



A Resilient Blue Commonwealth: Building Sustainable Ocean Governance

ARIES Number: 300318-102

Final Report

March 2021



The Commonwealth
Blue Charter

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Blue Charter

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Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Reference	iv
Acronyms and Abbreviations	v
Executive Summary	vi
In numbers: activities and products provided through this grant	vi
Into the future	1
Introduction	3
Implementing the Commonwealth Blue Charter	4
Outcomes	12
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	16
Lessons learnt	17
Sustainability	18
Accompanying Documents	20
Annex 1: Expenditure	21

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Reference

Commonwealth Secretariat (2021) *A Resilient Blue Commonwealth: Building Sustainable Ocean Governance*. Final report to the UK Government regarding financial support provided to the Commonwealth Blue Charter programme. ARIES Number: 300318-102. <https://bluecharter.thecommonwealth.org/>

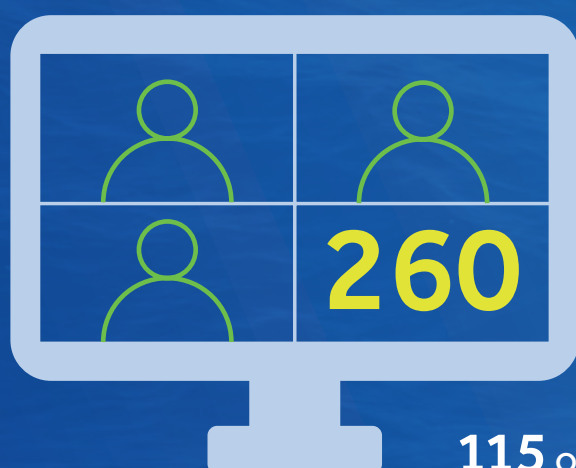
Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
CBC	Commonwealth Blue Charter
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COP	Conference of the Parties
EBR	Extra-Budgetary Resources
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
GGGI	Global Ghost Gear Initiative
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
TOR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA	United States of America

Executive Summary

The **Commonwealth Blue Charter** (CBC) was adopted at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018, reflecting a shared vision of fair, inclusive and sustainable ocean development and protection. This report summarises progress, from February 2018 to December 2020, made possible through the generous support of the Government of the UK. Although this funding has now ended, the CBC programme continues.

In numbers: activities and products provided through this grant



260 officials from **31** countries trained through five courses.

115 online ocean funder profiles in a database to assist Action Groups with funding.

62 case studies illustrating existing good and best practices.

46 of the **54** Commonwealth countries joined one or more of the Action Groups.

16 thematic capacity-building toolkits developed, one for each of the **10** Action Groups plus **6** cross-cutting themes.



15 countries stepped forward to (co-)lead CBC Action Groups.

Into the future

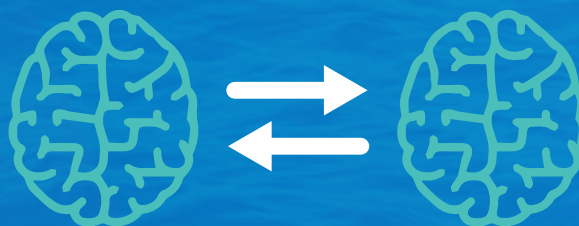
As these numbers illustrate, the CBC has had a very productive beginning, establishing the Action Groups and providing a solid knowledge foundation for each of them. In the coming years, the focus will shift to incubating innovative (pilot) projects and activities fostering cooperation across member countries and Action Groups.



11 short videos: **1** about CBC,
6 Action Group-specific, & **4** case studies.

10 CBC Action Groups established.

5 knowledge exchange webinars,
open to the public.



5 formal
partnerships.



2 monitoring, evaluation and
learning (MEL) assessments.



3 "All Champions"
meetings: **1** in-person
in 2019 and **2** virtual
meetings in 2020.

1 self-paced online training
module.

1 online knowledge exchange
platform established for CBC
members.



Introduction

Commonwealth countries hold more than one-third (35.5 per cent) of all marine waters that come under national jurisdictions, nearly half (45 per cent) of the world's tropical coral reefs and a quarter (25 per cent) of the mangrove forests. Two-thirds of all small island developing states (SIDS) are members of the Commonwealth (25 out of 38).

