TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL
New Zealand

Access to Environmental Information in Fiji and Solomon Islands

Strengthening Transparency, Participation and Environmental Governance

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Executive Summary

Healthy oceans, forests and natural resources depend not only on good environmental laws, but also on people being able to find, understand and use environmental information. Across the Pacific, governments increasingly recognise the importance of transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making. However, there has been relatively little research examining how accessible environmental information is in practice.

Pacific countries face unique governance challenges, including dispersed populations, limited administrative capacity, overlapping customary and statutory governance systems, and increasing pressure on natural resources from climate change, fisheries, forestry and mining. Access to reliable environmental information is therefore increasingly important for governments, communities and civil society alike.

In 2026, Transparency International New Zealand launched a pilot research project which aimed to assess how Fiji and Solomon Islands provide access to environmental information and how closely their systems align with Rio Principle 10 and the Bali Guidelines (Guidelines 1–7).

The pilot, whilst focussing on fisheries and extractives, tested a rapid research methodology that can be expanded to other Pacific countries and be adapted for environmental information generally (including forestry, fisheries, environmental impact assessments, wildlife crime, and climate finance). This methodology could also be adapted to other areas that civil society may be interested in researching.

The research pilot had four objectives:

- understand how environmental information is required by law and is currently made available
- identify strengths and gaps
- test a practical assessment methodology
- develop recommendations that can support stronger environmental governance.

Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, often shortened to Rio Declaration, was agreed at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), informally known as the Earth Summit, and signed by 175 countries. The Rio Declaration consists of 27 principles intended to guide countries in sustainable development.

Article 10 of the Rio Declaration sets out the right of every person to have timely and effective access to information on environmental matters. It acknowledges the key role of information, participation and justice in the transition towards environmentally sound and sustainable development.

Over the years, Principle 10 has provided a globally recognised framework for the development of national standards and laws for access to information, public participation in decision-making, and justice, in environmental matters.

There are three components of Rio Principle 10.

- **Access to Information** is essential to enable members of the public to participate meaningfully in public affairs and to make informed decisions about their lives. Transparency is critical because governments cannot be held accountable if decisions are made in secrecy. Transparency also exposes whether authorities are complying with environmental laws. Early access to information allows civil society to identify risks (e.g. pollution, biodiversity loss) before irreversible damage occurs.
- **Public participation** enables people and communities to have a meaningful say in environmental decisions that affect them. It strengthens accountability, improves decision-making and helps ensure that diverse voices are heard.
- **Access to justice** promotes accountability and the rule of law. It recognises that the achievement of sustainable development depends on fair and independent ways for people to challenge decisions. Laws are meaningless if there is no mechanism to enforce them. Courts and tribunals should act as independent checks on executive and administrative power, and the possibility of legal challenge encourages compliance by both public authorities and private actors.

To help governments put Principle 10 into practice, the Bali Guidelines were adopted in 2010. They provide practical guidance on improving access to environmental information, public participation and access to justice. Together, the 26 guidelines provide a roadmap for stronger environmental governance, with seven key guidelines forming the foundation of this research.

The Bali Guidelines

The Bali Guidelines translate Principle 10 into practical guidance for governments. They promote clear environmental laws, proactive disclosure of information, meaningful public participation, accountability, effective institutional arrangements, accessible dispute resolution and measures to prevent corruption.

When communities can access reliable environmental information, they are better able to understand decisions that affect their land, oceans and livelihoods. They can participate more effectively, contribute local knowledge, ask informed questions and hold decision-makers accountable. Access to information also helps build trust between governments, communities and civil society, leading to better environmental outcomes.

Approach

Fiji and Solomon Islands were selected as pilot countries because they represent two different environmental governance contexts and sectors of regional significance. Together they provide an opportunity to test whether a common assessment approach can be applied across different environmental sectors and governance systems across the Pacific.

This research also identified opportunities to make information more accessible for people with disabilities and other groups who may experience barriers to participation.

Methodology

This research has demonstrated that a rapid research methodology suitable for Pacific governance contexts can be practically applied. This methodology involves a three-stage enquiry:

- **Desktop Study —** First, a desktop study which identifies and maps the legislation and systems used by a national government to make environmental information available to the public (or not) for a particular sector or subject area, against the Bali Guidelines in particular, but also against other specific guidelines such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- **Targeted Interviews —** Second, a testing of that desktop study through a series of targeted interviews with a range of people including regulators, businesses, environmental advocates, community representatives, and representatives of people with disabilities. This leads to actionable recommendations for governments, business, and civil society.
- **RTI/ATI requests —** Third, the desktop review and stakeholder interviews are complemented by targeted Right to Information (RTI) or Access to Information (ATI) requests submitted to relevant government agencies. These requests tested how environmental information is accessed in practice by tracking response times, the completeness of information provided, and any barriers encountered. This provides practical insights into how access to information systems operate beyond what is described in legislation or policy.

The methodology developed through this pilot provides a practical approach that can be adapted for other Pacific countries and environmental sectors. It offers governments, civil society and development partners a consistent way to assess access to environmental information and identify opportunities to strengthen transparency, accountability and environmental governance.

I

PART I · COUNTRY REPORT

Access to Environmental Information in Fisheries and Environmental Impact Assessment Systems in Fiji

Researcher: Alisi Rabukawaqa

Executive Summary

This research examines the availability, accessibility, and practical usability of environmental information relating to fisheries governance and environmental impact assessment (EIA) systems in Fiji. It draws on three complementary sources of evidence: a desktop review of Fiji's legal and institutional framework; six key informant interviews with journalism, customary governance, regional fisheries, community/civil society, disability inclusion, and environmental law perspectives; and direct testing of Fiji's access-to-information (RTI) mechanisms, including a formal exchange with the Office of the Auditor-General and three live information requests submitted to government agencies.

Fiji has a comparatively strong legal and institutional framework for fisheries governance and environmental impact assessment, including the Environment Management Act 2005, EIA Process Regulations 2007, Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012, Fisheries Act [Cap. 158], Information Act 2018, and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018. The desktop review found that substantial fisheries and environmental information appears to exist institutionally, but that public-facing access is fragmented, uneven, and dependent on informal relationships rather than transparent systems.

The interviews and access-to-information testing largely confirm and deepen these desktop findings. Across all six interviews, informants independently described the same underlying pattern: information exists somewhere within government systems, but obtaining it in practice depends on personal networks, discretion, and informal relationships rather than on functioning legal or administrative pathways.

Image: Sangeeta Mangubhai

The Information Act 2018 was consistently described as legally present but not operationalised: several interviewees were aware of the Act but had never used it, and one described it bluntly as not working “at all.” Distinct and compounding barriers were also identified for customary fisheries governance, gender, disability, rural and maritime geography, and language.

Direct testing of access-to-information channels reinforces this picture empirically. Of three formal information requests submitted during the pilot period, only one (addressed to the Auditor-General's Office) received a full and rapid response (within six hours), though even that report remains accessible only in hard copy at the Auditor-General's office. The other two requests remained unresolved at the time of writing: both were sent to the enquiry email addresses each Ministry publishes on its own website, rather than to any online portal. The request to the Ministry of Fisheries went unacknowledged, while the request to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change bounced back outright. Separately, the Auditor-General's Office confirmed it has not conducted a performance audit specific to the fisheries sector since 2011, though it has conducted related environmental performance audits in 2020, 2021, and 2025 that were not identified during the desktop review.

The paper concludes that Fiji's central governance challenge in fisheries management and environmental impact assessment is not the absence of information, but the gap between what formally exists and what is practically, reliably, and equitably accessible. It sets out recommendations across quick wins, system improvements, and longer-term structural reforms, informed by the triangulated evidence of the desktop review, stakeholder interviews, and direct access-to-information testing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose

This paper reports on a Fisheries Governance Pilot study of information governance relating to fisheries management and environmental impact assessment (EIA) systems in Fiji, prepared to support a joint initiative on environmental governance and transparency led by Transparency International New Zealand with administrative support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The study was conducted in three stages. First, a desktop review assessed Fiji's legal and institutional framework and the public discoverability of fisheries and environmental information. Second, six key informant interviews tested and extended the desktop review's findings against the lived experience of journalists, customary resource owners, regional fisheries actors, civil society and community representatives, disability inclusion advocates, and an environmental law/governance specialist. Third, the study directly tested Fiji's access-to-information systems by submitting formal information requests and by seeking an interview with the Office of the Auditor-General, whose response is treated in this paper as primary evidence of how access-to-information processes function in practice.

1.2 Analytical framework

The study applies Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Bali Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, together with selected natural resource and fiscal transparency standards, as its analytical framework.

These frameworks emphasise public access to environmental information, proactive disclosure, regular collection and updating of information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and the accessibility and usability of information systems, not merely their formal existence.

1.3 Guiding questions

The study addresses four guiding questions:

1. What environmental and fisheries information should exist within Fiji's legal and administrative systems?
2. What information is currently publicly accessible, and how easily?
3. What information is fragmented, difficult to access, or missing from public systems?
4. What does direct testing of access-to-information processes reveal about how these systems function in practice?

1.4 Structure of this paper

Section 2 summarises Fiji's country and sector context and legal framework (drawn from the desktop review). Section 3 sets out the methodology for the interviews and access-to-information testing. Section 4 presents the country findings in full: the desktop review's transparency assessment (4.1), the synthesised stakeholder interview findings (4.2), the direct access-to-information testing, including the Auditor-General case study and the RTI request metrics (4.3), a triangulated summary across all three evidence streams (4.4), a summary of governance gaps (4.5), identified corruption risk points (4.6), and accessibility and disability findings (4.7). Section 5 sets out recommendations, beginning with seven key recommendations before a fuller time-phased list. Section 6 concludes, and Section 7 records limitations.

