



The Commonwealth  
Blue Charter

# An Ocean of Opportunity

Commonwealth Progress  
on Ocean Action

2024



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Commonwealth Progress on Ocean Action, 2024



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Blue Charter

This report was developed by Thuso Ltd.

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# About the Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal sovereign countries, and home to 2.7 billion people. The Commonwealth Secretariat is an independent organisation working with the 56 member countries to promote prosperity, democracy and peace, amplify the voice of small states and protect the environment.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Trade, Ocean and Natural Resources Directorate assists member countries to sustainably manage their natural resources, in the ocean and on land, for the benefit of present and future generations. The Oceans and Natural Resources (ONR) Section of the Secretariat manages the Commonwealth Blue Charter Programme.

The ONR provides technical assistance and support to member countries in the development of policies, laws, design of fiscal regimes and strengthening national institutions as they seek to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

This report is an update of the report *An Ocean of Opportunity: Commonwealth Blue Charter Ocean Action Report* published in September 2022. The report was initially compiled by Thuso, with research support from Daniel Cronin, editorial oversight by Matthew Goldie-Scot, specialist input from Michael Brown, design work overseen by Alexandra Tigan, review by Dr David Sheppard and Dr Ameer Ebrahim, and with additional inputs and revisions by the Commonwealth Secretariat.



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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>BBNJ</b>	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (Agreement)
<b>CBC</b>	Commonwealth Blue Charter
<b>CCOA</b>	Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (Marine Plastics Action Group)
<b>CHOGM</b>	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
<b>COMM</b>	Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties (to the Convention on Biological Diversity)
<b>CRC</b>	Coral Restoration Consortium
<b>EEZ</b>	exclusive economic zone
<b>GOA-ON</b>	Global Ocean Acidification – Observing Network
<b>GO-BC</b>	Global Ocean Decade Programme for Blue Carbon
<b>INC</b>	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (on Plastic Pollution)
<b>IOC</b>	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
<b>MoU</b>	memorandum of understanding
<b>MPA</b>	marine protected area
<b>MSP</b>	Marine Spatial Plan
<b>NAP</b>	National Adaptation Programme/Plan
<b>NDCs</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions (under UNFCCC)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>NOAA</b>	National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
<b>NPOA</b>	National Plan of Action
<b>ODA</b>	official development assistance
<b>ONR</b>	Oceans and Natural Resources (Section)
<b>SIDS</b>	small island developing state
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNFCCC</b>	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change



# Foreword



As the Commonwealth family gathers in Samoa for CHOGM 2024, I am proud to present this updated *Ocean of Opportunity* report – another step forward in our unwavering commitment to a resilient and sustainable future for our ocean.

In line with this year's CHOGM theme, *Resilience and Shared Prosperity*, the Commonwealth stands united in its resolve to address the urgent challenges threatening marine ecosystems and the millions of people whose lives depend on them.

The Commonwealth is home to 2.7 billion people, spread across five continents and connected by our one shared ocean. Our Commonwealth is an Ocean Commonwealth. Forty-nine of our 56 member countries border the ocean, and Commonwealth countries are stewards of more than a third of the ocean under national jurisdiction. We are also home to 45 per cent of the world's coral reefs, over a third of all mangroves, and two-thirds of small island developing states (SIDS) – or, as we rightly call them, *big ocean states*, given that 96 per cent of their territory is ocean.

Our ocean is more than just a resource: it is the lifeblood of countless communities across the Commonwealth. This report highlights how the blue economy can unlock new opportunities for sustainable growth, promoting economic resilience and environmental protection while advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainable ocean industries provide vital pathways for our member states, particularly those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, to achieve shared prosperity.

Our commitment to innovative financing and partnerships is central to our efforts. Initiatives such as the Commonwealth Blue Finance Working Group will enable us to leverage tools like blue bonds and impact investing to catalyse action for ocean health, biodiversity and resilience. Through collective action – engaging governments, the private sector and civil society – we are pioneering new investments which can safeguard our ocean for future generations.

However, the challenges facing our ocean are complex and serious. From plastic pollution to overfishing and the growing threat of climate change, these challenges demand co-ordinated, global solutions. This *Ocean of Opportunity* report highlights the Commonwealth's vital leadership through the Blue Charter Action Groups, uniting member states to strengthen and accelerate their marine protection efforts.

Our journey from the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in Cyprus to the outcomes of CHOGM is one of shared vision and determination. It reflects the collective will of our member states – large and small, developed and developing – to safeguard our ocean through concerted, practical action rooted in our shared values. The Commonwealth Blue Charter remains a model of global leadership in ocean governance, evolving with the challenges we face and mobilising our collective resources to ensure the resilience of marine ecosystems.

As we look ahead to 2030, the legacy we wish to leave for future generations must be at the forefront of our minds. By acting today, we ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit an ocean that thrives with life, sustains prosperity and reflects the collective care of all Commonwealth nations. As we prepare for CHOGM 2024, we carry with us the Pacific spirit, reminding us that our ocean connects us all and that, together, we can chart a course toward a more beautiful blue future.

*The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC*  
*Secretary-General of the Commonwealth*

# Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is an agreement by Commonwealth countries to actively co-operate in addressing the myriad ocean-related issues and commitments they face. There are 49 coastal countries in the Commonwealth, of which 47 are members of one or more Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups. These Action Groups are member driven, led by Commonwealth Blue Charter 'Champion' countries.

This report serves as a compilation of action under the 10 Action Groups, in the context of wider Commonwealth ocean action, with the aim of highlighting the impact of the Commonwealth Blue Charter.

Since our 2022 report,<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth countries have shown remarkable progress in ocean conservation. For the last two years, members of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, led by 17 co-Champions, have continued with their shared mission to co-operate to tackle ocean-related challenges and meet commitments for sustainable ocean development. Notable achievements in this period have been the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting (COMM) in April 2024, hosted by Cyprus. During COMM, a roadmap and timeframe were established for the drafting and adoption of a Commonwealth Ocean Declaration at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa during October 2024. Further to this, the period saw the establishment of a Blue Finance Working Group, an Ocean Youth Working Group, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the establishment of the Blue Charter Centre of Excellence in Cyprus, as well as the launch of the Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy (COBE) in Antigua and Barbuda.



12 non-government  
partnerships



More than 80 youth involved in the  
Ocean Youth Working Group



2 new Working Groups  
established



More than 620 officials from 50  
Commonwealth countries have  
joined training courses



20 knowledge exchange webinars,  
averaging 120 participants each



5 thematic toolkits developed



208 external training opportunities  
compiled in a searchable database



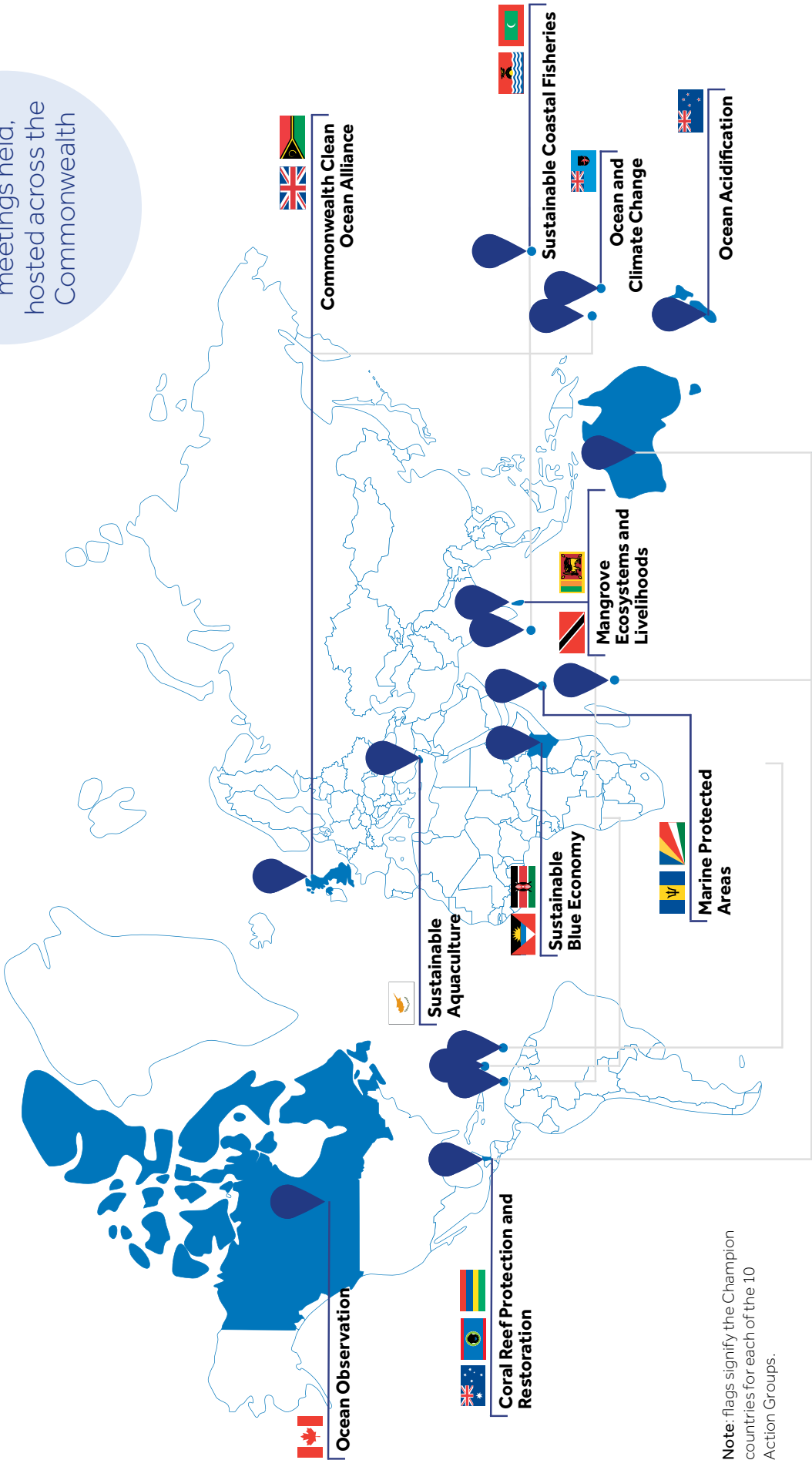
15 bespoke online training  
courses held or scheduled



115 online funder profiles  
compiled, providing visibility  
of opportunities worth over  
£126 billion

25

Action Group  
meetings held,  
hosted across the  
Commonwealth



Note: flags signify the Champion  
countries for each of the 10  
Action Groups.



Commonwealth Blue Charter All Champions Meeting, 27–30 March 2023, Ottawa, Canada

The Commonwealth Secretariat has amplified national ocean action and is working to support Action Groups to scale action by building partnerships, closing the funding gap, training ocean leaders and empowering collective solutions. All countries that participated in the Commonwealth Ocean Action Survey reported that the Commonwealth Blue Charter helped to progress ocean policy or legislation and the majority reported that the Commonwealth Blue Charter allowed them to better interact with external partners.