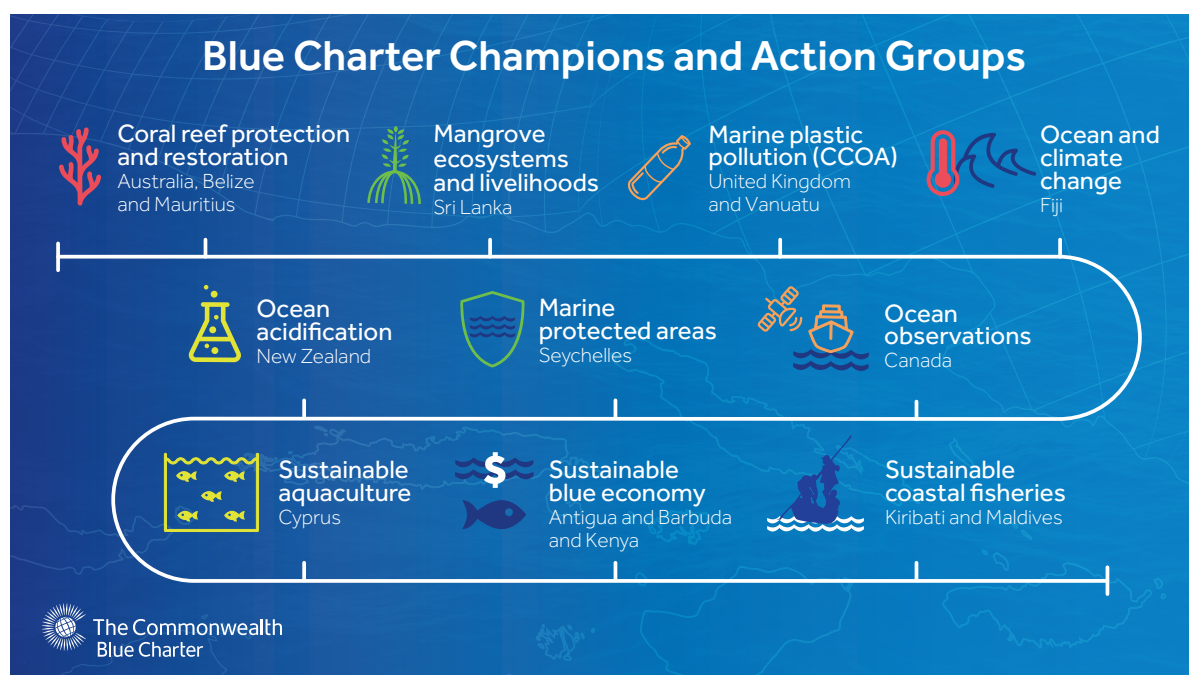
After broad consultations with member countries, including a side-event at the United Nations Ocean Conference in June 2017, the Commonwealth Secretariat began drafting the Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC). Around this time, the UK stepped forward to assist, generously contributing half a million pounds over three years to support the Secretariat's preparations and implementation of the CBC and its Action Groups.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2018, Heads of Government expressed alarm at the deteriorating health of the world's ocean, and named climate change, including sea level rise and acidification, biodiversity loss, overfishing and plastic pollution as some of the most significant threats.

They called for ambitious, coordinated pan-Commonwealth action. Consequently, the CBC was enthusiastically adopted.

The CBC 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 real on-the-water realities.

This report summarises activities and achievements between February 2018 and December 2020, early indicators of success, progress to date, what has been learnt and priorities moving forward. Although this UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) funding and reporting period has now ended, the CBC programme continues.



The Commonwealth Blue Charter is implemented through voluntary Action Groups. To date, 15 countries have stepped forward to (co-)champion 10 Action Groups.

Implementing the Commonwealth Blue Charter

Throughout the genesis of the CBC, the Secretariat has provided a wide range of ocean-related support to Commonwealth member countries:

Initial preparations (before, during and just after CHOGM 2018)

- Commonwealth countries' interest in the CBC at the time of CHOGM 2018 was immediate and beyond expectations.¹ Briefing notes were prepared and shared widely, discussing:
 - The Blue Charter;
 - Roles and responsibilities of Action Group members and "Champion" countries;
 - Frequently asked questions, especially concerning commitment.
- The Secretariat held bilateral conversations with High Commissions and government representatives, as requested.

Assisting Champions

- Once countries had stepped forward to be Champions of Action Groups, the Secretariat assisted them in:
 - Membership outreach (when requested);
 - Meeting preparations; and
 - The creation of Terms of Reference (TORs) and Action Plans.
- As a result, all 10 of the Action Groups have now met and drafted TORs and/or Action Plans.
- 46 Commonwealth countries have joined (or are about to join) one or more of the Action Groups. 3 countries (Barbados, Sri Lanka and Trinidad and Tobago) have joined 7 out of 10 Action Groups.