2. Country and Sector Context

2.1 Fiji's fisheries governance and EIA framework

Fiji has a comparatively developed legal and institutional framework for fisheries governance and environmental impact assessment. Key instruments include the Environment Management Act 2005, the Environment Management (EIA Process) Regulations 2007, the Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012 and its 2014 Regulations, the Fisheries Act [Cap. 158] (and the more recent Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2025, whose commencement status requires further verification), the Information Act 2018, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, and the Climate Change Act 2021.

2.2 Fisheries governance structure

Fisheries governance in Fiji operates through a dual structure. Offshore fisheries are governed through the Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012, with licensing, vessel monitoring, and compliance obligations that connect Fiji to regional systems such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Pacific Community (SPC). Inshore fisheries are governed primarily through the Fisheries Act [Cap. 158] and intersect with customary qoliqoli (fishing ground) governance structures, in which chiefs, clans, and traditional authorities hold recognised roles in decisions over access and use.

2.3 Environmental impact assessment governance

The Environment Management Act 2005 and its 2007 EIA Regulations establish screening, public notification, assessment, approval, and monitoring obligations for developments likely to have significant environmental impact. Public notices are legally required in English, iTaukei (Fijian), and Hindi.

2.4 Why transparency matters

Meaningful transparency in these sectors matters because fisheries and environmental decisions directly affect livelihoods, food security, customary resource rights, and ecosystem health, particularly for rural, maritime, and outer island communities. Where information exists only within government systems and is not genuinely accessible, communities, journalists, researchers, and civil society organisations are constrained in their ability to monitor decisions, participate meaningfully in consultation processes, and hold institutions accountable.

3. Methodology

This study combines three methods, each contributing a different vantage point on the same underlying question: does environmental and fisheries information that formally exists in Fiji's legal and administrative systems function, in practice, as accessible public information?

Image: Sangeeta Mangubhai

3.1 Desktop review

A rapid desk-based review of legislation, government reports, ministry websites, regional databases, and selected scholarly material was conducted to map what environmental and fisheries information should exist, and what appeared to be publicly discoverable at the time of review. The desktop review did not test information request procedures directly or access internal ministry systems; its findings are summarised in Section 4 and were treated as a set of hypotheses to be tested through interviews and direct access testing.

3.2 Key informant interviews

Six semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with individuals selected to represent distinct vantage points on fisheries and environmental information access in Fiji:

1. Journalism / media
2. Indigenous governance / customary fisheries
3. Regional / offshore fisheries
4. Community / civil society
5. Disability inclusion
6. Environmental law / governance

All interviewees have been anonymised. Each interview addressed six common questions covering current public availability of fisheries information, practical ease or difficulty of access, information that is not publicly available but sought, the process for requesting non-public information, EIA accessibility, and what information should be public but currently is not. Responses have been synthesised thematically, retaining illustrative direct quotations.

3.3 Direct testing of access-to-information systems

To move beyond perception and desk-based inference, the study directly tested Fiji's access-to-information systems during May–June 2026 by:

- Requesting an interview with the Office of the Auditor-General, and, following its decline, submitting three specific follow-up questions in writing;
- Submitting three formal information requests to relevant agencies (Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and the Office of the Auditor-General via the Ministry of Justice) using the legal bases available under sector legislation and the Information Act 2018; and
- Recording, for each request, whether it was acknowledged, the statutory deadline (if any), the actual response time, the completeness of disclosure, the format provided, public accessibility, fees charged, accessibility issues observed, the tone/cooperation of the agency, and an indicative corruption-risk rating.

This testing is reported in full in Section 4.3 and is treated as direct empirical evidence of how access-to-information processes function in practice, complementing the desktop review's institutional mapping and the interviews' accounts of lived experience.

4. Country Findings

This section presents the substantive country findings assembled from the desktop review, the six stakeholder interviews, and direct testing of access-to-information systems. It closes with three cross-cutting findings specifically requested for this deliverable: a summary of governance gaps, identified corruption risk points, and accessibility and disability findings.

4.1 Desktop Review: What the Legal and Institutional Framework Shows

4.1.1 What information appears to exist

Fiji's fisheries governance systems generate substantial administrative and monitoring information. For offshore fisheries this likely includes licence applications, authorisations, vessel records, catch and effort reporting, observer information, compliance records, and reporting to regional bodies, supported by systems such as Fiji's Catch Accountancy System (CAS) and regional Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS). For inshore fisheries, information appears less centralised, with no consolidated public platform identified. The EIA framework generates project applications, screening decisions, EIA reports, environmental management plans, approval decisions, and monitoring documentation, though no comprehensive, searchable, consolidated online EIA register was identified.

4.1.2 What is publicly available

Legislation is generally accessible through the Laws of Fiji website, PacLII (Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute), parliamentary repositories, and ministry websites, and ministry annual reports provide summary-level information on fisheries activities. However, no consolidated public registers were identified for fisheries licences, licence conditions, enforcement outcomes, compliance actions, EIA approvals, environmental compliance records, or regulatory decision reasons. Decision-level information (who was licensed, on what conditions, and with what compliance outcome) remains the central gap.

4.1.3 How information is accessed

Access proceeds through four main channels:

- proactive disclosure (legislation, annual reports, and some environmental information published online);
- request-based access under the Information Act 2018 (though no clearly visible public-facing system explaining request procedures, timelines, or responsible officers was identified);
- public consultation and notification (the clearest legal structure for disclosure, operating mainly through physical access during EIA consultation periods); and
- digital monitoring systems (sophisticated internally, but without a centralised public access point).

4.1.4 What is missing or unclear

The review identified a persistent gap between internal administrative capacity and public-facing transparency, particularly regarding licensing decisions, compliance outcomes, and enforcement actions. Environmental information more broadly remains fragmented across ministries, regional databases, project portals, and social media channels. Offshore fisheries governance appeared markedly more structured and digitised than inshore governance, reflecting international reporting obligations.

Accessibility and inclusion barriers (geography, language, connectivity, cost, and disability access) were identified as a governance issue rather than a purely technical one, though the desktop review could not directly assess user experience. These gaps framed the questions taken into the stakeholder interviews and access-to-information testing reported below.

4.2 Stakeholder Interview Findings

4.2.1 Overview

The six interviews were conducted with informants occupying structurally different positions in relation to fisheries and environmental information: a journalist, a customary governance representative, a regional/offshore fisheries specialist, a community/civil society representative, a disability inclusion advocate, and an environmental law/governance specialist.

Despite their different vantage points, the interviews converge strongly on a small number of themes, summarised thematically below, with representative quotations drawn from the consolidated interview extraction.

4.2.2 Theme 1: Information exists, but is not structured for public use

Across nearly every interview, informants distinguished between information existing somewhere in government or regional systems and information being usable by the public.

The journalism informant explained that fisheries information in Fiji “is not so easily accessible, or at least not structured,” compared with sectors like health or education. The regional/offshore fisheries informant made a similar point about the international side of the system: catch, vessel, and compliance data is reported to the Pacific Community and the WCPFC, but “you have to know where to go to get that information”; the problem, in this informant's words, is less an information gap than a navigation gap. The environmental law informant likewise noted that legislation, EIA procedures, and policy documents are “theoretically publicly available,” but that this formal availability does not extend reliably to operational or implementation-level information.

4.2.3 Theme 2: Access depends on relationships and discretion, not systems

Every interview, independently, described access as functioning through informal relationships rather than transparent public systems. The journalism informant stated plainly that “the only way is to go straight to the officials,” while the customary governance informant explained that civil society organisations often wait “weeks, sometimes a month” for information and must “know someone in there” to obtain it. The community/civil society informant described a “culture of avoidance and delay” and explained that organisations rely on provincial and district officers and personal networks rather than formal channels. The environmental law informant summarised the pattern most directly: “Sometimes it's also if you know the person,” adding that when issues become politically sensitive, agencies tend to become more restrictive and procedural rather than more forthcoming.

4.2.4 Theme 3: The Information Act 2018 is known but not operationalised

A striking and consistent finding across informants with very different professional backgrounds is that the Information Act 2018 is widely known to exist but rarely used and not experienced as functionally effective. The journalism informant argued that “the current act doesn't operationalize the actual giving of the thing.” The regional/offshore fisheries informant had “heard about it” but had “never seen any arrangement around the Information Act” in practice. The disability inclusion informant was aware of the Act but explained their organisation had “not actually gone through” it.

Most pointedly, the community/civil society informant stated that “the Information Act doesn't work at all,” and described communities and organisations relying on NGOs to interpret technical material and to navigate systems in its place. The environmental law informant, despite professional familiarity with the Act, had never personally relied on it, and observed that agencies themselves may lack clarity about what they are legally required to disclose.