## Clean Ocean Alliance



**54** countries have taken some form of action to address marine plastic pollution

**54** countries have taken steps to reduce avoidable single-use plastic waste

**26** countries have instituted a ban on single-use plastic carrier bags

## Coral Reef Protection and Restoration



**35** countries have protected coral reef habitats

**10** countries or territories have protected over 40% of their coral reefs

Coral reef restoration activities are underway in **18** countries

## Mangrove Ecosystems



**39** Commonwealth countries are restoring their mangroves

**15** countries have protected at least half of their mangrove stands

**35** countries have Ramsar protected sites that include mangroves

## Marine Protected Areas



Commonwealth countries are responsible for approximately **42%** of all MPAs

**31** countries with MPAs have undertaken assessments of management effectiveness

**28** countries have made SDG14 voluntary commitments relating to MPAs

**40** countries are now committed to the 30x30 target of protecting 30% of MPAs by 2030

## Ocean Acidification



**34** countries are represented on the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network

**55%** of reporting countries have or are planning ocean acidification policy/legislation

Policy handbook launched to empower policymakers to act on ocean acidification

## Ocean and Climate Change



**38** countries have referenced Blue Carbon in their NDCs

**16** countries/territories are signatories to the 'Because the Ocean' and/or Ocean Pathway Declarations

**37** countries mention the ocean in their NDCs



## Ocean Observation

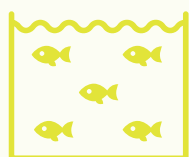


**1,570** Argo floats purchased and deployed by Commonwealth countries

**16** countries trained to use R software to analyse and interpret ocean observation data

**5** innovative GEM-in-Box kids developed for local cost nutrient pollution monitoring

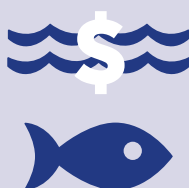
## Sustainable Aquaculture



New MoU signed to establish a **Blue Charter Centre of Excellence** in Cyprus

**21** courses available on the updated Commonwealth training database related to sustainable aquaculture

## Sustainable Blue Economy



**29** countries have implemented or are preparing marine spatial planning initiatives

**33** countries have some form of Blue Economy initiative underway

**8** countries have committed to sustainably managing 100% of their marine waters by 2025

## Sustainable Coastal Fisheries



**26** countries have NPOAs for sharks, sea birds or turtles

**27** countries are parties to the Port States Measures Agreement

**38** countries have made SDG14 voluntary commitments relating to fisheries

## Gender and Ocean Science

**1** new toolkit launched and **3** new events held to highlight women in marine science

## Youth in Ocean Science

At least **20** countries distributing *Message in a Bottle* children's book

**800,000** youths participating in the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge

More than **80** youth involved in the Ocean Youth Working Group



# Introduction

The world's ocean is essential to life on our planet. Billions of people depend on it for their livelihoods, yet human activity is increasingly putting the health of this crucial natural resource in peril. These are not challenges that any single country can solve alone. Covering over one-third (36 per cent) of the global ocean under national jurisdiction, the Commonwealth community is uniquely well-positioned to tackle urgent ocean challenges together.

In April 2018, the Commonwealth Blue Charter was adopted by member countries to guide co-operative action on ocean issues, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 'Life Below Water' to 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'. The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Oceans commended the 'wave of ocean action' initiated by the Commonwealth Blue Charter, which reflects the six strategies underpinning the roadmap for using the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.<sup>2</sup>

The Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC) programme has four 'pillars' that enable and empower Commonwealth governments, via:

1. community building – through convening, capacity building and government engagement;
2. project support and technical assistance – through financing, expertise and partnerships;
3. implementation of international agreements and policies of high impact – through effective, and selective, advocacy and scaled-up pan-Commonwealth solutions; and
4. resource mobilisation for external activities (for example, through the Blue Charter Incubator) and internal activities.

These pillars are complementary and are achieved by taking a collaborative approach.

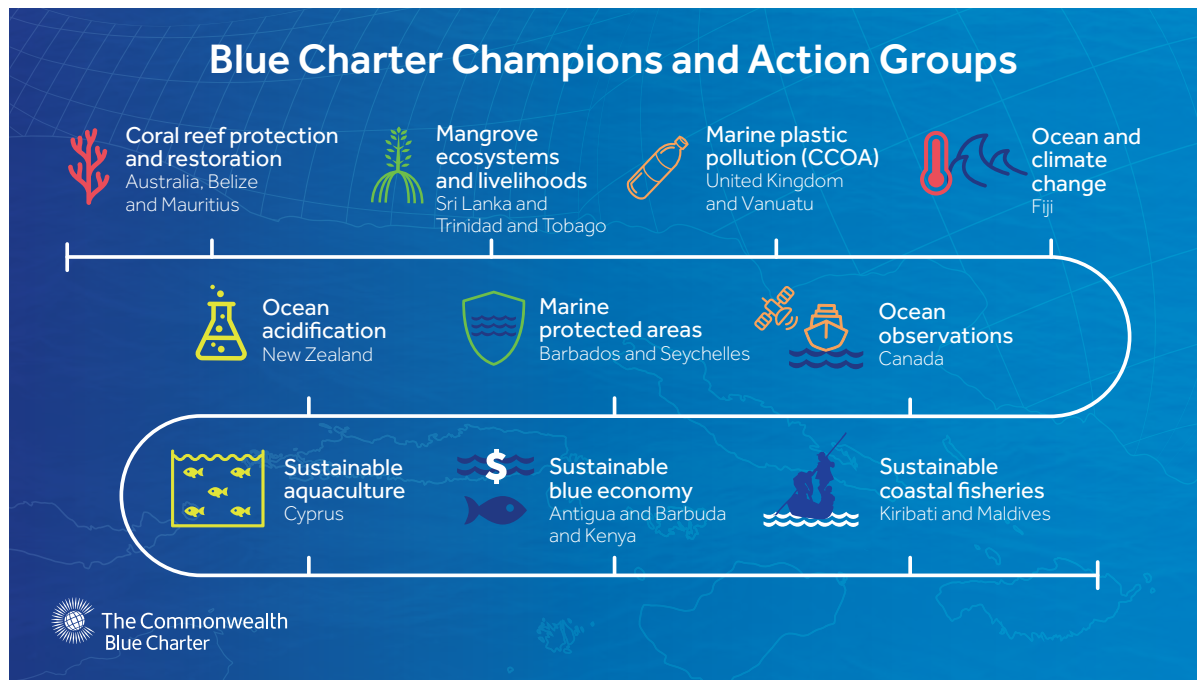
In the words of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC:

*'The Commonwealth Blue Charter is undoubtedly changing the pace of global efforts on ocean conservation, unlocking the power of 56 nations on what is clearly one of the most pressing causes of our time.'*

The Blue Charter mandate was reaffirmed at CHOGM 2022, where Heads noted the 'critical role of the ocean in mitigating and adapting to climate change, and supporting sustainable blue economies for resilient economic recovery'.<sup>3</sup> The Heads of Government acknowledged the progress made by the CBC Action Groups and the value of those groups in advancing progress towards SDG14.

Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups are member driven, led by Commonwealth Blue Charter 'Champion' countries. Through working together, Action Groups seek to unlock the experiences and knowledge of their member countries and partners. So far, 17 countries have stepped forward to be co-Champions on 10 topics:

- Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance
- Coral Reef Protection and Restoration



- Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods
- Marine Protected Areas
- Ocean Acidification
- Ocean and Climate Change
- Ocean Observation
- Sustainable Aquaculture
- Sustainable Blue Economy
- Sustainable Coastal Fisheries

These 10 Action Groups have been setting priorities and developing their individual Plans of Action, which reflect their regional needs and resource requirements.

Further to this, the reporting period saw the establishment of two Working Groups:

- Blue Finance
- Ocean Youth.


This report serves as a snapshot compilation of activities under the 10 Action Groups and two Working Groups, in the context of wider ocean action within the Commonwealth, with the aim of highlighting the impact of the Commonwealth Blue Charter over the past two years. This report summarises activities and achievements of the Commonwealth Blue Charter in terms of progress to date, what has been learned and priorities moving forward.

# Methodology

Covering the reporting period 2022–2024, this report primarily draws upon seven sources of data and information, supplemented with further literature review:

- Desktop-based research on ocean action by Commonwealth countries
- Commonwealth Blue Charter summary of experiences to date
- Documentation on the Blue Charter Project Incubator
- Commonwealth Blue Charter news stories
- Commonwealth Blue Charter newsletters
- Commonwealth countries 30x30 analysis
- National responses to the annual Commonwealth self-reporting survey on ocean action





# Sea Change Harnessing the Momentum behind the Blue Charter

The Commonwealth Heads of Government have called for ambitious, co-ordinated pan-Commonwealth action to address ocean issues.<sup>4</sup> The Commonwealth Blue Charter fills a particular gap in current global efforts, providing a practical means by which states can work together to meet their shared ambitions, transforming high-level commitments into actual 'on-the-water' realities.

## Commonwealth Secretariat's support







The Commonwealth Secretariat has been essential in supporting the progress of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, helping member countries enhance their ocean governance through a 'four-pillar' approach that enables and empowers Commonwealth governments, as described below.

### **Pillar 1: Community building through convening, capacity building and government engagement**

The Secretariat has continued to convene key stakeholders through a series of targeted meetings, webinars and training sessions. Between 2022 and 2024, over 141 officials from 41 Commonwealth countries and territories participated in four specialised training courses, bringing the total number of courses hosted by the Commonwealth Blue Charter to 15. These sessions covered critical areas such as Marine Protected Area (MPA) implementation, sustainable aquaculture and Blue Economy development. These courses are part of the Secretariat's broader capacity-building strategy, designed to equip member states with the necessary skills and knowledge to tackle complex ocean governance challenges.

The Secretariat also hosted 15 expert webinars, each attended by an average of 120 participants, which brings the total number of expert webinars hosted by the Commonwealth Blue Charter to 20. These webinars have contributed to the exchange of knowledge and the enhancement of collaborative efforts among member states. The topics covered in these sessions range from sustainable ocean financing to the integration of gender perspectives in ocean governance, reflecting the diverse and evolving needs of Commonwealth countries.

**Table 1.1: Specialised training courses hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat**

	Action Group/topic	Course title
	Policy and Negotiations	Science Policy Interaction
		Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
		Project Proposal Development
		Treaty Negotiations
	Sustainable Aquaculture	Effective Governance of Sustainable Aquaculture
	Mangrove Ecosystems	Mangrove Mapping – Training for Technicians
		Mangrove Mapping – Training for Managers
	Coral Reef Protection and Restoration	Coral Reef Mapping – Training for Technicians
		Coral Reef Mapping – Training for Managers
	Sustainable Blue Economy	Policy considerations when developing a sustainable blue economy
	Sustainable Coastal Fisheries	Mapping for Effective Compliance in Coastal Fisheries
	Marine Protected Areas	Marine Protected Areas
	Ocean Acidification	Addressing impacts of ocean acidification through mitigation, monitoring and policy
	Ocean Observation	Using R
		Using R to analyse and interpret ocean observational data

## Case Study 1: ORRAA

The Commonwealth Blue Charter, along with several other leading bodies in the conservation space joined the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA). The Alliance connects the finance and insurance sectors, governments, non-profits, and other stakeholders to drive investment into ocean-focused, nature-based solutions. This partnership led to a high-level panel discussion to highlight new and emerging finance options for ocean conservation during COP28 and the subsequent Commonwealth Blue Charter Blue Finance Working Group post the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in 2024.



