

Commonwealth Blue Charter

Shared Values, Shared Ocean

A Commonwealth Commitment
to Work Together to Protect
and Manage our Ocean



The Commonwealth
Blue Charter

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Commonwealth Blue Charter

1. The world's ocean¹ is essential to life on our planet. It provides humanity's largest source of protein and absorbs around a quarter of our carbon dioxide emissions and most of the world's extra heat. The ocean also produces half of the world's oxygen. Billions of people depend on it for their livelihoods, cultures and traditions. The output of the global ocean economy is estimated at US\$1.5 trillion and this could more than double by 2030. Constituting more than 95% of Earth's living space, the ocean contributes to the economic resilience of coastal and island states, whilst connecting all nations in global trade.

However, our activities are increasingly putting the health of the planet's valuable ocean ecosystems in peril. This is not an issue that any single country can solve. That is why we, the Leaders of the Commonwealth, are calling for ambitious, coordinated action, while recognising our different abilities, to sustainably manage, protect and preserve our ocean now, for the sake of present and future generations.

Our Commitment to the Global Ocean

2. **Acknowledging** the importance of the global ocean in contributing significantly to the economic, social, and environmental health, as well as the cultural heritage, of all nations;
3. **Recognising** that the ocean contributes significantly to the development of cultural values of coastal peoples and is a major source of their livelihoods and subsistence;
4. **Highlighting** in particular the close linkages between the ocean, climate change, sustainable development, and the wellbeing of the people of the Commonwealth;

¹ 'Ocean' refers to all Oceans and Seas, as commonly accepted under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Several of the issues that the Commonwealth Blue Charter seeks to address also impact great lakes that border more than one country, and action by Commonwealth members thus affected is encouraged under the Commonwealth Blue Charter.

5. **Acknowledging** the importance of the Paris Agreement goals of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels is crucial to limiting damage to many marine ecosystems, especially coral reefs;
6. **Noting** with concern increasing pressures on the global ocean, inter alia: ocean warming, acidification, and climate change; marine pollution, inclusive of plastic debris and micro-plastics; biodiversity loss; unsustainable fisheries, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and international marine wildlife crimes;
7. **Recognising** the primacy of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans must be carried out, supported by other applicable treaties to which Commonwealth member countries are parties and affirming the rights of landlocked member countries as stipulated in UNCLOS;
8. **Welcoming** the United Nations General Assembly's efforts to develop an international legally binding instrument under the Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction;
9. **Noting** that the seabed and its resources beyond the limits of national jurisdiction are the common heritage of humankind, as governed by the regime in part XI of UNCLOS;
10. **Highlighting** the value of the many global commitments and declarations as they apply to the ocean, including, inter alia, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement; the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Biodiversity Targets; the 'Rio+20' Earth Summit's The Future We Want; Our ocean, our future: call for action, arising from the 2017 Ocean Conference; the UN General Assembly's annual Law of the Sea and sustainable fisheries resolutions; the adopted ministerial declarations, resolutions

and decisions from the United Nations Environmental Assembly; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development;

11. **Highlighting** the value of the many regional and national commitments and declarations as they apply to the ocean, including, inter alia, the more than 1400 voluntary commitments arising from the first United Nations Ocean Conference; those made at the Our Ocean conferences; the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy, and the Pacific Oceanscape Framework; the Blue Pacific; the Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy; the Caribbean Challenge Initiative; the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the SAMOA Pathway; Declaration of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on enhancing Blue Economy Cooperation for Sustainable Development; the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, and Agenda 2063; Abuja Declaration on Lake Chad; United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Seas Programmes and associated agreements, including the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region;
12. **Applauding** the leading role that Commonwealth member countries are taking to support the implementation of these commitments;
13. **Appreciating** the technical assistance provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat and partners on the sustainable development and conservation of marine resources, including 'blue economies';
14. **Recognising** that much more work still needs to be done towards meeting our commitments, while acknowledging the unique vulnerability and capacity challenges faced particularly by least developed, small coastal and island states, and landlocked states, and therefore the importance of intra-Commonwealth cooperation;

Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

15. **Underlining** the pressing need to implement international and regional commitments at the national level, We:
16. **Recall** that the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies;
17. **Recognise** that some ocean challenges are common across the Commonwealth, such as:
 - Managing the impact of climate change, including sea level rise, ocean acidification, warming and coral reef bleaching;
 - Halting the loss of marine biodiversity, and where practicable, restoring it;
 - Tackling marine pollution, including: litter, lost, abandoned and discarded fishing gear, plastics, and anthropogenic noise;
 - Developing strong, sustainable, and innovative blue economies that promote sustainable development and an enabling environment that is fair, equitable, and inclusive of men and women in marine and maritime industries;
 - Eliminating and prohibiting certain forms of fisheries subsidies in accordance with SDG14.6;
 - Addressing the proliferation and mass movement of nuisance and harmful algal blooms;
 - Enhancing cooperation and coordination in matters relating to safety and security in the ocean;
 - Tackling marine wildlife crimes;
18. **Cognisant** of the specific challenges that landlocked states face in accessing and utilising the ocean and its resources due to remoteness from the coast;
19. **Recognise** the gaps that exist in education, skills and awareness of professional opportunities, that cannot be separated from marine and maritime economic development.

20. **Are conscious** that the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole;
21. **Reaffirm** the Commonwealth way of sharing of experience, especially through practical cooperation;
22. **Recognise** the importance of cooperation and engagement with all stakeholders, including the non-state sector, in meeting our ocean commitments and the sustainable management of the blue economy;
23. **Agree to cooperate** with one another in meeting our ocean commitments, including through the sharing of knowledge, information (including scientific information), expertise, and good practices;
24. **Invite** all interested Commonwealth member countries to come forward as Commonwealth Blue Charter Champions, to lead or engage with Action Groups, in alignment with their national priorities, with technical support from the Secretariat and partners.

A Principled Approach

25. **Recognising** the need to promote sustainable and equitable outcomes across the Commonwealth, We:
26. **Reaffirm** the continuing relevance of the Charter of the Commonwealth, our shared interests, and the rule of law to member countries;
27. **Underscore** that the 16 Principles contained within the Commonwealth Charter also apply to meeting ocean-related commitments, notably:
 - Sustainable development and protection of the environment;
 - Recognition of small and vulnerable states;
 - The importance of young people and civil society;
 - Human rights, gender equality, and dignity; and
 - Good governance, justice and peace.

28. **Reaffirm** consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness.
29. **Commit** to taking a principled, science-based approach consistent with the Charter of the Commonwealth to meeting our ocean commitments, including in ocean planning, sustainable economic development, and environmental conservation.
30. **Look forward** to a 'blue' Commonwealth future in which every member of the Commonwealth sees fair ocean governance, more prosperous maritime and marine industries, sustainable ocean use, and secure marine space across the Commonwealth.

Implementation

31. From words to actions, We
32. **Mandate** a Commonwealth Blue Charter plan of action focussed around Action Groups, led by Commonwealth member countries, which will collaborate with partners at national, regional and international levels, in addressing identified priority ocean issues of member countries.

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