4.2.5 Theme 4: Distinct and compounding barriers for specific groups

Beyond the shared pattern above, each interview surfaced barriers specific to its stakeholder group, which the desktop review could not have identified on its own:

- **Customary governance:** Access to some fisheries information is intentionally restricted within customary systems: “some information is privileged to the people who own that qoliqoli,” creating a layered access environment in which outsiders require consent from chiefs or traditional authorities in addition to formal government approval. The informant was clear that this should not be read as a transparency failure across the board: “not all information needs to be available to the public,” but licensing, catch, and monitoring data should be more accessible.
- **Gender:** The community/civil society informant described markedly unequal access along gender lines within fisheries licensing processes: “the women are often given the runaround,” while men reported greater ease and familiarity with information channels.
- **Disability:** The disability inclusion informant identified accessibility as a distinct and often overlooked dimension of transparency, separate from formal public availability. Online information is “often outdated” and frequently unusable for screen-reader users when presented as images. Persons with disabilities are often excluded from fisheries and environmental consultations altogether, being consulted “only on issues people assume affect disability.”
- **Commercial sensitivity vs. genuine sensitivity:** The regional/offshore fisheries informant distinguished between information industry actors legitimately regard as commercially sensitive (real-time vessel location) and information with “nothing sensitive” about it that nonetheless remains hard to obtain (licensing lists, vessel names, ownership), noting that other Pacific countries publish such data online.
- **Language and technical complexity:** The environmental law informant noted that EIA reports remain in English without translation, and that even where public consultation occurs, “the reports are in English... they are not translated,” and many members of the public lack the technical background to meaningfully engage with them.

4.2.6 Theme 5: EIA access is tied to a narrow consultation window

Multiple informants converged on a specific structural problem with EIA access: reports are only readily available during the formal consultation period. The environmental law informant explained that “those reports are only made available during the review process,” after which access becomes significantly harder. The journalism informant went further, stating “I've never been able to get an EIA through the front door,” and that every EIA they had obtained came through an anonymous informal channel within a ministry. The community/civil society informant emphasised that EIAs and fisheries impact assessments need to be simplified and translated for communities to use meaningfully, highlighting the role of provincial conservation officers as often “the only hope” for communities seeking to understand technical reports.

4.2.7 Theme 6: What stakeholders want to see made public

Despite their different backgrounds, interviewees converged on similar priorities for reform. Recurring proposals included:

- a public dashboard or mapping system showing fisheries licence holders, licence areas, species, methods, and expiry dates (the community/civil society informant explicitly compared this to publicly available mining tenement maps);
- proactive publication of EIA applications, decisions, and conditions rather than only final approvals (the environmental law informant: “applications should be made available online”);
- clearer public guidance on where different types of fisheries information are held (the regional/offshore fisheries informant: “maybe there should be a template: go here, go here, go here”); and
- accessible, multi-format communication (audio, screen-reader compatible, and simplified formats) so that information is usable by persons with disabilities, not just formally published (the disability inclusion informant: “information communication should be two ways”).

Image: Sangeeta Mangubhai

4.2.8 Summary

The interview evidence substantially corroborates the desktop review's central hypothesis (that Fiji's environmental and fisheries governance systems generate considerably more information internally than is genuinely accessible to the public), while adding two findings the desktop review could not have reached alone:

first, that the Information Act 2018 is functionally dormant even among informed professional users, rather than merely under-publicised; and second, that access barriers are not uniform but compound differently across customary rights holders, women, persons with disabilities, and non-English speakers.

4.3 Testing Access to Information in Practice

Where Sections 4.1 and 4.2 rely on institutional mapping and reported experience, this section presents direct, first-hand evidence generated by the study itself: a documented exchange with the Office of the Auditor-General, and the results of three formal information requests submitted to Fijian government agencies.

4.3.1 Case study: the Office of the Auditor-General

The study sought an interview with the Office of the Auditor-General (AG) to understand its role in overseeing fisheries and environmental accountability. The Office declined the interview, advising in writing that it had not conducted any performance audit of the fisheries sector in the last 15 years. Its last relevant audit was a 2011 performance audit titled Managing Sustainable Fisheries, reported to Parliament in June 2012, which the Office itself noted "may not be relevant now due to passage of time." The Office clarified that its ongoing engagement with the fisheries sector is limited to an annual financial audit of the Ministry of Fisheries' agency financial statements, providing an independent opinion on the fairness of those statements only, and that it was accordingly "not in a position to provide any detailed perspective of the Fisheries sector."

Three follow-up questions were then put to the Office in writing, and are treated here as a direct test of proactive and responsive disclosure:

1. **Requesting a copy of the 2011 "Managing Sustainable Fisheries" report.** The Office confirmed it does not have a copy on its website but does hold a hard copy. This is a significant accessibility finding in its own right: the only performance audit ever conducted on Fiji's fisheries sector (a document of clear public interest) exists solely as a physical record, fifteen years after its release, and cannot be obtained without an in-person visit to the Office.
2. **Whether other relevant audits had been conducted since 2011.** While no further fisheries-specific performance audit has occurred, the Office identified three related environmental performance audits not identified during the desktop review: a Performance Audit on the Management of Environmental Impact Assessment (2020), a Performance Audit on Licensing and Monitoring of River Gravel and Sand Extraction (2021), and a Performance Audit on Implementation of Climate Change Adaptation Actions in Fiji (2025), all of which the Office confirmed are available on its website. This is a useful correction to the desktop review, which had not surfaced these reports, and each is a plausible primary source for future stages of this research.
3. **Referral to a better-placed agency.** The Office recommended the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change as better positioned to address environmental oversight and accountability questions more broadly.

Taken as a whole, the AG exchange illustrates a pattern distinct from, and in one respect more encouraging than, the pattern described in the interviews: written correspondence with the Office was handled promptly, substantively, and courteously, even though the underlying information (the 2011 report) remains practically inaccessible in digital form. This distinction between institutional responsiveness and practical accessibility recurs in the formal request testing below.

4.3.2 Formal information request testing

To test these dynamics systematically rather than anecdotally, the study submitted three formal information requests during May–June 2026, each documenting the legal basis cited, whether the request was acknowledged, the statutory deadline (where one exists), the actual response time, the completeness of disclosure, the format provided, public accessibility, fees charged, accessibility issues observed, the tone/cooperation of the responding agency, and an indicative corruption-risk rating.

Table 1: Fiji access-to-information request testing, May–June 2026

Field	FJ-01: Fisheries	FJ-02: Environment	FJ-03: Auditor-General
Agency	Ministry of Fisheries	Ministry of Environment & Climate Change	Ministry of Justice
Date submitted	23 June 2026	30 June 2026	18 May 2026
Legal basis cited	Fisheries Act 1941; Information Act 2018	Environment Act 2005	Environmental auditor function under the Environment Management Act 2005
Acknowledged	No	No	Yes (same day)
Statutory deadline	None in Fisheries Act; 20 days under Information Act	None specified in Environment Act	Not specified
Response time	Pending	Pending	6 hours
Disclosure	N/A	N/A	Full
Format provided	N/A	N/A	Hard copy
Publicly accessible?	N/A	N/A	Yes
Fees charged	N/A	N/A	None
Accessibility issues observed	Sent to published enquiry email; no bounce, but no acknowledgement or response received	Published enquiry email bounced back outright; individual contact researched and request resent same day; response awaiting	Report accessible only in person at the Auditor-General's office
Cooperation	N/A	N/A	Very cooperative and helpful
Corruption risk	N/A	N/A	Low

Summary metrics (n = 3 requests)

Metric	Result
Requests submitted	3
Acknowledged	1 / 3
Average response time	1 of 3 complete (6 hours); 2 of 3 pending
Full disclosure	1 / 3
Refused or unresolved	2 / 3 pending
Accessibility issues identified	100% of requests

4.3.3 Interpreting the results

Three findings stand out from this limited but revealing sample:

First: an agency's own published contact channel can itself be a functional barrier, before the Information Act is even engaged. Neither the Ministry of Fisheries nor the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change directed requesters to an online submission portal; both simply publish an enquiry email address on their own website. Both channels failed, but in different ways. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's published address bounced back outright, requiring manual research to locate an individual contact and resubmit, a more fundamental failure since the Ministry's own advertised point of contact for public queries was non-functional. The Ministry of Fisheries' published address did accept the email but produced no acknowledgement or response at all within the study period. This corroborates the environmental law informant's observation that agencies may lack operational clarity on how disclosure obligations are meant to work in practice.

Second: neither the Fisheries Act 1941 nor the Environment Act 2005 specifies a statutory response deadline, leaving the Information Act 2018's 20-day default as the only applicable timeline; even that default had not been met for either request as at the time of writing. This is a direct, empirical confirmation of the interview theme that the Information Act exists on paper but is not “operationalised” in the words of several informants.

Third: the one fully successful request (to the Auditor-General's Office) succeeded despite, not because of, systemic design. It was resolved quickly and cooperatively, but the underlying document remains available only in hard copy, in person, at a single physical location. This illustrates precisely the distinction raised throughout the interviews between an agency being well-intentioned and responsive on a personal level, and an access system being genuinely, structurally accessible to the public. All three requests, regardless of outcome, surfaced at least one accessibility issue (an unacknowledged enquiry email, a bounced published email contact, an unspecified deadline, or a document confined to a single physical office), supporting the paper's central finding that the primary transparency deficit in Fiji's fisheries and environmental governance is one of practical access design, not of an absence of underlying information or institutional goodwill.

4.4 Triangulated Summary

Bringing together the desktop review, the interviews, and the direct access-to-information testing produces a more precise account than any single method could on its own.

Confirmed across all three sources: substantial fisheries and environmental information exists within government and regional systems; public-facing access is fragmented and inconsistent; the Information Act 2018 is legally present but not functioning as an effective, reliable disclosure mechanism; and offshore/regional fisheries systems are markedly more digitised and structured than inshore and domestic environmental systems.

