

**5th United Nations Ocean Forum on trade-related aspects of
Sustainable Development Goal 14: Ocean economy, trade
policy, the climate and development nexus**

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**Commonwealth Secretariat Information Note
for the 5th United Nations Ocean Forum**

by

The Commonwealth Secretariat

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD.

The Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration

Commonwealth countries adopted the [Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration](#) (ACOD) for a One Resilient Common Future at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2024. This declaration sounds a clarion call for the protection and restoration of the ocean in the face of severe climate change and pollution, and it highlights five action areas: sustainable fisheries, marine pollution, the ocean-climate change nexus, marine protection and restoration, and the blue economy. The ACOD demonstrates that solving the global ocean emergency is a priority for the Commonwealth.

With regard to **fisheries**, the ACOD commits Commonwealth countries to collectively improving the sustainability of fisheries, including small-scale and artisanal fisheries, and to preventing, deterring and eliminating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, including by:

- enhancing transparency and traceability of fish and fishery products, with certification and traceability systems that meet or exceed best practices with reference to the guidance by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and others;
- managing fisheries and aquaculture with a view to ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of these sectors;
- establishing conservation and management measures informed by the best available scientific evidence, while taking a precautionary approach where scientific information is absent or inadequate; and
- promoting full implementation of the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, FAO Compliance Agreement 1993 and 2009, UN Fish Stocks Agreement and FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.
- Additionally, the Commonwealth Secretariat continue to support member countries in negotiation and ratification of the WTO's Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (FSA).

With regard to **marine pollution**, the ACOD:

- reaffirms a commitment to accelerate action to prevent, significantly reduce and control marine pollution of all kinds;
- recognises the significant threat posed by chemical pollutants;
- notes an ongoing concern that the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale; and
- calls for an effective and ambitious international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter

The ACOD will be implemented through the existing [Commonwealth Blue Charter](#) Action Groups. These action groups are: 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, and Sustainable Coastal Fisheries.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has supported these action groups through the following activities:

- granting £500,000 in CBC Project Incubator grants, including plastic pollution projects in Barbados and Seychelles, and a coastal fisheries project in Kiribati;
- providing knowledge exchanges to over 2,000 participants; including 1 on Aquaculture, 2 on Coastal Fisheries, 3 on Plastic Pollution;

- training 600+ officials from 50 Commonwealth countries; including 2 on Aqua culture and Coastal Fisheries, and 1 on Marine Plastics treaty negotiation.
- developing 15 thematic toolkits; including on Maritime Security and Ship Registries; and
- compiling a database of 100+ online funding profiles providing access to opportunities worth over £126 million.

Many of these actions contribute to, and align with, the recommendations from the 4th Ocean Forum.

Commonwealth Blue Charter Finance Working Group

The need to urgently bridge the gap in ocean finance remains. The recently established Commonwealth Blue Charter Finance Working Group is a collaborative platform bringing together member countries, partners, and experts to address critical challenges in financing ocean governance and sustainable development. The working group is a partnership with the Ocean Risk Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA) and has 14 member countries (Barbados, Canada, Fiji, Grenada, Kenya, Maldives, Malta, Namibia, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom). Focus areas include: enabling frameworks for member countries, blue bonds, ocean guarantees and large-scale project implementation. It provides a vital mechanism for members to engage with blue finance organisations to assist in the development or improvement of financial mechanisms, pilot solutions, share best practices, and attract blue finance opportunities to support impactful projects.

Collaboration between UNCTAD and the Commonwealth on Oceans

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been working with UNCTAD on Oceans related issues like plastic pollution, maritime trade and other related policy areas. The Secretariat regularly partners on the Oceans Forums and both organisations have formalised these working relationships through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2023.

The Evidence-based and Policy Coherent Oceans Economy and Trade Strategies project (2018 – 2021) was implemented by UNCTAD and DOALOS, in cooperation with the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist coastal developing countries, particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in harnessing economic benefits from the sustainable use of marine resources. The initiative addressed challenges such as limited capacity to identify opportunities in ocean-based sectors, lack of stakeholder coordination, trade barriers, and inadequate legal frameworks. By formulating and implementing evidence-based and policy-coherent strategies, the project promoted sustainable trade in ocean-based products and services, aligning with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Going Forward

The Commonwealth Secretariat will continue to assist member countries through:

- Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator projects;
- increasing technical assistance to member countries particularly in the areas of ocean policy, marine transportation policy, and with ratifying and implementing international agreements, such as the UN Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement); and
- strengthening delivery partnerships with other international organisations, the private sector and others.

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