**Table 1.2: Webinars hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat, 2020–2024**

<b>2024</b>	Blue Dialogues: NDCs Go Blue – Ocean-Driven Climate Commitments
	Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear: Challenges and Solutions
	Blue Dialogues: National Action Plans to End Plastic Pollution
	Blue Dialogues: Ocean-Based Debt-for-Nature Swaps in the Commonwealth
	World Creativity and Innovation Day: Building Creative and Innovative Skills
	Seagrass Day: Sustaining Our Oceans, Combatting Climate Change (Ocean Youth Working Group)
	Investing in Women Making Waves in the Indo-Pacific Region
	World Ocean Day 2024 – Empowering Waves event at Marlborough House
	From Policy to Practice – Marine Action Partnership and Sustainable Coastal Fisheries Management
<b>2023</b>	Empowering Future Stewards: Commonwealth Youth for Ocean Science, Policy and Advocacy
	She's Making Waves – Celebrating Women in Ocean Advocacy, Science and the Blue Economy
	Blue Dialogues: Confronting Fisher Mortality: The Human Dimension of Ocean Governance
<b>2022</b>	Breaking the Blue Bias: Celebrating an Sharing the Experiences of Ocean Experts
	World Ocean Day 2022: Marine Protected Areas in the 21st Century
	Unleashing Climate Finance for Blue Economies: Approaches and Best Practices
<b>2021</b>	World Ocean Day 2021: The Blue Reset – Building Resilient and Equitable Ocean-Based Economies
	Argo: A Global Fleet of Robotic Floats to Monitor Ocean Climate Change and Health
<b>2020</b>	The Blue View: Opportunities and Challenges for the Blue Economy
	The Rising Blue Dollar: Sustainable Ocean Financing for Marine Conservation
	Commonwealth Blue Charter: Unlocking the Wealth of Mangrove Ecosystems

### Allen Coral Atlas partnership

This partnership involves the use of cutting-edge mapping technology to plot coral reefs in Commonwealth countries.<sup>37</sup> This mapping and monitoring by Allen Coral Atlas uses various sources of data to generate multiple information sources, including detailed maps, monitoring, images and notifications. It also supports the implementation of reef and ecosystem planning, as well as adding to information that can be used to help with governance, evaluation and management activities in Commonwealth countries.

## Pillar 2: Project support and technical assistance, through financing, expertise and partnerships

Building partnerships has been a fundamental strategy in the Secretariat's efforts to advance the goals of the Blue Charter. Strategic collaborations have taken place with organisations such as the following.

## Commonwealth Blue Charter Partnerships



Arizona State University,  
Allen Coral Atlas



Bloomberg  
Philanthropies



Cyprus Marine and  
Maritime Institute



eXXpedition



International Coral Reef  
Initiative



International  
Partnership for Blue  
Carbon



Nekton Foundation



Ocean Risk and  
Resilience Action  
Alliance



Vulcan Inc.



International Maritime  
Organization



UN Trade and  
Development



Blue Marine Foundation

## Pillar 3: Implementation of international agreements and policies of high impact, through effective, and selective, advocacy and scaled-up pan-Commonwealth solutions

The reporting period covered two rounds of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) conferences, COP27 and COP28. During both events, the Commonwealth Blue Charter held a number of side events. These included the following.

### COP27

- Building resilience through blue carbon ecosystems for coastal communities.
- Corals and climate; the importance of citizen science in their management and restoration.
- International finance opportunities, gaps and challenges in ocean-based climate action towards addressing SDG14.3.
- Intergenerational Dialogue: Youth voices for sustainable oceans and energy.
- CORVI (Climate and Ocean Risk Vulnerability Index): From land to seascapes, building climate resilience for island states and coastal communities.
- The future of blue carbon roundtable.

## Case Study 2: Coral storytelling project 38

The Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Coral Restoration Consortium (CRC), held an event at the UNFCCC COP28 to highlight the importance of storytelling in the management and restoration of coral reef ecosystems. This event also launched the Coral Restoration Consortium's innovative storytelling hub, which aims to raise awareness about coral conservation. The CRC uses storytelling to connect communities, scientists and policy-makers with the critical issues surrounding coral reef conservation. The CRC storytelling hub serves as a platform where individuals and organisations can share their experiences, challenges and successes in coral restoration. The hub was launched in response to the urgent need to protect coral reefs, which are facing unprecedented threats from climate change, pollution and unsustainable fishing practices. By capturing and disseminating stories from around the world, the project aims to inspire action and foster a global community committed to coral conservation. This initiative is part of a broader effort to engage diverse audiences in the conversation about ocean conservation, using the power of personal narratives to drive change. The storytelling hub is not only a repository of stories but also a resource for learning and collaboration, providing insights into best practices and innovative approaches to coral restoration.

### COP28

- Beyond blue carbon: maximising the benefits of coastal wetland NDC commitments for climate, people and nature.
- Blue carbon in focus: Shaping sustainable futures through a blue carbon policy forum.
- Navigating the blue future: Unlocking sustainable finance for Commonwealth's ocean economy.
- Coastal resilience accelerator: Catalysing quick climate action in cities.
- The end of coral reefs? The human stories behind the reefs of the future.
- Accelerating Marine Nature-Based Solutions through Sustainable Ocean Plans.
- In support of OA Action: Leveraging UN Mechanisms for Local OA Adaptation and Resilience.
- Opportunities, tools and challenges towards an inclusive and equitable approach for local and regional adaptation to a rapidly changing ocean.

In April 2024, the Commonwealth Blue Charter convened the inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting (COMM), hosted by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. The goal of COMM was to establish a shared voice for Commonwealth countries on ocean issues. The meeting served to encourage the sharing of experiences, progress, challenges and ambitions in furthering ocean-related agendas and implementing international commitments. The result of this meeting was a roadmap and timeframe for the drafting and adoption of the Commonwealth Ocean Declaration at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October 2024.<sup>5</sup>

The inaugural Commonwealth  
Ocean Ministers Meeting, Cyprus,  
April 2024



In 2024, the Commonwealth Secretariat initiated a new programme to assist members **in accelerating their ratification** of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement. This is an international treaty aimed at protecting and sustainably managing the biodiversity of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction. The BBNJ Agreement focuses on four main areas: marine genetic resources; area-based management tools; environmental impact assessments; and capacity-building and transfer of marine technology. The BBNJ Agreement was adopted in June 2023, with 38 members having since signed the agreement and seven members having ratified it.<sup>6</sup> A capacity needs survey of members was undertaken, and an initial webinar was held in October 2024 to be followed by five further webinars and direct technical assistance to members.

#### Pillar 4: Resource mobilisation for external and internal activities

In response to the critical need for financial resources to support ocean conservation, the Secretariat continues to update its online funding database.<sup>7</sup> Providing access to more than 100 international funding opportunities. This tool has been important in helping countries secure the funding needed to implement their Blue Charter commitments.

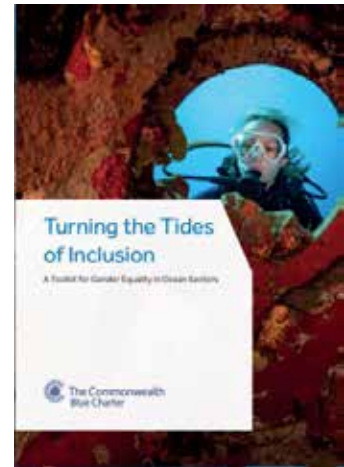
Furthermore, the Blue Charter Project Incubator,<sup>8</sup> established in 2022, supports Commonwealth governments and their partners in developing solutions that address shared ocean issues. While the grants are modest, the scope is large, and can include project-related capacity building, the writing of larger project proposals, 'rapid assessments' and proof-of-concept pilot projects. See details of grants given further below.

Looking ahead, the Commonwealth Secretariat remains committed to supporting member states in achieving their ocean governance goals. Future efforts will focus on scaling successful projects, closing the financing gap for ocean conservation, and ensuring that progress is consistently tracked and reported. By continuing to build capacity, foster partnerships and secure funding, the Secretariat is helping to ensure that the Commonwealth Blue Charter remains a powerful tool for sustainable ocean management across the Commonwealth.

## Gender

The Commonwealth Secretariat has made significant strides in advancing gender equality within the ocean sector, recognising that women play a crucial role in marine conservation, fisheries and ocean governance. This recognition has driven a series of initiatives aimed at promoting gender inclusivity, empowering women and addressing the unique challenges faced by women in ocean-related fields. These efforts are part of a broader commitment by the Commonwealth to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all aspects of environmental and economic governance.

One of the key initiatives launched by the Commonwealth Blue Charter is the *Gender Equality Toolkit for the Ocean Sector*, which was introduced in 2024.<sup>9</sup> This toolkit provides practical guidance for policy-makers, organisations and practitioners on how to incorporate gender considerations into ocean governance and marine resource management. The toolkit addresses a wide range of topics, including gender-sensitive policy-making, capacity building for women in the ocean sector and strategies to promote women's leadership in marine conservation. The toolkit also includes case studies and best practices from across the Commonwealth, highlighting successful initiatives that have effectively integrated gender equality into ocean-related activities.



The event 'Empowering Waves: Celebrating Women in Oceans, Science, Art, Communications and Government on World Oceans Day', June 2024, Marlborough House, London.

The Secretariat's efforts to promote gender equality are also reflected in its celebration of women's contributions to the ocean sector. In 2024, the Secretariat hosted the Commonwealth Women in Ocean Science, Art, Conservation and Policy Discussions event with the Blue Marine Foundation. This event brought together women leaders from across the Commonwealth to share their experiences, challenges and successes.<sup>10</sup> This event highlighted the diverse roles that women play in the ocean sector, from marine scientists and conservationists to policy-makers and artists. It also provided a platform for discussing the barriers that women face and exploring strategies for overcoming these challenges. The event was part of the Secretariat's broader efforts to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality in the ocean sector and to inspire more women to take on leadership roles in this field.

In addition, there have been several gender-based activities throughout the Commonwealth aimed at empowering women in the ocean sector.

Despite the progress made, challenges remain in advancing gender equality in the ocean sector. Women continue to be underrepresented in many areas, particularly in leadership roles and decision-making processes. The Commonwealth Blue Charter is committed to addressing these disparities by continuing to promote gender inclusivity and supporting initiatives that empower women. One of the key strategies moving forward is to expand the reach of the *Gender Equality Toolkit for the Ocean Sector*, ensuring that it is widely adopted by governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector organisations across the Commonwealth. The Secretariat is also exploring new opportunities for collaboration with international organisations, with the goal of scaling up successful gender equality initiatives and sharing best practices globally.

In the broader context of the Commonwealth's work, promoting gender equality in the ocean sector is seen as an integral part of achieving sustainable development. By ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from ocean-related activities, the Commonwealth is helping to build more resilient and inclusive communities.

## Youth empowerment

The Commonwealth Blue Charter launched the Ocean Youth Working Group under the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network<sup>11</sup> in 2023 at COP28.

It is envisaged that the Ocean Youth Working Group will serve as a platform to raise awareness on ocean-climate issues, develop collaborative actions with Commonwealth government programmes and youth-led initiatives and be instrumental in the implementation and design of scalable solutions to meet the targets of SDG14 and CBC Action Groups.

The Ocean Youth Working Group will work with youth across governments, academic institutions, private business, civil society and Commonwealth government agencies to advance shared interests.

### Case Study 3: Empowering future stewards: Commonwealth youth for ocean science, policy and advocacy webinar

As part of International Youth Day in 2023, the Commonwealth Blue Charter convened a webinar. Bringing together several young leaders, it highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change and ecosystem decline on today's youth and future generations, while further highlighting the role that young people play in shaping a sustainable future.



The key objectives of the Ocean Youth Working Group are to:

1. build youth awareness of ocean–climate issues and related international commitments, including SDG14, UNFCCC and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) targets;
2. create global projects that strategically align with the Action Groups under the Commonwealth Blue Charter and ensure the targets of SDG14 are achieved in collaboration with Champion countries;
3. monitor and evaluate the impact of youth-led initiatives under the Blue Charter;
4. act as liaison between the CBC Action Groups, Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN), Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), Champion countries and other stakeholders;
5. identify youth-relevant priority needs and encourage youth participation within the work of the Champion countries in CBC Action Groups;
6. build the capacity of the Ocean Youth Working Group members in Action Groups of Champion countries in CBC to ensure they have the necessary skills to achieve the targets of SDG14 through summits, conferences and workshops;
7. build upon the existing skills and knowledge of youth members within the Working Group to develop youth-oriented solutions to some of the most pressing ocean issues;
8. advise and provide recommendations to the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups and other stakeholders on how to engage young people in the implementation of the Blue Charter; and
9. enhance the visibility of the CBC programme among youth engagement initiatives through the Ocean Youth Working Group.

## Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator

The Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator was established in 2022 with support from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and Bloomberg Philanthropies Vibrant Oceans Initiative. It has provided approximately £300,000 in grants, training and rapid assessments to support innovative ocean projects across the Commonwealth. The following eight member countries have benefitted or are in the process of benefitting from this initiative.

### A roadmap for tackling plastic pollution in Barbados – a rapid assessment using Common Seas' Plastic Drawdown tool

**Amount received:** £50,000, with additional co-funding from Common Seas: £71,000

**Countries involved:** Barbados

**Goal:** To increase technical capacity on plastic pollution and the Blue Economy in Barbados, as well as offer technical and policy support.

**Progress to date:** The Government of Barbados has successfully partnered with the environmental NGO, Common Seas, to address the pressing issue of plastic pollution.

**Future activities:** The project will initiate steps to unlock future investments and will provide valuable input to the UN Expert Group on Plastics Reporting.

### Instrumentation, methods and training for coastal oceanographic observations in under-resourced countries

**Amount received:** £19,000, with additional co-funding from the Tula Foundation: £7,000

**Countries involved:** Organised by Canada

**Goal:** To support travel from developing countries to a Global Eutrophication Monitoring (GEM)-in-a-box workshop that Canada is co-organising with the Tula Foundation.

**Progress to date:** With the objective of finalising the development of low-cost packages for essential observations in coastal water, the workshop also aims to secure funding for pilot equipment boxes and training camps. User-friendly visualisation and data management tools are being developed as part of this initiative.

### Preliminary mangrove carbon stock assessments for Fiji and Sri Lanka

**Amount received:** £47,000

**Countries involved:** Fiji and Sri Lanka

**Goal:** To build a suite of tools for evidence-based decisions around mangrove blue carbon.

**Progress to date:** Researchers from the Smithsonian Institution have been working with Sri Lankan agencies to develop validated habitat maps. In Fiji, existing national mangrove maps are serving as the foundation for their mangrove cover estimates.

**Future activities:** The project is in the process of collating mangrove carbon data to develop a national carbon stock estimate.

### Building ocean climate monitoring technical capacity between youth and leaders on the Swahili Coast

**Amount received:** £50,000, supplemented with £16,000 co-funding

**Countries involved:** Kenya

**Goal:** To empower local communities and promote long-term capacity building in marine monitoring and mapping.

**Progress to date:** A comprehensive marine monitoring and mapping project has begun, involving multiple stakeholders including the Kenyan Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, Environmental Resources and Coastal Marine Management, and others.



**Future activities:** The first phase of the project focuses on identifying youth and leaders for training in three distinct regions. The second phase aims to co-design marine mapping and coral reef monitoring workshops.

### Fishing gear store revolving fund for the Northern Line Islands

**Amount received:** £19,000

**Countries involved:** Kiribati

**Goal:** To make accessible good-quality, legal fishing gear at affordable prices, thereby reducing the use of illegal and otherwise problematic gear.

**Progress to date:** The project is getting in contact with overseas suppliers, offering more attractive pricing options for fishers to fish legally.

### Rapid assessment of policy gaps for sustainable mangrove management in the Niger Delta

**Amount received:** Requested £29,000, supplemented with co-funding of £15,000

**Countries involved:** Nigeria

**Goal:** To provide a summary of the current state of policy and identify areas where training and capacity building may be required. This will help in determining if the voluntary carbon market can support the restoration of mangrove ecosystems in the Niger Delta.

**Progress to date:** The rapid assessment is underway to establish the feasibility of blue carbon crediting projects.

**Future activities:** The future steps involve generating summary documents, identifying areas where training and capacity building is required, and actioning recommendations.

### Investigating rivers as a source of marine plastic litter on Mahé Island

**Amount received:** £37,000, supplemented with co-funding of £24,000 from The Ocean Project

**Countries involved:** Seychelles

**Goal:** To identify the presence, quantity and sources of plastic pollution in seven rivers on Mahé island and to raise awareness among youth and local communities about the consequences of plastic pollution.

**Progress to date:** The programme has begun, and the project team is developing a customised net for micro and meso plastic monitoring.

### Preliminary mangrove carbon stock assessments for Sri Lanka

**Amount received:** £42,000

**Countries involved:** Sri Lanka

**Goal:** To document the population dynamics of marine species associated with blue carbon ecosystems, including bivalves, gastropods and fish.

**Progress to date:** An online knowledge and skills-building module on QGIS, mangrove and seagrass ecology is currently being developed.

**Future activities:** Two training workshops will be conducted, involving 50 participants, to process satellite and drone images for mangrove and seagrass management.

# Waves of Action

## Updates from Blue Charter Action Groups

The Action Group status updates in the following section demonstrate that the Commonwealth is collectively working towards a more equitable and sustainable approach to ocean protection and economic development. The Action Groups, and the Commonwealth community more broadly, have achieved a range of tangible successes on which future efforts will build. Champions of the Action Groups have demonstrated great success and paved the way for other countries by showing the potential for tangible outcomes.



Co-Champions:



United Kingdom



Vanuatu

Number of members: 35; SDG target addressed: 14.1

# Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance

## Action Group achievements

The CCOA ('the Alliance') has ensured continued action on marine plastic pollution through the period 2022–2024, most recently publishing the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance Action Plan.<sup>12</sup> The plan outlines the short-, medium- and long-term priorities for the CCOA and is indicative of the active role the group is taking towards ocean conservation.

In November 2023, the CCOA hosted a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, to raise awareness about the Alliance, its work and progress towards its action plan. The meeting represented a concerted effort by the CCOA to support negotiations and the eventual implementation of a global treaty on plastic pollution. Discussions in the meeting highlighted the critical need to reduce plastic pollution for small island developing states (SIDS).

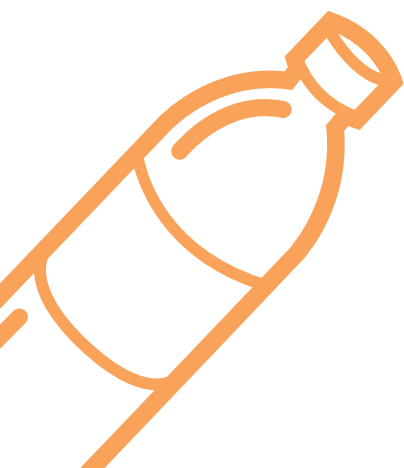
*'As we face the pervasive threat of plastic pollution, the Commonwealth's collaboration is more important than ever. We are here to ensure that we support each other and build capacity to help shape a robust and actionable global treaty.'*

Spokesperson from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs<sup>13</sup>

The Commonwealth Secretariat hosted a series of webinars related to the Action Group's work on the current state of ghost fishing gear globally, the economic and social implications on the Blue Economy, technical and innovative solutions, as well as the role the Global Plastics Treaty will play in existing regulations.

The Commonwealth Litter Programme (CLiP) has already supported several member states to develop Marine Litter Action Plans. In addition, CCOA members are already planning and/or undertaking a range of activities that support the group's vision (to end plastic pollution in the Commonwealth, with the ambition to reduce additional plastic pollution to zero by 2040, protecting human health and the environment from adverse effects of plastic throughout its life cycle) and objectives. These include:

- constructively engaging with the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for an ambitious, international, legally binding instrument on plastic pollution;
- tackling existing plastic pollution and its impact;
- improving monitoring and data gathering, particularly in relation to microplastics;





- raising awareness of plastic pollution issues and solutions, and educating the public, industry and other stakeholders;
- exchanging knowledge and building capacity to address abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear and single-use plastics;
- exchanging knowledge and building capacity to identify suitable alternatives and substitutes for plastic;
- strengthening regulatory authorities and frameworks;
- developing national action plans or strategies; and
- improving infrastructure and support for managing and reducing plastic waste.



**<2%** of plastic pollution is generated by SIDS. Yet they are disproportionately impacted by it<sup>39</sup>

**22%** of plastic waste is mismanaged<sup>40</sup>

**91%** of all plastic is not recycled<sup>41</sup>

## Country updates

### Barbados

Barbados launched its National Action Plan, co-developed with Common Seas in 2024, which aimed at reducing the country's plastic pollution by 73 per cent over the next decade. This plan focuses on banning single-use plastics, improving waste management systems and encouraging the use of reusable products. (This project was supported through the Blue Charter Project Incubator).

### India

India introduced a ban on single-use plastic items such as plastic bags, straws and cutlery starting in July 2022. This effort is part of India's broader initiative to eliminate single-use plastics by 2025.<sup>14</sup>

### United Kingdom

The UK has introduced legislation, which came into full effect in October 2023, under the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) Regulations to phase out the sale of single-use plastics like plastic straws and stirrers.<sup>15</sup>

### Vanuatu

Vanuatu, a co-Champion of the CCOA, has been at the forefront of banning single-use plastics and is now planning to continue its progress in this regard with the implementation of a Product Stewardship Scheme for the collection of beverage containers.<sup>16</sup> The Vanuatu Government aims to have the design of this scheme finalised by the end of 2024.

## Challenges

There are several ongoing challenges to the fight against marine plastic pollution, many of which have been identified by the CCOA and addressed in the Alliance's new action plan. These include the following.

### Lack of waste management infrastructure or struggles with policy implementation and enforcement

Many Commonwealth countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDS) and low-income nations, struggle with inadequate waste management infrastructure. This results in poor waste collection, limited recycling capabilities and uncontrolled dumping, leading to significant amounts of plastic waste entering marine environments. Further to this, countries may have regulations in place but lack effective enforcement mechanisms, meaning that these regulations fail to produce the desired impact.

The CCOA has identified this issue in a new action plan and intends to address it by encouraging members to make available resources and capacity building to support those countries that need assistance. This is particularly regarding waste management systems and monitoring frameworks.

### Public awareness and behaviour change

A significant challenge lies in raising public awareness and changing consumer behaviour regarding plastic use. Shifting public habits requires sustained educational campaigns and alternative solutions, which can be difficult to implement uniformly across diverse regions.



## Transboundary nature of marine plastics

Marine plastic pollution is a global issue that does not respect national boundaries. Its transboundary nature requires strong international co-operation. The CCOA has identified this as an issue and encourages members to support and implement international initiatives. Further to this, the CCOA is actively supporting negotiations towards an international treaty on plastic pollution.

## Priorities and opportunities

In pursuit of its current action plan, the CCOA has identified a number of short-, medium- and long-term priorities. Acknowledging the work and planning that has gone into it, and to ensure alignment, the recommendations and priorities will be a mirror of those in the action plan.

### Short-term priorities

- **Rebuild the CCOA network to strengthen its effectiveness**  
This step involves updating the membership contact list to ensure effective communication and co-ordination, rebuilding the CCOA network, updating the CCOA webpage, and reviewing previous commitments and identifying barriers to achievement.
- **Exchange knowledge on key topics to tackle plastic pollution**  
Currently, this priority is heavily focused on abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and involves arranging knowledge exchanges and dissemination of best practice guidance for tackling the problem, as well as the development of national action plans for tackling plastic pollution.
- **Support constructive and effective engagement in the INC process, including through developing mutual understanding of the texts and the negotiation process**  
This involves training countries to support their engagement in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) process for the plastics treaty, including holding events at INC meetings and undertaking capacity-building webinars on the international legally binding instrument and the negotiation process.
- **Build scientific capacity to tackle plastic pollution**  
This step includes providing capacity-building opportunities, alongside developing models for plastic pollutant dispersion and marine litter detection, with the inclusion of support for sampling to inform future modelling.