Refined by the interviews beyond what the desktop review could show: access depends heavily on personal relationships and institutional discretion rather than formal process; barriers compound differently for customary rights holders, women, persons with disabilities, and non-English speakers; and EIA information is functionally available only within a narrow consultation window, after which it becomes very difficult to obtain even where a formal right of access exists.

Newly established by direct testing, beyond what interviews alone could show: at least one significant historical accountability document (the 2011 Fisheries Performance Audit) exists only in hard copy fifteen years after publication; sector-specific legislation (the Fisheries Act 1941, the Environment Act 2005) provides no statutory response deadline, leaving requesters dependent entirely on the Information Act's default; agencies' own published contact channels can themselves be non-functional, adding a technical barrier ahead of any legal one; and institutional cooperation and practical accessibility do not necessarily move together: an agency can be fast and courteous in correspondence while the underlying record remains inaccessible to anyone unable to visit in person. The Auditor-General exchange also surfaced three environmental performance audits (2020, 2021, 2025) not identified in the desktop review, indicating that the desktop review's discoverability limitations were real, not merely hypothetical, and that primary-source outreach materially improves the completeness of an evidence base of this kind.

4.5 Summary of Governance Gaps

Drawing together the three evidence streams, the following governance gaps are the most significant obstacles to meaningful public access to fisheries and environmental information in Fiji:

- **No consolidated public register.** No searchable public register exists for fisheries licences, licence conditions, enforcement outcomes, EIA approvals, or environmental compliance records. Decision-level information is the single largest and most consistent gap identified across the desktop review, the interviews, and direct testing.
- **The Information Act 2018 is not operationalised.** The Act establishes a legal right to request information but, as confirmed independently by informants across six different professional backgrounds and by the direct testing in Section 4.3, it does not function as a reliable access mechanism in practice.
- **No enforceable response deadlines in sector legislation.** Neither the Fisheries Act 1941 nor the Environment Act 2005 specifies a statutory deadline for responding to information requests, leaving requesters wholly dependent on the Information Act's 20-day default, a default that was not met by either the Fisheries or Environment request tested in this study.
- **A structural gap between internal administrative capacity and public disclosure.** Fisheries and environmental agencies appear to hold substantial monitoring and administrative information internally, but this capacity does not translate into public-facing transparency.
- **Offshore/inshore asymmetry.** Offshore fisheries governance is markedly more digitised, structured, and internationally accountable (through WCPFC/SPC reporting) than inshore and domestic fisheries governance, which remains fragmented and dependent on informal access.
- **Time-limited EIA access.** EIA reports are functionally accessible only during the formal consultation window, after which obtaining them becomes very difficult even though no legal bar to later access exists.
- **Non-functional published contact channels.** Neither the Ministry of Fisheries nor the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change directs the public to an online submission portal; both simply publish an enquiry email address, and both failed during direct testing, adding a technical barrier before any legal or administrative process could even begin.
- **Weak independent oversight of the fisheries sector.** The Auditor-General has not conducted a performance audit specific to fisheries governance in fifteen years, and the one audit that exists is not available in digital form.

4.6 Identified Corruption Risk Points

The findings do not provide evidence of actual corruption in any specific agency or transaction, and none should be inferred. However, consistent with standard governance and transparency risk-assessment methodology, several structural features identified across the desktop review, interviews, and direct testing represent indicative corruption-risk points: conditions under which favouritism, informal payment, or unaccountable decision-making could arise or go undetected, precisely because they remove the external visibility that normally constrains such behaviour:

1. **Discretion-based, relationship-dependent access.** Multiple informants independently described access as dependent on personal networks and official discretion rather than transparent rules. Where access to valuable information depends on who a requester knows rather than on a published process, the conditions for informal favouritism or rent-seeking can occur, even where there is no evidence of it.
2. **Opacity around licensing and allocation decisions.** Several informants noted that fisheries licensing information is not commercially sensitive yet remains among the hardest information to obtain. Concentrating control over economically valuable allocation decisions in channels that are not independently visible is a recognised corruption-risk pattern in natural resource governance.
3. **Absence of enforceable response deadlines.** The lack of statutory deadlines in the Fisheries Act 1941 and Environment Act 2005 means agencies face no formal consequence for indefinite non-response, reducing external accountability pressure on how and to whom information is ultimately released.
4. **Non-functional or bypassed published request channels.** Neither the Ministry of Fisheries nor the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change offers an online submission portal, and both failed during testing, forcing requesters back onto informally located individual contacts, the very channels most vulnerable to inconsistent or preferential treatment.
5. **Limited independent audit coverage of the fisheries sector.** With no fisheries-specific performance audit conducted in fifteen years, and the sole historical audit available only in hard copy, an important independent check on licensing, compliance, and enforcement practice has been effectively dormant for over a decade.
6. **Fragmentation as a monitoring obstacle.** Information spread across multiple uncoordinated agencies, platforms, and formats raises the practical cost of independent monitoring by media, researchers, or civil society, reducing the likelihood that irregularities would be identified externally.
7. **Unequal, discretionary treatment at the point of access.** The gendered gatekeeping described by the community/civil society informant illustrates how informal, unaccountable discretion in information provision can compound into unequal treatment more broadly, a dynamic consistent with the informal power structures that governance literature associates with elevated corruption risk.

These points are best read as priority areas for the independent oversight and proactive-disclosure reforms set out in Section 5, rather than as findings of wrongdoing.

4.7 Accessibility and Disability Findings

Accessibility, including but not limited to disability access, emerged as a distinct governance issue across all three evidence streams, separate from the question of whether information is formally public.

Disability-specific findings, drawn from the dedicated disability inclusion interview, include:

- Government fisheries and environmental information is disseminated primarily online, which the informant identified as itself a barrier for many persons with disabilities and for people without reliable internet access.
- Where information is available online, it is frequently outdated and often presented in formats incompatible with assistive technology: the informant specifically noted that information depicted only as an image cannot be read by a screen reader.

- Persons with disabilities are largely excluded from fisheries and environmental consultation processes, and are typically consulted only on matters assumed by decision-makers to be disability-specific, rather than being recognised as stakeholders in fisheries and environmental governance generally.
- The informant's organisation was aware of the Information Act 2018 but had never used it, relying instead on informal institutional contacts (government disability focal points) to obtain information, the same relationship-dependent pattern identified across other interviews, compounded here by a lack of accessible formats even when information is obtained.
- This pattern sits in tension with Fiji's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, which establishes accessibility and inclusion obligations that, on this evidence, are not yet reflected in how fisheries and environmental information is published or communicated.

Broader accessibility findings, consistent across the desktop review and multiple interviews, include:

- Cost, geography, and connectivity barriers affect rural and maritime communities, where formal information systems depend on internet access and physical office visits that are not equally available across Fiji.
- Language barriers persist: EIA public notices are legally required in English, iTaukei (Fijian), and Hindi, but full EIA reports themselves are not translated, limiting meaningful participation for non-English speakers even where formal notice requirements are met.
- Technical complexity is itself a barrier: several informants noted that even accessible, translated information would remain difficult for ordinary community members to interpret without simplification or trusted intermediaries (such as provincial conservation officers).
- Reliance on social media (particularly Facebook) for government communication of environmental information creates additional accessibility and archiving concerns, including for users without reliable data access and for future researchers seeking historical records.

Taken together, these findings indicate that accessibility and disability inclusion should be treated as a core design requirement for environmental and fisheries information systems, not an add-on, a distinction reflected in the recommendations below.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Key recommendations

The following seven recommendations represent the highest-priority actions arising from this study, distilled from the fuller, time-phased list in Sections 5.2–5.4:

1. **Fix and clearly publish access-to-information request pathways.** Neither the Ministry of Fisheries nor the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change offers an online submission portal; both simply publish an enquiry email address on their own website, and both failed during testing: the Fisheries address went unacknowledged and the Environment address bounced back outright. Repair these published contact channels and publish clear public guidance on how to request fisheries and environmental information under the Information Act 2018, including process, responsible officers, and timelines.
2. **Introduce enforceable statutory response deadlines.** Amend the Fisheries Act and Environment Management Act (or rely explicitly and visibly on the Information Act's default) so that requesters are not left with an indefinite wait, as occurred with two of the three requests tested in this study.

3. **Digitise and publish historically significant accountability records,** starting with the Auditor-General's 2011 Managing Sustainable Fisheries report, which currently exists only in hard copy at a single office.
4. **Establish searchable public registers** for fisheries licences, licence conditions, enforcement outcomes, and EIA approvals and conditions, closing the single largest gap identified across all three evidence streams.
5. **Extend EIA access beyond the formal consultation window,** and provide plain-language, translated summaries of EIA reports and decisions so they remain usable by communities after a project is approved.
6. **Adopt accessible, multi-format disclosure as a default requirement,** not an accommodation, including screen-reader-compatible formats, plain language, and offline/low-bandwidth channels (radio, community noticeboards), so that persons with disabilities and rural/maritime communities are not structurally excluded.
7. **Resource an independent performance audit of the Fisheries sector,** given none has been conducted in fifteen years, to re-test the corruption risk points identified in Section 4.6 against current practice.

The fuller, time-phased set of recommendations below elaborates on how these seven priorities could be sequenced.

