implementation of the Charter Principles.

By leveraging the insights and recommendations outlined in this report, CSOs can strategically prioritize their efforts, amplify advocacy initiatives, and collaborate with stakeholders to implement tangible reforms. The Coalition encourages CSOs to capitalize on our collective influence, leveraging each other's work to tackle the intricate challenges in the fishing sector and drive meaningful progress towards a more collaborative, just, and sustainable future.

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