### Medium-term priorities

- Shift CCOA's focus to supporting implementation of the international legally binding instrument (on plastic pollution).
- Exchange knowledge on key topics to tackle plastic pollution.
- Capacity building in critical areas for tackling plastic pollution.

### Long-term priorities

- Continued focus on supporting implementation of the instrument.
- Explore opportunities to widen CCOA's focus and connections to other programmes.
- Continue capacity-building and network development activities, which are adapted to the needs of members.

## Co-Champions



Australia



Belize



Mauritius

Number of members: 11; SDG target addressed: 14.2

# Coral Reef Restoration and Protection

## Action Group achievements

The Coral Reef Restoration and Protection Action Group members and Champions have, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, been collating a series of case studies to assist member countries to learn from the actions of others to protect, restore and build resilience of their coral reefs through management actions and policies. Further to this, the Commonwealth Blue Charter has developed an Ocean Training Database,<sup>17</sup> which includes 30 training courses related to coral. In addition, the CBC has created and delivered virtual technical training sessions on the mapping of corals and mangroves.

In 2023, the Commonwealth partnered with the Coral Restoration Consortium (CRC) to launch an online Coral Restoration Storytelling Hub<sup>18</sup> at COP28. The idea behind the CRC hub is to leverage storytelling to raise awareness around coral reefs and the work that is currently going into protecting and restoring those reefs.

## Country updates

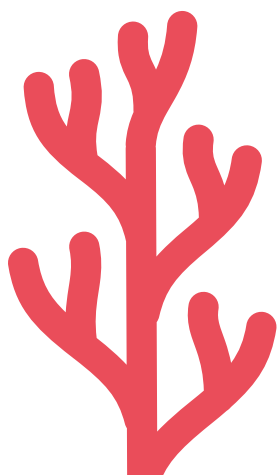
### Australia

Australia has made progress on the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP) – one of the largest investments in science, technology and engineering that includes coral adaptation and acclimatisation, breeding, and recruitment. The RRAP is part of the larger Reef 2050 Plan, which aims to enhance the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef against climate change and other environmental stressors. In 2024, Australia implemented new techniques in coral breeding and transplantation, helping to restore degraded areas of the reef more effectively.<sup>19</sup>

### Belize

The 'Fragments of Hope' project, which has been a cornerstone of Belize's coral restoration efforts, saw further expansion in 2024. This community-led initiative, based in Laughing Bird Caye National Park, focuses on restoring resilient coral species through outplanting and nursery techniques. The project has expanded its on-ground reach in adjacent areas and northern Belize, by restoring additional degraded reef areas and involving more local communities in conservation activities.

Belize published its national reef restoration plan in 2024.<sup>20</sup> This strategy includes scaling up coral nurseries, enhancing herbivory on coral reefs, and integrating coral restoration with broader marine protected area management. The plan emphasises







the importance of involving local stakeholders, including fishers and tourism operators, in restoration efforts to ensure long-term sustainability.<sup>21</sup>

### Maldives

Maldives is currently in the process of developing a new Strategic Action Plan (SAP), which will contain policies that promote resilience-based management. This SAP will also have policies focusing on rehabilitation and restoration of coral reefs. In addition, the establishment of a coral reef restoration practitioners network is underway, with training provided on techniques to speed up reef restoration in Maldives.

### Challenges

While there is significant work ongoing by the Action Group with regards to coral reef restoration and protection, it faces two major challenges.



**>25%** of ocean species live in coral reefs<sup>42</sup>

**>54%** of coral reefs experienced bleaching-level heat stress in 2024<sup>43</sup>

**45%** of the world's coral reefs occur in Commonwealth countries<sup>44</sup>

### Current rising sea temperatures

Members are facing a race against time: while current restoration projects and protection efforts are displaying some success, the rate of coral bleaching events due to rising sea temperatures is accelerating. In 2024, the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) confirmed a fourth global coral bleaching event, the second in the last 10 years.<sup>22</sup> This acceleration is leading to increased time pressures on member states to put into place legislation, policies and strategies that will help ensure some level of reef resilience while longer-term changes are being effected.

### Funding

Despite the growing awareness and commitment to coral reef conservation, many Commonwealth countries, particularly small island developing states, face limitations in financial and technical resources. The high costs associated with large-scale coral restoration projects, such as coral nurseries and outplanting efforts, can be prohibitive. Securing sustained funding for these initiatives remains a significant challenge.

### Priorities and opportunities

Considering the ongoing success of the coral mapping project, the next step in supporting member states with their policy and strategies regarding coral reef restoration and protection is to evaluate the health of the reefs.







## Co-Champions



Sri Lanka



Trinidad and Tobago

Number of members: 14; SDG target addressed: 14.2

# Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods

## Action Group achievements

Several members have put their commitments regarding mangrove conservation forward formally through national policies or plans, and mangrove restoration is being undertaken in at least 38 of the 42 Commonwealth countries that hold mangroves.

At the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in Cyprus, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago announced it was joining forces with the Government of Sri Lanka to co-Champion the Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods Action Group.

## Country updates

### Bangladesh

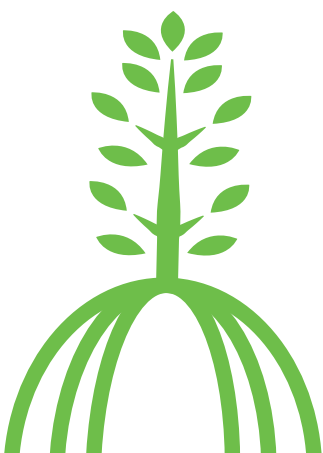
Bangladesh has made significant strides in protecting and restoring its mangrove forests, particularly the Sundarbans, which is the largest mangrove forest in the world. Recent efforts include increasing the enforcement of laws against illegal logging and poaching, as well as implementing sustainable management practices that involve local communities. These actions are vital for maintaining the health of the Sundarbans, which is crucial for protecting the country from cyclones and storm surges.<sup>23</sup>

### Fiji

Fiji has launched several initiatives focused on restoring and protecting its mangrove ecosystems. In 2024, the Fijian Government, in collaboration with local NGOs, implemented new mangrove reforestation projects aimed at increasing coastal resilience against climate change impacts. These projects also provide alternative livelihoods for local communities through eco-tourism and sustainable harvesting of mangrove resources.<sup>24</sup>

### Kenya

Kenya has undertaken significant efforts to restore mangrove forests along its coastline, which are essential for protecting against erosion and supporting marine biodiversity. Recent projects include large-scale replanting efforts, supported by both the government and international partners. Kenya has also focused on incorporating mangrove conservation into its broader climate change adaptation strategies, recognising the role of these ecosystems in carbon sequestration.<sup>25</sup>



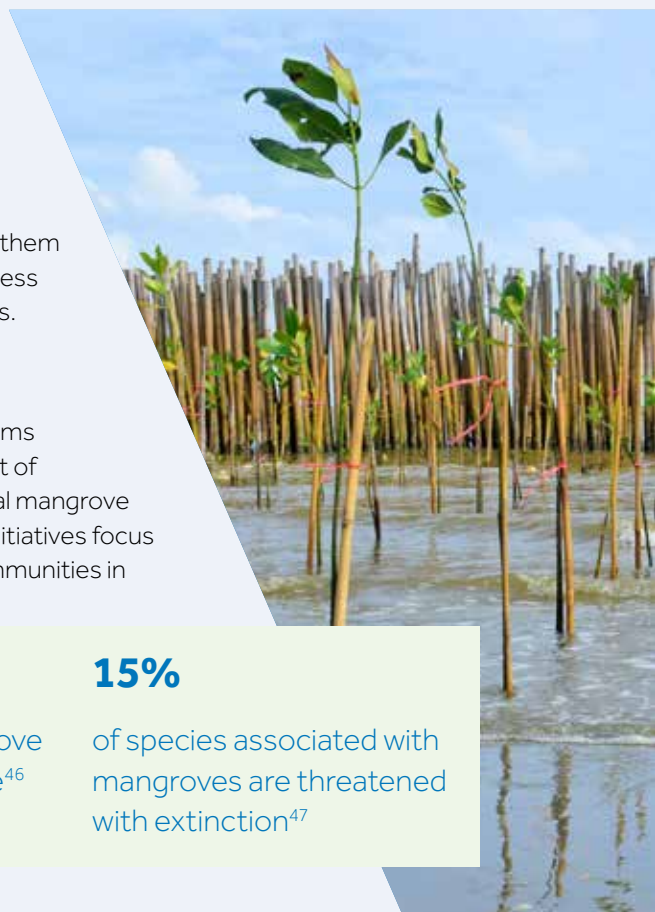


### Seychelles

Seychelles has continued to build on its Blue Economy initiative by enhancing mangrove conservation as part of its broader environmental sustainability goals. Notably, this includes current work on a Blue Carbon Policy, with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat. The country has been working on projects that not only restore mangrove areas but also integrate them into tourism and education programmes, helping to raise awareness and generate income that supports ongoing conservation efforts.

### Sri Lanka

As the co-Champion of the Commonwealth Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods Action Group, Sri Lanka has been at the forefront of mangrove conservation. Recently, Sri Lanka expanded its national mangrove restoration efforts through community-based projects. These initiatives focus on rehabilitating degraded mangrove areas, integrating local communities in



**10x**

more carbon is stored by mangrove forests than terrestrial forests<sup>45</sup>

**1,500**

species rely on mangrove ecosystems to survive<sup>46</sup>

**15%**

of species associated with mangroves are threatened with extinction<sup>47</sup>

the conservation process, and building on Sri Lanka's legislation protecting all its remaining mangroves, which came into effect in 2015. The country has also focused on raising awareness about the importance of mangroves for coastal protection and biodiversity.<sup>26</sup>

## Challenges

### Funding and resource limitations

One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of consistent and adequate funding for mangrove restoration projects. Many Commonwealth countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDS), struggle to secure the financial resources necessary for large-scale restoration efforts. Even when initial funding is available, maintaining long-term financial support for monitoring, management and community involvement remains a significant hurdle.

### Land use conflicts and development pressures

Mangrove ecosystems are often located in areas that are also prime locations for development, such as coastal zones near urban centres or tourism hotspots. The pressure to convert these areas for agriculture, aquaculture or infrastructure development can lead to the unsustainable use and destruction of mangroves. Balancing economic development with environmental conservation is a major challenge, particularly in countries where land use policies may not adequately protect these critical ecosystems. The economic benefit that can result from innovative financing solutions, such as debt-for-nature swaps, can go a long way towards addressing these issues.

### Technical and capacity gaps

Many Commonwealth countries face challenges related to the technical aspects of mangrove restoration, including a lack of expertise, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, and limited access to restoration technologies.

## Priorities, opportunities and next steps for the coming year

Current priorities for most countries with mangrove ecosystems lie in the strengthening of policy frameworks to better facilitate conservation and sustainable use efforts, engaging community members and building local capacity, as well as research and data collection to better inform activities, plan future initiatives and allocate funding.

There is significant opportunity internationally with the growth of blue carbon markets. These markets present an opportunity for countries with significant blue carbon ecosystems, such as mangroves, to leverage these to further development and conservation efforts. This may be particularly the case in SIDS, which up until now have had to play a balancing act between development and conservation.