5.2 Quick wins (0–6 months)

- Publish clear public guidance, including on agency websites, on how to request environmental and fisheries information under the Information Act 2018, including the process, responsible officers, and applicable timelines.
- Fix and routinely test the enquiry email addresses agencies publish on their own websites as their public contact channel for information requests (specifically the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of Fisheries).
- Publish plain-language summaries of key environmental and fisheries decisions, and make historically significant accountability documents, such as the Auditor-General's 2011 Managing Sustainable Fisheries report, available digitally as well as in hard copy.
- Clarify statutory response deadlines within sector legislation (the Fisheries Act and Environment Management Act currently specify none), so that requesters are not solely reliant on the Information Act's default timeline.
- Increase use of offline communication pathways (radio, community noticeboards, talanoa processes) for fisheries and environmental information, and provide accessible-format materials (audio, screen-reader compatible, simplified language) as standard rather than on request.

5.3 System improvements (6–18 months)

- Establish searchable public registers for fisheries licences, licence conditions, enforcement outcomes, and EIA approvals and conditions.
- Extend EIA report availability beyond the formal consultation window, so that reports remain accessible to researchers, journalists, and communities after a decision is made.
- Standardise and publicise agency-level request-handling procedures and timelines across ministries, closing the gap between formal legal entitlement and actual administrative practice identified through direct testing.
- Build in accessibility standards (screen-reader compatibility, translated materials, low-bandwidth formats) as a default requirement for environmental and fisheries disclosure, rather than a special accommodation.

- Establish a clear, government-endorsed protocol for engaging customary governance structures on fisheries information that affects qoliqoli rights holders, respecting legitimate customary restrictions while improving access to licensing, catch, and monitoring data.

5.4 Structural reforms (long-term)

- Develop an integrated environmental information portal consolidating fisheries, biodiversity, climate, EIA, and compliance information, addressing the fragmentation identified consistently across all three evidence streams.
- Strengthen proactive disclosure as the legal and institutional default, reducing reliance on discretionary, relationship-based access.
- Consider legislative amendment to the Information Act 2018 (or sector legislation) to introduce enforceable response deadlines, defined disclosure obligations, and an independent review or appeal mechanism for refused or unacknowledged requests.
- Formalise the role of provincial and community-level intermediaries (conservation officers, NGOs, disability focal points) who, this study found, already function as de facto access points, so their role is supported rather than merely relied upon.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to test, through interviews and direct access-to-information testing, a hypothesis generated by a desktop review of Fiji's fisheries and environmental governance systems: that substantial information exists institutionally, but that public-facing transparency is fragmented and uneven. That hypothesis has been strongly confirmed, and substantially deepened, by the evidence gathered.

Six interviews spanning journalism, customary governance, regional fisheries, community and civil society, disability inclusion, and environmental law converged independently on the same core finding: access to fisheries and environmental information in Fiji depends far more on personal relationships and institutional discretion than on functioning legal or administrative systems, and the Information Act 2018, while legally in force, is not experienced by regular users as an effective disclosure mechanism. Direct testing of that system reinforced this finding empirically: of three formal information requests submitted, only one received a full response, and even that response left the underlying document accessible only in person. The Auditor-General exchange further showed that a fifteen-year-old, publicly significant audit report exists only in hard copy, and surfaced three relevant environmental performance audits that had not been identified through desk research alone.

The central governance challenge in Fiji's fisheries and environmental sectors, this study concludes, is not the absence of information but the accessibility, consistency, and practical usability of the systems meant to disclose it, a challenge that is technical, legal, and institutional in roughly equal measure, and one that affects different groups of Fijians unevenly. Addressing it will require not only publishing more information but redesigning how that information reaches the people who need it.

7. Limitations

This study combines a rapid desktop review, six key informant interviews, and a small, time-bound sample of formal information requests (n = 3). Findings from the interviews reflect the perspectives of six anonymised informants and should be read as illustrative rather than statistically representative, though the striking convergence across informants with very different professional backgrounds strengthens confidence in the core findings. The access-to-information testing was limited to three requests submitted within a single window (May–June 2026); two remained pending or unresolved at the time of writing, and this paper reports their status as of that date; outcomes may change with further follow-up, and a larger sample would strengthen the corruption-risk indicators reported in Table 1. The Auditor-General's Office itself cautioned that its 2011 Fisheries Audit may no longer reflect current conditions given the passage of time. Finally, this paper does not independently verify the commencement status of recent legislative reforms, including the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2025.

Annex A: Desktop Review Transparency Matrix

Full legislative mapping and Offshore Fisheries Management Act registers are provided in Annex B and Annex C.

Matrix Theme	Fiji Legal Basis	What Appears to Exist	Public Visibility	Practical Access Issues
Access on request	Information Act 2018	Agency-held records	Unclear in practice; confirmed weak by direct testing	Request systems not highly visible; no enforceable deadlines in sector legislation
Proactive disclosure	EIA laws and reporting systems	EIAs and reports	Partial and fragmented; time-limited to consultation window	No integrated portal
Register systems	EIA and fisheries systems	Register obligations exist	Public-facing visibility limited	Discoverability gap
Monitoring and compliance	Fisheries and environment laws	Compliance records likely held	Very limited	Weak accountability visibility
Environmental quality information	Sectoral reporting systems	Environmental reporting exists	Fragmented	No integrated system
Accessibility and inclusion	Information and disability laws	Legal obligations exist	Limited visible implementation	Connectivity, language, and format barriers; disability access largely unaddressed
Independent oversight (Auditor-General)	Environment Management Act 2005; Audit Act	Financial and occasional performance audits	Very limited: no fisheries-specific performance audit since 2011	Key historical report exists only in hard copy

Annex B: Key Legislative Framework

Instrument	Primary Purpose	Main Environmental Information Relevance	Public Access Implications
Fisheries Act [Cap. 158]	Inshore fisheries governance	Licensing and fisheries administration	Less structured public disclosure
Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2025	Fisheries reform and modernisation	Expanded fisheries governance provisions	Commencement requires verification
Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012	Offshore fisheries governance	Licensing, monitoring, compliance	Stronger basis for structured disclosure
Environment Management Act 2005	Environmental governance	Environmental approvals and monitoring	Supports disclosure and participation
EIA Regulations 2007	EIA operational procedures	EIA reports and notices	Procedural publication obligations
Information Act 2018	Access to official information	Information requests and disclosure	Establishes information request pathway
Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018	Accessibility and inclusion	Accessible communication obligations	Supports inclusive information access
Climate Change Act 2021	Climate governance	Climate-related reporting	Supports broader environmental transparency

Annex C: Registers and Records under the Offshore Fisheries Management Act

This section maps registers and records originating primarily from the Act (Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012 (Fiji)).

Register / Record	Provision	Source	What it covers
Record of fishing vessels	s 39	Act	Official register of licensed/authorised fishing vessels
Licensing register (applications, grants, refusals, conditions, suspensions, cancellations)	Part 5 (esp. ss 32–38)	Act	Full lifecycle record of fishing licences and authorisations
Authorisations register (separate from licences where applicable)	Part 5	Act	Records of specific fishing authorisations and associated conditions
Observer programme records	ss 68–71	Act	Data, reports, and deployment records of fisheries observers

Register / Record	Provision	Source	What it covers
Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) records	s 75	Act	Electronic tracking and positional data for vessels
Inspection and enforcement records	Part 8 (ss 84–101 approx.)	Act	Inspections, offences, detentions, seizures, prosecutions

This section covers registers specifically established under the Regulations (Offshore Fisheries Management Regulations 2014).

Register / Record	Provision	Source	What it covers
Record of offshore fishing companies	reg 28	Regulations	Registered fishing companies operating offshore
Record of fish processing establishments	reg 29	Regulations	Approved/registered processing facilities
Record of fish exporters and importers	reg 30	Regulations	Entities authorised to export/import fish
Record of vessels using ports in Fiji	reg 45	Regulations	Foreign and domestic vessels calling at Fijian ports
Requirement that vessels using ports be on record	reg 46	Regulations	Links port access to inclusion in official records

This section covers other vital monitoring and compliance data systems mandated by both the Act and the Regulations.

Record / System	Provision	Source	What it covers
Port inspection records	Part 7 + regs	Act & Regulations	Inspections of vessels in port
Landing and transhipment records	Regs (various)	Regulations	Fish landed, transhipped, or moved between vessels
Bunkering/provisioning records	Regs (various)	Regulations	Fuel and supply activities for vessels
Catch and effort reporting records	Licence conditions + regs	Act & Regulations	Data submitted by operators on fishing activity

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II

PART II · COUNTRY REPORT

Access to Environmental Information in Mining and Logging and Environmental Impact Assessment Systems in Solomon Islands

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Executive Summary

This paper examines how access to environmental and extractive information functions in practice in Solomon Islands' mining and logging sectors. It draws on two complementary sources of evidence: a desktop review of Solomon Islands' legal framework for extractive industries (reported separately), and in-depth interviews with six stakeholders, across five interview sessions, representing civil society, legal advocacy, media, disability inclusion, and resource management perspectives.

The interviews reveal a consistent pattern across stakeholder perspectives: information exists within government systems but is not reliably or equitably accessible to resource owners and communities most affected by mining and logging operations. Interviewees described barriers operating at multiple levels.

Interviewees also raised significant concerns regarding informed consent. Several described resource owners signing agreements with incomplete information, including cases of partial contracts, simplified verbal explanations in contexts of limited literacy, and financial payments offered in place of substantive consultation. Interviewees described Environmental Impact Assessments, in the cases they discussed, as functioning more as procedural paperwork than as mechanisms for ongoing environmental accountability.

Several interviewees also linked corruption and bribery to the absence of transparent information pathways, describing instances in which they said informal payments were used to secure agreement to mining or logging operations in place of genuine consultation.

Note on serious claims: these are serious claims, reported directly by interviewees from their own experience and observation; they have not been independently verified against company or government records, and this report does not allege wrongdoing by any specific individual, company, or agency. They are presented here as consistent qualitative testimony because of how frequently and independently they arose across interviews, not as an audit finding.

This report identifies eight themes that emerged consistently across interviews: information withholding, geographic and economic barriers, environmental monitoring failures, linguistic and literacy obstacles, marginalisation of vulnerable groups, reported corruption and bribery concerns, inadequate consultation and participation, and weak government accountability mechanisms.

For each theme, this report synthesises evidence across interviewees, distinguishes reported experience from analysis, and compares findings against what Solomon Islands' legal frameworks state should happen.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope

This paper reports on qualitative research into information access, transparency, and accountability in Solomon Islands' extractive industries, specifically mining and logging operations. The research tests findings from a parallel desktop legal review against the lived experience of people working within, or affected by, the extractive sector.

1.2 Why This Matters

Extractive industries, mining and logging, directly affect customary resource rights, land tenure, livelihoods, environmental health, and community wellbeing, particularly for rural and remote populations. Meaningful transparency and access to information are prerequisites for resource owners to provide informed consent to operations on their land, for communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making, for civil society and media to monitor compliance, and for government agencies to function accountably.

Where information exists only within government and corporate systems and is not genuinely accessible, affected communities, journalists, civil society organisations, and researchers are constrained in their ability to participate, monitor, and seek accountability.

This analysis applies the principle that information access is not merely a matter of formal legal rights, but of practical, reliable, and equitable accessibility, consistent with the Bali Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Given the extractive sector focus of this pilot, the analysis also draws on the disclosure principles of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Standard, which establishes expectations for the public disclosure of licences, contracts, beneficial ownership, and production and revenue data in mining and resource sectors.

A law may give people the right to access information, but that right means little if they cannot access the information in practice. Poor administrative systems, distance, language barriers or other obstacles can all prevent people from getting the information they need and using it to hold decision-makers accountable.

1.3 Guiding Question

The central question guiding this research is: how does access to environmental and extractive information actually work in practice in Solomon Islands' mining and logging sectors, and how does that compare with what legal and administrative systems state should happen?

2. Country and Sector Context

Solomon Islands' mining sector is governed primarily by the Mines and Minerals Act 1990 (Cap. 42) and its subsequent amendments (Government of Solomon Islands, 1990), which interviewees referred to informally as the "Mineral Act." The Act provides for the granting of mining licences, permits, and leases, and establishes a Minerals Board to regulate the sector (Government of Solomon Islands, 1990).

A National Mining Bill intended to replace the 1990 Act has been under review since 2018 but had not been enacted at the time of writing (World Bank, 2021). The new Coalition Government has indicated that the Mineral Resources Bill is currently under review, and seven amendments have been made. The Bill is due to go to Parliament before the end of 2026.

Logging is governed primarily by the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act (Cap. 40), originally enacted in 1969 and revised in 1996 (Government of Solomon Islands, 1996), which sets out the procedure for the acquisition of timber rights on customary land, including the timber rights hearings referenced by interviewees (Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission, n.d.).

Solomon Islands does not yet have a dedicated Freedom of Information or Right to Information law. A draft Right to Information Bill has been under review for several years but has not yet been adopted. This is despite Solomon Islands joining other Pacific Islands Forum members in endorsing the 2021 Teieniwa Vision, which recognises the right to information as an important tool for transparency and preventing corruption (UNODC, 2020; Transparency Solomon Islands, cited in Solomon Star News, 2025).

In the absence of a dedicated Right to Information law, one interviewee pointed to Chapter II of the Constitution of Solomon Islands 1978, which protects freedom of expression as a fundamental right (Government of Solomon Islands, 1978, s.3(b)). While this does not provide a specific right to access information, it offers a broader constitutional foundation for people to seek, receive and share information. Access to information is particularly important for resource owners, enabling them to understand decisions about extractive activities, form their own views, participate in public debate, challenge decisions where necessary, and speak openly about issues affecting their land, resources and communities.

Environmental impact assessments in the Solomon Islands are governed by the Environment Act 1998 (No. 8 of 1998), which came into effect in 2003 and established the Environment and Conservation Division, now part of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (Government of Solomon Islands, 1998).

The Act and the Environment Regulations 2008 set out requirements for assessing the environmental impacts of certain developments, including mining and logging. Depending on the development, this may require a public environmental report or environment impact statements. The legislation also requires environment impact s to be considered when decisions are made and provides for monitoring during and after development activity (Government of Solomon Islands, 2008).

In response to an information request, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification explained that Development Consents are issues by the Ministry responsible for the Environment. That Ministry therefore holds the information on how many mining projects currently have Development Consents. MMERE, did however, confirming that all mining projects are required to have Development Consents before they can be issued a Mining Lease/License.

Customary land tenure plays a central role in the extractive sector: the majority of land in Solomon Islands is held under customary ownership, and mining and logging operations typically require engagement with resource owners, and in some cases timber rights hearings, before operations can proceed. Interviewees described this customary framework as a critical point of vulnerability, since consultation and consent processes intended to protect resource owners' interests were, in the cases discussed, reportedly avoided or under-resourced in practice.

Government oversight of the extractive sector sits primarily with the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification and the Ministry of Forestry and Research, with monitoring and enforcement functions described by interviewees as inconsistently resourced, and, in some instances, subject to conflicts of interest where monitoring costs are met by the companies being monitored.

These contextual factors make access to environmental and extractive information particularly important in Solomon Islands. With most land held under customary ownership, decisions about mining and logging directly affect the rights, livelihoods and wellbeing of resource-owning communities.

The country's dispersed geography, large rural population and reliance on natural resources also mean that practical barriers to accessing information can have significant consequences for informed consent, community participation and environmental accountability. Understanding how information systems operate in practice is therefore critical to assessing whether existing legal and administrative frameworks are achieving their intended purpose.

3. Methodology

This study is based on interviews with six stakeholders, across five interview sessions, conducted with individuals selected to represent distinct vantage points on information access in Solomon Islands' extractive industries:

1. Legal advocate and resource owners' representative
2. Civil society organisation (two representatives, interviewed together)
3. Disability inclusion advocate
4. Environmental and ranger sector representative
5. Journalist

All interviewees have been anonymised and are referred to by stakeholder group rather than by name, consistent with research ethics protocols.

Interviews addressed six core topics: current availability and accessibility of extractive industry information; practical barriers experienced in accessing documents and data; information that exists but is difficult to obtain; processes for environmental monitoring and accountability; participation and consultation processes; and perspectives on what information should be public but currently is not. The full interview protocol is provided in Annex A.

Responses have been analysed thematically rather than individually. This report synthesises evidence across interviewees, identifying patterns, areas of agreement, differing stakeholder perspectives, and illustrative examples that support the themes identified.

While interviewees approached the issue from different professional perspectives, there was a high level of consistency across interviews.

Some quotes have been lightly edited for readability.

4. Country Findings

4.1 Information Withholding and Restricted Access

Finding: interviewees consistently described essential documents relating to mining and logging operations as difficult for resource owners and the public to obtain.

A legal advocate working with customary resource owners stated that documents relating to mining and logging operations are routinely kept confidential. This interviewee described a specific case in which only a small portion of a multi-page mining contract was provided to resource owners for signature, with the remainder withheld, preventing informed decision-making about the terms being agreed to.

Civil society representatives confirmed that the responsible ministry holds the relevant documents, but that resource owners struggle to obtain them without advocacy support, and that information requests are not routinely fulfilled without such intervention. A journalist described vital records as largely confined within ministerial departments, compounded by legislation that is too technically dense for most citizens to interpret independently.

> *"Documents relating to these operations are always kept secret."*
>
> *"The bulk of vital records continues to be confined within ministerial departments, creating significant hurdles for public accessibility."*

Comparison with legal framework:

As set out in Section 2, Solomon Islands does not yet have a dedicated Freedom of Information or Right to Information law; the general freedom of expression protected under Chapter II of the Constitution is the closest existing formal basis, alongside a draft Right to Information Bill that has not yet progressed to adoption (UNODC, 2020; Solomon Star News, 2025). Sectoral legislation, including the Environment Act 1998 and its regulations, does establish specific disclosure and public-notice requirements for environmental impact assessments (Government of Solomon Islands, 1998, 2008).

These legal mechanisms can, and do, help people access environmental information. However, significant barriers remain. These include low literacy levels, the costs of travelling to Honiara to access information, and a lack of confidence to challenge existing systems and decision-makers. Civil society organisations, the Ombudsman and public solicitors can provide support, but seeking information or challenging decisions are still costly. This creates a significant imbalance for resource owners with limited financial resources, particularly when they are dealing with much better-resourced logging and mining companies.

Interviewees' accounts suggest that even these more specific, sector-based requirements are not consistently operationalised in practice: documents that should be public under the Environment Act, including public environmental reports and monitoring results, were described as remaining within government files and being released, if at all, only after civil society intervention.

Without a general access-to-information law, there is no clear pathway for resource owners to request information that is not already required to be made public under specific sector laws.

Why this matters:

Where resource owners cannot access the contracts they are asked to sign, or where full terms are withheld, informed consent becomes difficult to establish. Interviewees connected this pattern to conditions of vulnerability discussed further in Section 4.6.

4.2 Geographic and Economic Barriers

> **Finding:** interviewees described information as centralised in Honiara, making access costly and logistically difficult for remote island communities.