## Co-Champions



Barbados



Seychelles

Number of members: 20; SDG targets addressed: 14.5 and 14.c

# Marine Protected Areas

## Action Group achievements

Commonwealth countries already conserve around 6,613,358 square kilometres of ocean, which equates to around 30 per cent of all MPAs.

In June 2022, the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted the knowledge exchange event 'World Ocean Day: Marine Protected Areas in the 21st Century: a turquoise tipping point', noting the growing movement to ensure that 30 per cent of marine areas are conserved by 2030 ('target 30x30'). In the Commonwealth, at least 30 countries have committed to 30x30, with five (Australia, Malta, New Zealand, Seychelles and UK) having achieved 30 per cent protection of their respective marine waters already.

## Country updates

### Australia

In 2023, Australia expanded the Macquarie Island Marine Park area by 300 per cent. The park protects tracts of the Southern Ocean to provide migration, feeding and breeding sites for seals, whales, penguins and seabirds.

### Canada

In 2023, an action plan was developed and endorsed for a Great Bear MPA Network. The action plan was developed through collaboration between First Nations, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada. This action plan has identified more than 30,000 square kilometres (sq. km) of new and existing MPAs in the Great Bear Sea. By connecting these areas, it aims to protect sensitive ecosystems, preserve and connect habitats, steward areas of cultural importance, create jobs, adapt to climate change and demonstrate reconciliation.

### Dominica

In November 2023, Dominica declared the world's first sperm whale reserve. It is hoped that the reserve will help address the decline of sperm whales observed between 2008 and 2009. Dominica has more than 50 families of sperm whales in its waters, and these animals are very important to Dominicans. The reserve will see the establishment of a sperm whale reserve office, with staff and rangers, as well as a comprehensive management plan.

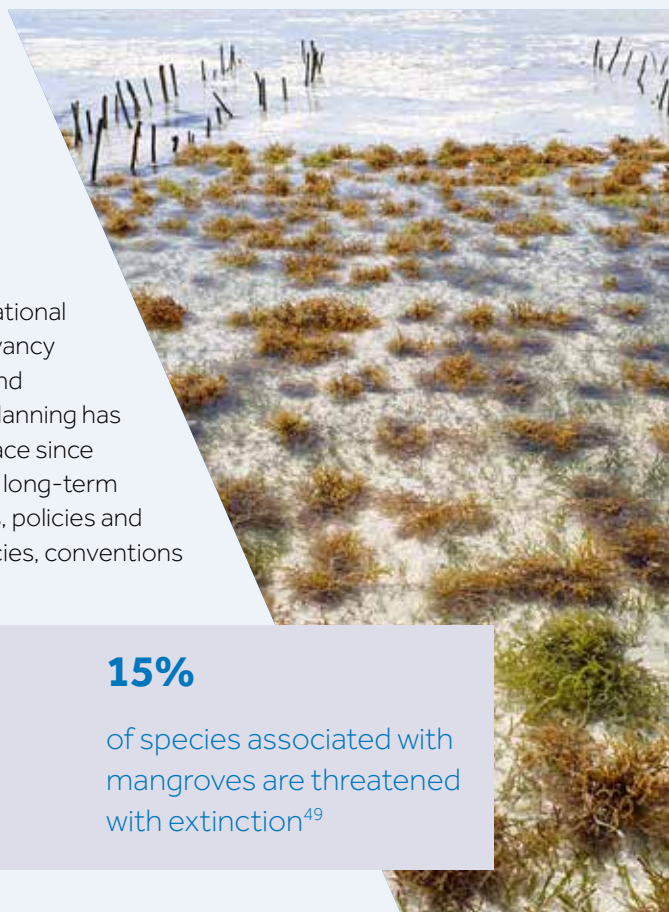






## Seychelles

The Seychelles, a co-Champion of the MPA Action Group alongside Barbados, is one of the countries to have achieved protection of 30 per cent of its marine waters. In 2020, Seychelles legally designated 410,000 sq. km of its ocean as Marine Protection Areas. The Seychelles Protected Area Policy 2013 provides for co-ordination and guidance for the planning, management and assessment of the existing and future set of protected areas in accordance to other national policies, international standards and best practices. The Nature Reserve and Conservancy Act 2022 is the piece of legislation used to designate, classify and manage protected areas of the island nation. Seychelles MPA planning has also been guided by its Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) Initiative, in place since 2014. The initiative focuses on planning for the sustainable and long-term use and health of Seychelles' ocean. It is guided by national laws, policies and priorities, as well as national commitments to international policies, conventions and treaties.<sup>27</sup>



**8.2%**

of the world's ocean is currently protected<sup>48</sup>

**30%**

of all MPAs are in the Commonwealth

**15%**

of species associated with mangroves are threatened with extinction<sup>49</sup>

*'The Seychelles MSP process is key to achieving integrated ocean management. The process has involved an integrated, cross-sectoral, and participatory public process since its inception in 2014.'*

Ashley Dias, Seychelles Director of Biodiversity Conservation, Ministry of Agriculture Climate Change and Environment

## Togo

Togo is in the process of creating its first marine protected area. Since January 2024, regular consultations have been held among stakeholders with the support of the West African Marine Protected Areas Network.

## United Kingdom

The growing movement towards MPA creation and management has been underpinned by commitments to myriad national and international policies and strategies. For example, the UK's Policies on Marine Protected Areas and Highly Protected Marine Areas are key to its Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), published in July 2023.<sup>28</sup> The programme outlines plans to adapt to and mitigate the risks of a warming climate on the marine environment, including to protect, restore and create blue carbon habitats and manage the risks and opportunities to marine species, habitats and fisheries.

## Challenges

There are several challenges that countries must overcome to ensure meaningful progress. These include:

- increasing community and stakeholder engagement, awareness, support and partnerships in the development of MPAs;
- better co-ordination between marine protected area development, fisheries management and other natural resource management initiatives in the marine environment; and
- developing national marine protected area frameworks to assess and report on the effectiveness of the MPAs.

## Priorities and opportunities

Multiple countries are experimenting with novel ways to fund MPAs. For example, Seychelles continues to work on establishing debt-for-nature swaps designed to channel funds into the maintenance and expansion of MPAs. Similarly, Barbados has been developing the infrastructure for debt-for-nature swaps and blue bonds. Advanced market commitments (AMCs) and matching funds have also been identified as innovative financing strategies ideally suited to the advancement of MPAs and marine protection more broadly.

International co-ordination through creative networks will be essential to ensuring the adequacy and effectiveness of MPAs. For example, the West African Marine Protected Areas Network (RAMPAO) has enabled the sharing of technical knowledge on MPAs between its partner countries. The network has also supported countries without existing MPAs, such as Togo, to plan for a future of specialist marine protection.





## Champion



New Zealand

Number of members: 6; SDG target addressed: 14.3

# Ocean Acidification

## Action Group achievements

While there remains progress to be made, the status of ocean acidification in national plans has grown. For example, the United Kingdom's Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), published in July 2023, featured the goal of reducing 'risks to marine species, habitats and fisheries from changing climatic conditions, including ocean acidification and higher water temperatures'.

The Commonwealth is preparing to launch an e-learning course to support the *2022 A Policymakers' Handbook for Addressing the Impacts of Ocean Acidification*,<sup>29</sup> aimed at educating policy-makers on the impacts of ocean acidification and guiding them in developing effective response strategies. The recent UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (Ocean Decade) Action on Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability (OARS) has drawn on the policy-makers handbook as a key resource for its working group on ocean acidification policy, and several Commonwealth member countries are engaged with the working group.

As a result of the Pacific Partnership on Ocean Acidification (PPOA) project, two vulnerability assessments were published: the Pacific Vulnerability Assessment of Pelagic Fisheries and the Ocean Acidification Vulnerability Assessment of Pelagic Fisheries. In addition, ocean acidification information media were published and distributed to local island communities via outreach programming and local language factsheets.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) has assisted Commonwealth member countries with resources and organisational capacities required to understand and tackle the problem of ocean acidification. Through the Global Ocean Acidification – Observing Network (GOA-ON), the IOC has facilitated capacity building and provides essential training in ocean acidification monitoring for many Commonwealth members. This has included offering workshops and resources to enhance local scientific expertise, particularly in small island developing states (SIDS) and African nations. The network has also made efforts to standardise data collection on ocean acidification globally, ensuring that all countries can contribute to and benefit from a comprehensive understanding of ocean acidification.

## Challenges

Monitoring and addressing ocean acidification in remote island settings requires overcoming logistical barriers. Particularly in remote SIDS, moving people and equipment can be both expensive and slow. Another challenge is high turnover rates, which are problematic for capacity-building efforts, as it is common for local talent to be called up to another position or to move abroad to pursue higher education opportunities.



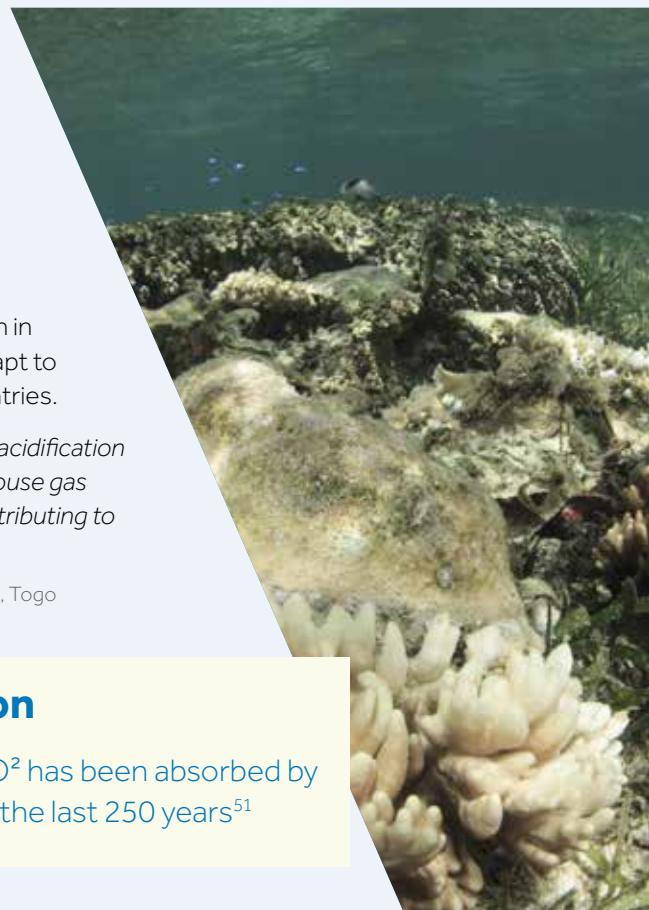


## Priorities and opportunities

All Commonwealth countries are signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the SDGs, thereby committing to protecting the marine environment and combating ocean acidification. While many Commonwealth countries do not explicitly address ocean acidification in national legislation, some do have legislation that can address it indirectly. Leveraging international commitments, and their implementation in national legislation, to develop national action to mitigate and adapt to ocean acidification will be an important next step for several countries.

*'While our national legislation does not directly address ocean acidification as a specific issue, it incorporates measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect marine ecosystems, thus indirectly contributing to the fight against acidification.'*

Komi Loko, Head of Marine and Coastal Environment Protection Section, Togo



**30%**

pH change of ocean water since pre-industrial levels<sup>50</sup>

**560 billion**

tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> has been absorbed by the ocean in the last 250 years<sup>51</sup>



Enhancing the capacity of local scientists and policy-makers to monitor and respond to ocean acidification is a key opportunity. Continued collaboration with international bodies like the IOC and GOA-ON, alongside increased investment in scientific infrastructure, will help to further develop effective, locally driven responses to ocean acidification across the Commonwealth.