Multiple interviewees independently described the same barrier: that travelling from remote islands to Honiara to access government-held information is a significant and often prohibitive cost for rural people. A journalist's own research estimated that a substantial majority of the rural population remains uninformed due to these access barriers; this figure reflects the interviewee's own reporting rather than an independently verified statistic and is presented here on that basis.

Interviewees also noted that information intended to be available online is often out of date. Access is further limited by poor connectivity, with some remote provinces experiencing unreliable or no internet access. As a result, resource owners in remote areas may need to travel to Honiara, engage a paid representative, or rely on incomplete verbal explanations to access information.

"Coming from remote areas to Honiara just to get access to this information is a costly activity for rural people."

"Most information and websites are not up to date. You have to look for hard copies within respective offices."

In response to an information request about monitoring and compliance reports, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) explained that it receives reports required under mining legislation and Mining Lease conditions. These include operational, production, safety and other statutory reports. Environmental monitoring and compliance reports required under Development Consent conditions, however, are generally submitted to the Ministry responsible for Environment.

Why this matters:

Geographic centralisation of information unreasonably affects rural and remote populations, who are often those most directly affected by extractive operations, while government and company representatives based in or near Honiara face no equivalent barrier.

4.3 Environmental Monitoring and Accountability Failures

Finding: interviewees described Environmental Impact Assessments as procedurally required but, in the cases discussed, not functioning as mechanisms for ongoing environmental accountability.

A legal advocate described a case in which mining activity began before an Environmental Impact Assessment process was completed, and in which the resulting EIA was treated as paperwork rather than a substantive assessment. In this account, only one monitoring report was produced, with no continued monitoring throughout the operation, and no environmental findings were made available to the affected community when a government monitoring team visited the site.

This interviewee called for independent, third-party verification of company-produced reports. An environmental sector representative confirmed this pattern more generally, describing monitoring as inadequate and independent verification mechanisms as largely absent.

"The mining activity happens even before the registration and the production of the Environmental Impact Assessment."

"No monitoring and assessments done throughout the operations period."

Comparison with legal framework:

Solomon Islands' legal framework requires Environmental Impact Assessments for mining and logging operations, ongoing monitoring, and availability of information to affected communities and the public.

Interviewees' accounts suggest a gap between these requirements and operational practice, including EIAs treated as compliance documentation rather than functional tools, irregular or absent monitoring, and monitoring reports not disclosed to resource owners.

Why this matters:

Where EIAs and monitoring function as paperwork rather than substantial processes, communities cannot make informed decisions about whether operations should proceed, and no functioning mechanism exists for detecting environmental harm as it occurs.

4.4 Linguistic Complexity and Illiteracy Barriers

Finding: interviewees described complex legal language and variable literacy levels as preventing meaningful comprehension of extractive industry documentation.

A legal advocate stated that limited literacy among rural resource owners has, in the case described, been used to the advantage of investors, with resource owners paid a fixed sum to sign agreements without a clear understanding of their implications.

A disability inclusion advocate recommended that the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Act 1990, referred to by interviewees as the “Mineral Act,” be translated into plain language, and that a simplified handbook be developed to help communities understand the laws governing the resources sector. A journalist similarly emphasised the need to translate technical legal terminology into accessible, layperson's language.

“The unfortunate thing here is the so-called investors are taking advantage of the illiteracy level we have in the country.”

“All the clauses in the Mineral Act should be translated in simple terms so that people in the community can understand.”

Why this matters:

Even where documents are technically available, dense legal language and variable literacy levels can make them effectively inaccessible, creating disproportionate understanding between companies and government officials on one side and resource owners on the other.

4.5 Systematic Exclusion of Marginalised Groups

Finding: interviewees described people with disabilities, women, and children as consistently excluded from information and decision-making processes relating to extractive operations.

A legal advocate described vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and those without internet access, as consistently marginalised in mining and logging decision-making, with the benefits of operations flowing disproportionately to those who support them.

An environmental sector representative and a journalist both emphasised that people with disabilities, women, and children are routinely excluded at the community level, despite being directly affected by outcomes.

A disability inclusion advocate described accessibility as a distinct and often overlooked dimension of transparency: information is frequently not provided in accessible formats, consultation venues are not always accessible, and decision-making processes often exclude people with disabilities, women, and children in favour of a narrower set of community representatives.

> *"Vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and rural residents lacking internet access, are consistently marginalized during mining and logging operations."*
>
> *"They are also members of the community and equally need to have their say in decisions regarding extractive activities."*

Why this matters:

Marginalised groups are often among those most affected by extractive operations and least able to influence decisions about them. Their exclusion from information and consultation is both a participation gap and a practical one, since decisions made without their input are less likely to reflect the full range of community impacts.

4.6 Reported Corruption and Bribery Concerns

Note on serious claims: these findings reflect interviewees' direct accounts and professional observations. They have not been independently verified against company or government records, and no specific individual, company, or agency is named or accused of wrongdoing in this report.
They are presented as consistent qualitative testimony, given how independently and repeatedly this theme arose across interviews, rather than as an audit finding or legal conclusion.

Finding: several interviewees linked the prevalence of informal and, in their accounts, corrupt practices to the absence of transparent information pathways.

A legal advocate described a case in which, in this interviewee's account, consultations became a vehicle for cash payments made directly to individual resource owners in exchange for agreement to mining on their land. A civil society representative described a similar dynamic in the logging sector, where, in this account, opposition from resource owners at timber rights hearings was overcome through direct payments.

An environmental sector representative connected this pattern to information gaps more broadly, arguing that where people are not informed through legitimate processes, shortcuts and informal payments become the default route to securing agreement, and that only a small number of people close to logging or mining operations tend to gain the information needed to become licensees themselves.

"They dish out money for the people to sign up their land for only $500 each signatory."

"When people are not informed, the only route they took is for short cuts and bribery activities."

Interpretation:

Interviewees consistently drew a connection between information access failures and the conditions under which informal or corrupt practices can occur. When formal, transparent processes are not functioning, informal channels appear to fill the gap, and communities lacking information about their rights and alternatives become more vulnerable to financial incentives substituting for genuine consultation. This is presented as a pattern interviewees identified from their own experience and observation, not as a finding independently verified by this research.

4.7 Consultation and Participation Gaps

Finding: interviewees described resource owners and communities as not meaningfully consulted before extractive operations commence, and consultation, where it occurs, as often procedural rather than substantial.

A legal advocate described the consultation and awareness process that should occur before operations begin, covering both the benefits of extractive activity and its environmental and social impacts, and stated that none of this occurred in the case described. Civil society representatives emphasised that meaningful consultation requires resource owners to have access to complete, accurate, and understandable information about a proposed operation and its likely impacts, not simply a chance to be informed of a decision already made.

"Public consultations have to be always made so people can be freely informed so they can make well informed decisions for their resources."

"Meaningful consultation requires that people have access to accurate, complete, and understandable information about the proposed operation, its likely impacts, and the process for making decisions."

Why this matters:

Consultation is both valuable in itself, in giving affected people voice in decisions that shape their futures, and instrumentally important, since decisions made with genuine input are more likely to be informed, legitimate, and protective of community interests.

4.8 Government Accountability Mechanisms

Finding: interviewees described government procedures for monitoring extractive industry compliance as weak, inconsistently applied, and not effective in holding companies to account.

A legal advocate described government monitoring visits producing no reports made available to affected communities. A civil society representative attributed this to a lack of resources, training, and political independence within the responsible institutions. An environmental sector representative noted that where monitoring reports are produced, they tend to favour the interests of the companies being monitored, including in some cases involving government officials whose costs are met by industry.

"Government institutions responsible for monitoring compliance lack resources, training, and political independence."

"Most reports coming from these sectors are tailored in favour of the so-called investors."

In response to an information request about enforcement action taken against mining projects for breaches of Development Consent conditions over the past two years, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) explained that these matters fall outside its jurisdiction. Enforcement of Development Consent conditions is the responsibility of the Ministry responsible for Environment. MMERE's enforcement role is limited to requirements under the Mines and Minerals Act, the Mines and Minerals Regulations, and the conditions attached to mineral tenements.

Why this matters:

Without effective, independent government accountability mechanisms, companies have limited incentive to comply with legal and environmental obligations, and without transparency about government monitoring activity, civil society has no reliable means of validating compliance or holding either companies or government to account.

4.9 Testing Access to Information in Practice

As part of the research, three information requests were submitted to Solomon Islands government ministries to test how access to environmental information works in practice. At the time of reporting, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) had responded, while responses from the other two ministries remained outstanding.

MMERE provided information about Development Consents for mining projects, monitoring and compliance reporting, and enforcement responsibilities. Its response also clarified that some environmental information relating to mining is held by the Ministry responsible for Environment rather than MMERE.
For example, Development Consents and environmental monitoring and compliance reports fall within the responsibilities of the Environment Ministry, while MMERE holds information required under mining legislation and Mining Lease conditions.

The testing highlights a practical challenge for people seeking environmental information: relevant information and responsibilities can sit across different government agencies. Requesters may therefore need to know which ministry holds particular information before they can successfully access it.

5. Synthesis: Comparing Practice Against Legal Framework

A central finding of this research is a gap between what Solomon Islands' legal frameworks state should happen and how extractive industry information systems function in practice, as reported by interviewees.

It is worth noting that this gap operates at two levels: for information governed by sector-specific legislation (such as environmental impact assessments under the Environment Act 1998), the gap is one of enforcement and disclosure practice; for information not covered by sector-specific rules, the gap begins earlier, since Solomon Islands does not yet have a general access-to-information law resource owners can invoke (see Section 2).