There is a potential for further collaboration between the Ocean Acidification Action Group and the Ocean and Climate Change Action Group through the sharing of monitoring data and research, to assist in the development best practices and input into UNFCCC and SDG reporting mechanisms. Together, they can also advocate for integrated policies and funding that support climate resilience, ocean health and sustainable economic development.







## Champion



Number of members: 13; SDG target addressed: 14.2

# Ocean and Climate Change

## Action Group achievements

Fiji, as the lead of the Blue Charter's Ocean and Climate Change Action Group, has been instrumental in highlighting the ocean's role in climate regulation at international forums such as COP27 and COP28.

In November 2023, the Commonwealth Secretariat released '*Blueing' the NDCs: An Updated Review of Ocean-Based Nationally Determined Contributions of Commonwealth Countries*'.<sup>30</sup> The review produced the following overall findings:

- more than 75 per cent of Commonwealth small island developing states (SIDS) have led the mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs;
- of all Commonwealth ocean countries, 59 per cent have mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments in their most recent NDCs; and
- just one-third of developed countries in the Commonwealth have mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments in NDCs.

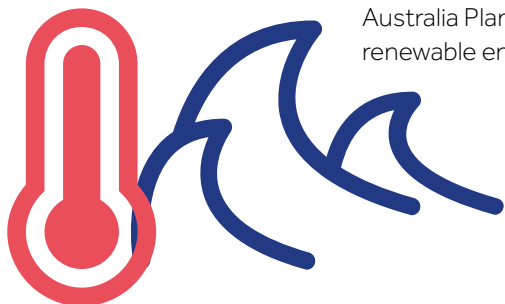
Many Commonwealth members' National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) feature ocean and coastal zone management as key components of their adaptation strategies. For example, Antigua and Barbuda's NAP includes initiatives aimed at enhancing the resilience of marine ecosystems to climate change impacts, such as coral reef protection, sustainable fisheries management and the development of marine protected areas (MPAs).

## Country updates

Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies have been an increasing priority for Commonwealth countries, with growing numbers of stakeholders assigned to the area.

### Australia

Australia's Net Zero Plan (which is currently under development) and Powering Australia Plan (2022) include ocean-based sectors such as shipping and offshore renewable energy.<sup>31</sup>







## Dominica

Dominica is set to become 'the world's first climate-resilient nation'. Much of this is due to institutional and policy reform. Currently, Dominica is setting up a Climate Resilience Execution Agency and the country aims to pass the Climate Resilient Act, which is intended to enhance carbon sequestration and improve climate resilience.

## Fiji

Fiji has launched its National Ocean Policy (NOP), which puts it at the forefront of ocean climate governance and climate commitments. One of the nature-based solutions that Fiji has implemented for coastal resilience that meets NAP and NDC priorities is a nature-based sea walls construction under the Adaptation Fund. This project aims to increase the climate resilience of vulnerable coastal communities through the adoption of nature-based coastal protection measures.



**1.45°C**

average sea temperature rise since pre-industrial levels<sup>52</sup>

**91%**

of excess heat energy trapped as a result of global warming is stored by the ocean<sup>53</sup>

**40%**

of the global rise in sea levels is attributed to global warming<sup>54</sup>

## Challenges

Ensuring all Commonwealth countries mainstream ocean-based actions and commitments is a pressing challenge.

*'Blueing' the NDCs* notes that only 2 per cent of the Green Climate Fund has been allocated to ocean projects and only 1.6 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) supports the ocean economy, resulting in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 being the least funded of the UN SDGs.

## Priorities and opportunities

The Commonwealth Secretariat's *'Blueing' the NDCs* report concludes that there is a significant opportunity in codifying ambitions concerning the ocean–climate nexus in NDCs. Developing plans and actions within NDCs allows them to become an important accountability mechanism and a tool for resource mobilisation.

Updates to NDCs, next due in 2025, provide a significant opportunity for countries to formalise their ocean–climate action commitments. Negotiations at November's COP29 conference will involve the challenge of ensuring the world's oceans feature in discussions on climate finance, loss and damage, and climate adaptation, supporting aligned commitments and realistic target setting.

Directing increased finance towards the ocean–climate nexus will unlock opportunities for innovation in approaches to reforming ocean-based energy, marine transport, climate-critical habitats and other climate-impacting areas of ocean management.





## Champion



Canada

Number of members: 8; SDG target addressed: 14.a

# Ocean Observation

## Action Group achievements

In 2024, the Commonwealth Blue Charter launched a new self-paced course on Using R to Analyse and Interpret Ocean Observational Data<sup>32</sup> in order to increase the use of new technology and make the knowledge on how to analyse ocean data information more broadly available. On the back of this, Canada supplied biogeochemical Argo floats for deployment on a marine science training expedition around Seychelles and Mauritius, in partnership with Monaco Expeditions and CNRS.

The Action Group also launched a new project through the CBC Project Incubator to increase ocean observation capacity through sharing information and knowledge. Canada, as the lead of the Action Group, has championed support for improved data management and better international co-operation. It has also launched a project to support under-resourced countries with training on methods for coastal oceanographic observations.

A project to develop low-cost sensors for measuring nutrient pollution in coastal waters, called Global Eutrophication Monitoring (GEM)-in-a-box, was initiated by Canada, with additional support from Vulcan, under the Blue Charter partnership. This has resulted in several prototype modules being built. The Blue Charter Project Incubator is supporting the provision of training to countries on using these modules, and the development of a Commonwealth network of users. As a result, the Action Group is now a member of the UN Ocean Decade Action on Nutrient Pollution – Global Action Network (NP-GAN).

The Action Group has also been able to support the work of the Ocean Acidification Action Group, through Canada's provision of GOA-ON-in-a-box modules for low-cost ocean acidification monitoring to other Commonwealth members.

## Country updates

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has launched an initiative called the Global Ocean Decade Programme for Blue Carbon (GO-BC). The project goal is to enhance understanding of the ocean–climate nexus and generate new knowledge and solutions around the multiple roles blue carbon ecosystems play for climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience. GO-BC aims to address climate responses comprehensively, while supporting people and biodiversity. It provides a platform and community of experts, bringing together existing initiatives, alliances and programmes to identify, obtain and share data, knowledge and best practices to support the integrity and impact of blue carbon projects.







## Challenges

The Action Group recognises that existing ocean observational data are not fully utilised due to the complex task of analysis, as well as lack of training and tools to fully find and utilise existing ocean observational data. To promote accessibility of ocean observational data, knowledge and best practices, the Action Group is developing several training courses.

Member countries have indicated that fiscal challenges are often an impediment to the development of ocean observational capacity. Grants or funding are frequently available for short-term observational programmes, but observations over longer timescales are often what is most useful to members.

## Priorities and opportunities

In November 2024, the Global Ocean Acidification – Observing Network (GOA-ON), one of the forums that sees the participation of the Ocean Observation Action Group, will hold its Ocean Acidification Week 2024 to exchange information and data among partners, enhance knowledge on ocean acidification, and assess the current impact of ocean acidification.



**Champion**

Cyprus

Number of members: 10; SDG target addressed: 14.7

# Sustainable Aquaculture

## Action Group achievements

Notable achievements include the development and publication of several online training courses relating to sustainable aquaculture. These online courses cover a range of issues, including water chemistry, ethical management of animals, innovative solutions and climate change resilience, and are available on the updated Commonwealth Blue Charter training platform.<sup>33</sup>

## Country updates

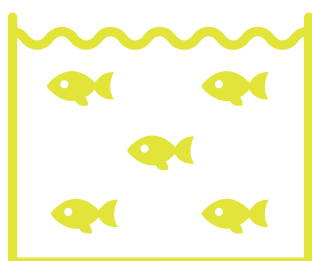
### Cyprus

The Commonwealth and Cyprus have signed a three-year memorandum of understanding to establish a centre of excellence in Larnaca. The centre will take the lead in developing policies with a specific focus on sustainable aquaculture, maritime and marine research, development and innovation in support of Commonwealth island and coastal states. This represents a concrete step to develop better policies and enhance research on maritime resources.

Cyprus is also planning a new infrastructure project around aquaculture, jointly funded with EU Resilience and Recovery Funds. The project will see the construction of a complete collaborative infrastructure equipped to collectively cover the needs of more than 70 per cent of the marine offshore aquaculture units operating in Cyprus. The intention is for this project to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of the overall sector in the country.<sup>34</sup>

### Mauritius

Mauritius' Fisheries Act 2023 provides a legal framework for fish farming and aquaculture development in Mauritius. The Fisheries Act provides for the long-term conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture, while safeguarding marine resources, biodiversity, the environment and ecosystems for the benefit of the people of Mauritius. As such, the Act takes account of international fisheries instruments and international conservation and management measures, ensuring the conduct of responsible fishing, fish farming and aquaculture.<sup>35</sup>







## Togo

With the support of UN Development Programme (UNDP), Togo is implementing a project to enhance and sustain the aquaculture sector in the country. Together, this will add up to 2 billion West African CFA francs that Togo will invest in total in fishing and aquaculture this year. The country is seeking to finance another US\$12 million project to reinforce national production and on entrepreneurship in the sector.

## United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is currently implementing the Ocean Country Partnership Programme – plastic pollution, MPAs and aquaculture (OCP). It is an official development assistance (ODA) programme, which partners bilaterally with ODA-eligible countries to deliver technical assistance and capacity building using marine science to support countries on marine pollution, marine biodiversity and sustainable seafood. The Commonwealth countries directly involved in the project are Bangladesh, Belize, India, Ghana, Maldives, Mozambique, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

**96 million**

metric tonnes of global fish production came from aquaculture in 2023<sup>55</sup>

**US\$313 billion**

is the estimated first sale value of global aquaculture<sup>56</sup>



## Challenges

Despite the positive impact that aquaculture can have on an economy and in terms of providing food to communities, it has the potential to contribute to negative environmental impacts. Some of the well-known risks are disease outbreaks, coastal degradation and unsustainable feeding practices. To tackle these challenges, countries need robust policy and legislative bodies, as well as financial resources.

Small coastal countries and islands face more problems in responding to these challenges and reducing the negative impacts of aquaculture. For example, it has proved difficult to achieve economies of scale. Low population densities in rural areas, compounded by a poor enabling environment – inadequate infrastructure and the distances between small, fragmented markets, the lack of affordable credit, the absence of sound practical information – are among the most common sources of poor sector development.

## Priorities and opportunities

Sustainable aquaculture offers Commonwealth countries an opportunity for economic growth, food security and environmental sustainability. Countries in the Action Group are currently devoting resources to expand national sustainable aquaculture development.

Priorities in this regard are the continued development of policy and legal frameworks, which are serving to facilitate sustainable solutions and encourage economic growth in the sector. There are significant opportunities, particularly through the Commonwealth network, for the sharing of knowledge and experience, which will greatly serve those countries wanting to expand their aquaculture sector.





## Co-Champions



Antigua and Barbuda



Kenya

Number of members: 16; SDG targets addressed: 14.6, 14.7 and 14.c

# Sustainable Blue Economy

## Action Group achievements

The Sustainable Blue Economy Action Group, championed by Antigua and Barbuda and Kenya, is dedicated to developing an integrated approach among Commonwealth member countries to develop the sustainable use of maritime resources.

In 2023, the Action Group held a webinar with the title 'Ocean-based debt-for-nature swaps in the Commonwealth', which explored the innovative financial solutions that have been leveraged by Seychelles, Belize and Barbados. The idea is to create financial debt conversion schemes that allow governments to negotiate with a lender to reduce the cost of their public debt and reallocate the savings to fund local conservation projects instead.

## Country updates

Commonwealth countries are leading the charge towards sustainable blue economies, with Barbados and Seychelles pushing for innovative blue finance models.

### Antigua and Barbuda

In May 2024, at the fourth UN Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS-4), a Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy (COBE) was launched. The COBE is a collaboration between the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the University of the West Indies, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Commonwealth Universities which aims to support the development of regional research and innovation expertise and strengthen institutional capacity in areas related to marine science and the Blue Economy.

### Seychelles

Seychelles is working on a project called 'Seychelles Protected Areas Implementation and Fisheries Reforms'. This project seeks to address key enabling activities that will support the development, implementation and adaptive management of the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan, allowing better management of maritime resources. The country is also working towards improved management of the fisheries sector and better protection of maritime areas.







### Blue Economy rapid assessment in Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago

The Commonwealth Blue Charter recently supported rapid assessments in Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago to identify opportunities for expanding their blue economies. These assessments, supported by UNEP, focused on understanding the current state of ocean-related sectors and identifying areas for sustainable growth.

In **Antigua and Barbuda**, the assessment highlighted the potential for enhancing sustainable tourism and fisheries, while in **Trinidad and Tobago**, the focus was on improving marine spatial planning and governance.

These findings are expected to guide future investments and policy development, helping both countries to sustainably unlock the potential of their ocean resources.

These assessments are crucial for small island developing states, where the Blue Economy represents a significant portion of gross domestic product (GDP) and a vital source of employment. By identifying key opportunities and challenges, the Commonwealth Secretariat is helping these nations to develop strategies that align with global sustainability goals while supporting economic resilience.<sup>57</sup>



Seychelles has also undertaken several activities geared towards the finalisation of its maritime boundaries. To this end, the verification of the baselines from which the maritime zones are calculated was undertaken and the co-ordinates updated as required. In addition, a training project was undertaken to equip the members of the maritime boundary delimitation team with the necessary tools to assist with the delimitation of the outstanding maritime boundary.

## Togo

The current Togo Government Roadmap (2020–2025), through its Axis 2, aims to boost job creation by leveraging the strengths of the economy and affirming the country's position as a logistics and services hub. It includes projects such as enhancing the competitiveness of the logistics sector through port reform and digitalisation, and creating a recreational tourism offer, both of which aim to develop the Blue Economy.

Additionally, Togo has developed its National Strategy for the Sea and the Coast 2023–2030.

## Challenges

Despite the potential positive economic impact that investing in the Blue Economy can have, current domestic financial resources, especially for SIDS, are often insufficient to implement activities as planned.

The degradation of marine resources is one of the key challenges faced by coastal states. Their preservation requires the creation of protected marine areas, a policy for fisheries management, as well as law enforcement.

Broader challenges pertain to the need for greater levels of international co-operation among coastal states. Development of a national Blue Economy needs to be driven by national governance frameworks. However, the marine environment extends beyond national boundaries, and Blue Economy activities in one nation can impact neighbouring nations. Many ocean resources, such as migratory fish stocks or marine genetic resources (MGR), can move between jurisdictions. It is necessary to develop co-operation between different states' jurisdictions to mitigate potential conflicts.

## Priorities and opportunities

There is a great opportunity for Commonwealth countries that already have frameworks to manage individual sectors or the Blue Economy as a whole, to share their expertise to help other nations develop, or improve, their national frameworks as appropriate.





## Co-Champions



Kiribati



Maldives

Number of members: 7; SDG targets addressed: 14.4 and 14.b

# Sustainable Coastal Fisheries

## Action Group achievements

The Sustainable Coastal Fisheries Action Group has been key in advancing the sustainable management of fisheries within the Commonwealth. Its initiatives have centred on strengthening legal frameworks, refining management practices, and enhancing the ability of member states to effectively manage their coastal resources.

The Action Group has effectively fostered collaboration among Commonwealth countries, leading to the formation of networks dedicated to sustainable fisheries management. These networks have supported the sharing of best practices and the development of joint initiatives. For example, the Commonwealth's collaboration with the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA) has enabled member states like Kiribati and Sri Lanka to conduct climate and ocean risk assessments that inform fisheries management strategies. These assessments are essential for understanding how climate change affects coastal fisheries and for developing strategies to adapt.

Further to this, the Action Group has convened numerous meetings to discuss progress and challenges in sustainable fisheries management. Key meetings include the 'Blue Dialogues: From Policy to Practice' held in July 2024, which focused on sharing best practices in coastal fisheries management. These meetings have provided a platform for member states to engage with experts, policy-makers and practitioners, promoting a collaborative approach to addressing the challenges facing coastal fisheries.

## Country updates

### Australia

In Australia, regular stock assessments have become a fundamental component of fisheries management, ensuring that fishery practices remain sustainable and the nation's marine biodiversity is protected. These efforts follow Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, which guides the country's approach to sustainable fisheries management. Further to this, Australia has implemented the Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy, which underwent national review in 2023, and Bycatch Policies (which are continuing to be developed) to ensure sustainable fishing practices. These policies set out guidelines for managing fish stocks, minimising bycatch and protecting marine







biodiversity. Australia has also expanded its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) to safeguard critical habitats essential for the sustainability of fisheries and the maintenance of biodiversity.

### Canada

Canada has made significant efforts through its Sustainable Fisheries Framework (SFF), which includes policies and tools designed to support sustainable fishing practices. The framework is based on principles of ecosystem-based management, ensuring that fishing activities do not compromise the health of marine ecosystems. Additionally, Canada has been active in promoting Indigenous co-management of fisheries, recognising the traditional knowledge and rights of Indigenous communities in managing fish stocks sustainably.

### Seychelles

Seychelles has made significant strides through the implementation of its Marine Spatial Plan (MSP), which includes comprehensive strategies for sustainable fisheries management within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).



## Togo

Togo is advancing its National Aquaculture Development Strategy, supported by its 2016 Fisheries and Aquaculture Law, to enhance sustainable fisheries and aquaculture practices. This includes the implementation of new fisheries regulations in the country in 2023.

## Challenges

Despite the progress made, challenges remain. Limited resources and funding gaps have hindered the full implementation of sustainable fisheries management practices in some countries – for example, preventing them from conducting regular stock assessments, which is a critical component of effective fisheries management. Additionally, there is a need for more comprehensive data collection and monitoring to inform management decisions.

## Priorities and opportunities

Looking forward, there are significant opportunities to build on the successes of the Sustainable Coastal Fisheries Action Group. Enhanced collaboration between member states and increased engagement with international partners can help bridge funding gaps and provide the resources needed to overcome existing challenges. The upcoming meetings and webinars will provide a platform for countries to share experiences and explore new opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, the potential for securing new funding sources, particularly through partnerships with philanthropic organisations, presents an opportunity to scale successful initiatives and implement new projects that further the goals of sustainable fisheries management.

The commitments made by the Action Group have centred around enhancing the sustainability of coastal fisheries through targeted initiatives and policy reforms.

The Action Group has also committed to increasing its efforts to train fisheries managers in best practices for compliance and enforcement.

Looking ahead, the Sustainable Coastal Fisheries Action Group has planned a further series of meetings. These include follow-up webinars focused on the implementation of sustainable fisheries practices and in-person workshops aimed at building the technical capacity of fisheries managers. These meetings remain essential platforms for exchanging knowledge and solving problems collaboratively among member states.

The Action Group plans to deepen its engagement with stakeholders, particularly in the private sector and local communities. This will include partnerships with international organisations such as Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Stimson Centre, which have already supported several successful initiatives. Future engagement efforts will focus on integrating local knowledge and practices into national fisheries management strategies, ensuring that these strategies are both effective and culturally relevant.





# Discussion

# Taking Stock and Charting the Course

## Taking stock

The Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC) has been a driving force in advancing ocean sustainability across the Commonwealth. Through its Action Groups and Working Groups, the CBC has facilitated internationally leading ocean initiatives. In many cases, Commonwealth countries are contributing more than their share with regard to ocean action, as highlighted throughout this report.

The CBC has been instrumental in supporting these actions through the facilitation of training, establishing Working Groups, and by providing access to funding and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

Action Group Champions have shown leadership in driving priorities within their respective areas. They have showcased the possibility for rapid, tangible results within each Action Group, with sustained drive towards Action Group priorities. A clear example of this is the updated action plan published by the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance.

In addition to the individual Action Group achievements highlighted throughout this report, many countries are implementing significant programmes across multiple Action Group themes.

Further to this, continued growth and focus on youth and gender within CBC work has been made. Notable progress in this regard includes the launch of the new *Turning the Tides* toolkit<sup>36</sup> and the establishment of the new Ocean Youth Working Group.

Another recent step forward has been the establishment of the Blue Finance Working Group. The work was established at the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in April 2024 to provide a collaborative platform between Commonwealth member countries, partner organisations and the Commonwealth Secretariat, with

the ultimate aim of exploring and enabling key financial aspects crucial to fostering a sustainable and regenerative Blue Economy in Commonwealth countries. The group will do so by focusing on four key objectives.

1. Accessing new financial pathways.
2. Developing a high-quality pipeline of bankable projects.
3. Building enabling frameworks.
4. Encouraging stakeholder engagement and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Small island developing states (SIDS) and low-lying countries are among the most vulnerable countries when it comes to ocean-related issues. It is therefore heartening to see the exceptional progress these members are making. The Commonwealth Blue Charter is well situated to continue to provide support to these countries, facilitating meaningful change and contributing substantially to their development.

## Charting the course

The Commonwealth Blue Charter's mandate was reaffirmed at CHOGM 2022. Since then, significant progress has been made, with delivery of capacity-building and training activities, sharing of knowledge and expertise, and delivering on outcomes around ocean conservation, sustainable use and management.

There remain significant challenges relating to finance, and the establishment of the new Blue Finance Working Group will further serve this need and provide new, innovative strategies.

There is a growing call for political collaboration and co-ordination on ocean-related issues. This is largely due to the transboundary nature of ocean processes. During the inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in 2024, the path was paved for the Commonwealth Ocean Declaration to be agreed upon at CHOGM 2024. This declaration will further serve to strengthen Commonwealth countries' work in ocean governance to the benefit of all.

The CBC Ministerial Steering Committee will take the CBC and Ocean Declaration forward with plans to develop an implementation and monitoring framework to track CBC outcomes and the success of Action Groups and their members.

Looking forward, the next Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting will be held in Kenya.

# Annex: Members of Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups

## Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (Marine Plastics)

UK (Champion), Vanuatu (Champion), Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Cameroon, Canada, Fiji, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Kiribati, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Zambia

## Coral Reef Restoration and Protection

Australia (Champion), Belize (Champion), Mauritius (Champion), The Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, UK

## Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods

Sri Lanka (Champion), Trinidad and Tobago (Champion), Australia, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Maldives, Nigeria, Pakistan, Togo, Vanuatu, UK

## Marine Protected Areas

Barbados (Champion), Seychelles (Champion), Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, Togo, Tonga, UK, Vanuatu

## Ocean Acidification

New Zealand (Champion), Barbados, Malta, Seychelles, Togo, UK

## Ocean and Climate Change

Fiji (Champion), Anguilla (UK), The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Canada, Malta, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, St Vincent and the Grenadines, UK

## Ocean Observation

Canada (Champion), Australia, Barbados, Cyprus, Malta, Sri Lanka, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago

## Sustainable Aquaculture

Cyprus (Champion), Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius, Seychelles, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago

### Sustainable Blue Economy

Antigua and Barbuda (Champion), Kenya (Champion), Anguilla (UK), The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Canada, Guyana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago

### Sustainable Coastal Fisheries

Kiribati (Champion), Maldives (Champion), Australia, Guyana, Malta, Sri Lanka, Togo



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