Aspect	Legal Framework	Practice Reported by Interviewees
General information access	No general access-to-information law yet enacted; a draft Right to Information Bill remains under review	Interviewees described no clear formal pathway to request information not otherwise covered by sector legislation
Sector-specific disclosure (EIA)	Environment Act 1998 requires public environmental reports and monitoring	Interviewees described documents as often withheld in practice
Accessibility	No barriers to geographic or economic access implied by the legislation itself	Geographic and economic barriers reported as significant
Environmental monitoring	Required and should be transparent under the Environment Act	Described as sporadic, with results not disclosed
Consultation	Required for timber rights acquisition under the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act	Described as minimal or absent in the cases discussed
Accountability	Government expected to monitor and enforce	Described as weak, with minimal consequences reported
Informed consent	Presupposed in lawful decision-making	Interviewees described this as undermined by information gaps and, in some accounts, bribery

The findings suggest that barriers to information access do not operate in isolation, but compound one another:

- geographic isolation combined with information withholding and literacy barriers leaves rural communities structurally unable to access information even where they have the time and motivation to seek it;
- information gaps combined with weak consultation leave communities unable to make informed decisions about operations affecting their land; and

- information gaps combined with weak accountability leave no reliable mechanism for detecting or addressing non-compliance.

Addressing information access, on this evidence, requires action across multiple dimensions rather than the availability of documents alone.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Key Recommendations

The following recommendations represent the highest-priority actions arising from this study, distilled from the fuller set in Sections 6.2 to 6.4.

These recommendations draw on the interview findings, desktop review and broader international good practice.

1. **Establish legally-mandated proactive government disclosure** of mining and logging contracts (or non-confidential summaries), Environmental Impact Assessments and monitoring reports, and consultation records, consistent with the disclosure principles of the EITI Standard. It is understood that the current Government is working on reviving an EITI office in the Solomon Islands. A civil society campaign could be run to create a strong voice in support of Solomon Islands rejoining EITI and working towards implementing the requirements of the EITI standard.
2. **Enact and operationalise the draft Right to Information Bill,** which has reportedly remained under review for a number of years without progressing to law, including clear procedures, response timelines, staff training, and oversight or appeal to the Ombudsman as normal practice, although the Act may need amending to add this to their functions.
3. **Produce simplified, plain-language materials,** including a handbook covering the Mines and Minerals Act 1990, the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act, and resource owners' rights, distributed to provincial and community level. This could be managed and delivered by a local civil society organisation with international support.
4. **Establish community-level information access points** in local and district offices, reducing dependence on travel to Honiara.
5. **Require independent environmental monitoring,** separate from company self-reporting, with results made available to affected communities and the public.
6. **Establish minimum legal requirements for consultation,** including defined consultation periods, accessible-language requirements, and documented consent processes that include women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.
7. **Strengthen government accountability mechanisms** for monitoring compliance and enforcing violations, including publication of enforcement actions.
8. **Resource further research and independent verification** of the corruption and bribery concerns raised in this study, given the seriousness of the allegations and the current absence of independent confirmation.

6.2 Immediate Actions (Quick Wins)

- Establish government policy requiring proactive online publication of key extractive industry documents, including mining and logging contracts or non-confidential summaries, Environmental Impact Assessments and monitoring reports, government monitoring results and compliance decisions, and consultation records.
- Prepare simplified summaries, handbooks, and plain-language explanations of the Mines and Minerals Act 1990 and the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act, resource owners' rights and obligations, environmental impact assessment processes, and how to request information or make complaints. Distribute these to provincial offices, council offices, and community leaders.
- Establish accessibility standards for government information, including alternative formats (audio, large print, simplified visual) for key documents, accessible websites, and accommodation for people with disabilities in consultation processes.
- Establish provincial and district-level information access points where community members can access extractive industry documents without travelling to Honiara.

6.3 Medium-Term Reforms (6 to 12 months)

- Advance the draft Right to Information Bill to enactment, then operationalise it by establishing clear procedures and timelines for information requests, training government staff responsible for responding to requests, publishing a register of information held by government, and establishing oversight and appeal mechanisms. The Ombudsman could provide the initial independent mechanism.
- Establish clear legal requirements and procedures for consultation before extractive operations commence, including minimum consultation periods, a requirement to provide information in accessible language, inclusion of women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, and mechanisms for documenting consent.
- Establish requirements that environmental monitoring be conducted independently of companies, that monitoring results be published and accessible to the public, and that affected communities receive regular reports on environmental impacts.
- Strengthen government capacity and mandate to monitor compliance, enforce violations, publish enforcement actions and results, and hold hearings on significant violations.

6.4 Longer-Term Structural Reforms (more than 12 months)

- Review and reform the Mines and Minerals Act 1990, the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act, and related legislation to strengthen resource owner rights and consultation requirements, require transparency in contracting and monitoring, establish meaningful penalties for non-compliance, and create mechanisms for independent verification of environmental impacts.
- Build government institutional capacity for information management and disclosure, environmental monitoring and enforcement, community consultation, and support for resource owner participation.
- Support civil society organisations working on transparency and accountability in extractive industries through funding, training, and legal support.
- Strengthen customary governance institutions' capacity to understand and negotiate extractive industry proposals, monitor operations affecting customary lands, and access information and accountability mechanisms.

7. Conclusion

This research set out to test how access to environmental and extractive information functions in practice in Solomon Islands' mining and logging sectors, against what legal and administrative systems state should happen. Interviewees representing civil society, legal advocacy, media, disability inclusion, and resource management perspectives consistently described: information exists within government systems but is not reliably or accessible to the resource owners and communities most directly affected by extractive operations.

Resource owners themselves are not always being given access to information about their own land and resources. This goes beyond a general access to information issue - it also raises fundamental questions about their rights as resource owners and their ability to make informed decisions about their property.

The barriers described operate at multiple levels:

- **Legal -** in that Solomon Islands has no general access-to-information law resource owners can invoke, and even sector-specific disclosure requirements that do exist were reported as inconsistently followed;
- **Geographic and economic -** given the centralisation of information in Honiara; linguistic, given the complexity of legal documentation relative to literacy levels;
- **Institutional -** given weak and inconsistently applied accountability mechanisms; and
- **Social -** given the exclusion of women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups from consultation.

These barriers compound one another rather than operating independently, and several interviewees connected them directly to conditions in which informal payments were reported to substitute for genuine consultation and consent.

This research suggests that transparency and access to information function, on this evidence, as practical prerequisites for informed consent, participation, and accountability in the extractive sector, not only as abstract governance principles. Addressing the gaps identified will require coordinated reform across legal, administrative, institutional, and community governance dimensions, informed by further research, including perspectives from government and industry that were outside the scope of this study.

8. Limitations

This research is based on interviews with six stakeholders across five interview sessions, representing distinct and relevant vantage points, but a limited sample. It does not include perspectives from most government officials responsible for mining and logging regulation, though resource owners' and civil society's descriptions of their interactions with government are included, nor perspectives from mining and logging companies. The same information requests were sent to the other relevant government ministries, but no responses have been received to date. The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification was the only ministry to respond. Some interviews were conducted in Solomon Islands Pijin, and translation may have affected some nuance in the English transcripts.

The direct testing was limited to three information requests. Only one ministry had responded at the time of reporting, so the results provide an indication of how access works in practice rather than a comprehensive assessment of government responsiveness.

Interview data reflects the perceptions and direct experience of informed stakeholders; it does not constitute a comprehensive audit of all information held by government or accessible through formal channels, and the corruption and bribery concerns raised in Section 4.6 have not been independently verified against company or government records.

However, these concerns need to be considered in the context of the wider risk of systemic and large-scale bribery and corruption in the natural resource sector, particularly given weaknesses in the legal framework governing natural resource exploitation, gaps in implementation and enforcement, and international evidence of significant corruption risks within the extractives sector.

These limitations do not negate the findings: consistent, independent testimony across stakeholders with different vantage points, combined with documentary evidence where available, provides meaningful evidence of systemic barriers to information access. Addressing the issues raised would benefit from further research, including government and company perspectives and a systematic audit of government information holdings and access procedures.

Annex A: Interview Question Protocol

1. What information about mining and extractive activities in Solomon Islands is currently publicly available? (For example: mining licences or exploration permits, licence holders, environmental monitoring, project approvals or EIAs. Where is this information usually found?)
2. In practice, how easy or difficult is it for the public or civil society to access this information? (Prompts if needed: government websites or registries, ministry reports, public consultation processes, requests to government agencies.)
3. What information about extractive activities is not publicly available, but people often want to access? (Examples: licence ownership, environmental monitoring data, compliance or enforcement actions, revenue or production data.)
4. Does the government collect environmental information related to mining activities (for example water quality, biodiversity, or land impacts)? If so, is this information available to the public, and in what form?
5. Are Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or environmental approvals for mining projects easy for the public to access? (Prompts: public notices or consultation processes, EIA reports or environmental registers, how communities can obtain this information.)
6. From a civil society perspective, what information about extractive activities should be publicly available but currently isn't? What information would help communities better understand environmental impacts, government decisions, or company accountability?

Optional follow-up: How accessible is environmental information for people with disabilities, rural communities, and people without reliable internet access?

Annex B: Information Request Questions for Ministry of Mines

1. How many mining projects currently hold Development Consent under the Environment Act?
2. Does the Ministry receive monitoring or compliance reports from those projects?
3. Have any enforcement actions been taken against mining projects in the last two years for failing to meet Development Consent conditions?

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