Establishing a community of Champion countries

- In June 2019, 28 government representatives from (then) 12 Champion countries were introduced to one another and shared experiences through a four-day "All-Champions" meeting in London convened by the Secretariat.
- The 2020 All-Champions meeting, scheduled for March in Cyprus, was postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To keep the Champions in touch and active, the Secretariat hosted two online meetings, in May and November 2020, each across two time zones.
- In addition to these formal All-Champions meetings, we facilitated bilateral/multilateral meetings among some of the champions as requested, to assist in realising their goals and objectives.

Supporting Action Groups when they met

- Secretariat staff attended each of the six Action Groups that convened an in-person meeting before the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat provided remote meeting support for the remaining four Action Groups, which convened virtually.
- The six Champion countries that hosted in-person Action Group meetings were:
 - Coral Reef Protection and Restoration, July 2019 (hosted by Australia, with co-Champions Belize and Mauritius);
 - Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods, October 2019 (hosted by Sri Lanka);
 - Marine Protected Areas, November 2019 (hosted by Seychelles);
 - Ocean Acidification, February 2019 (hosted by New Zealand);

¹ The Secretariat had expected that perhaps five Action Groups would be created around CHOGM. However, countries announced eight Action Groups, with others to follow. Currently, there are 10 Action Groups led/co-led by 15 Champion countries.





The Sustainable Aquaculture Action Group tours a closed-containment facility in Cyprus.

- Ocean Observation, May 2019 (hosted by Canada);
- Sustainable Aquaculture, March 2020 (hosted by Cyprus).
- The remaining four Action Groups, which met virtually in 2020 (often two or three times to accommodate time zones), were:
 - Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, August 2020 (UK and Vanuatu)
 - Ocean and Climate Change, December 2020 (Fiji);
 - Sustainable Blue Economy, November 2020 (Antigua and Barbuda, and Kenya);
 - Sustainable Coastal Fisheries, December 2020 (Kiribati and Maldives).
- Five Action Groups also held a second Action Group meeting virtually during 2020 (again, often across different time zones):
 - Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods, May 2020 (Sri Lanka);
 - Sustainable Aquaculture, April 2020 (Cyprus);
 - Marine Protected Areas, June 2020 (Seychelles);
 - Ocean Acidification, August 2020 (New Zealand);
 - Ocean Observation, July 2020 (Canada).



28 representatives from the Champion countries met at Marlborough House in June 2019 over four days of training, planning and partnership-building.

Building partnerships

- The Secretariat has formally established four Blue Charter Partnerships through signing **four memoranda of understanding (MOUs)**:
 - [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#) ([announced at CHOGM 2018](#)) offers a powerful range of data analytics as well as support from the [Vibrant Oceans](#) initiative.
 - [Nekton Foundation](#) ([announced November 2018](#)) is a scientific research and discovery organisation that has worked closely with Commonwealth

governments to link science with policy through expeditions, and that offers in-country training to young scientists.

- [Vulcan Inc.](#) (announced in the lead-up to [World Oceans Day](#), June 2020) is developing and offering its [Allen Coral Atlas](#) for use by the Blue Charter Action Groups. The Atlas provides high-resolution, up-to-date satellite imagery of the world's coral reefs.
- [eXXpedition](#) (negotiated during this project period, [announced in January 2021](#)) is a not-for-profit organisation that runs all-female sailing research expeditions to investigate the causes of and solutions to ocean plastic pollution.
- **A Partnerships Day** at the 2019 All-Champions week, co-hosted by one of our Partners, Bloomberg Philanthropies, was devoted to introducing Champions to interested partnering organisations. A total of 21 partner organisations made 5-minute "pitches" to the Champion countries on how they could support them.
- **Blue Charter Fellowships:** The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) established a Blue Charter Fellowship programme to tackle marine pollution. The UK's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and supermarket chain Waitrose & Partners funded the awards, and the Secretariat gave support.
 - In its first two years, the Blue Charter Fellowships supported 48 talented young researchers from across the Commonwealth.

Promoting Action Groups, members and partners

- **Establishment of a public website:**
 - For the period between 1 December 2018 and 30 November 2020, the CBC website welcomed 30,043 visitors, visiting 34,219 times and viewing a total of 79,044 pages.
 - The day with the most users (182) and sessions (217) was 8 June 2020 – World Oceans Day – which was the day of our [high-level virtual event](#).

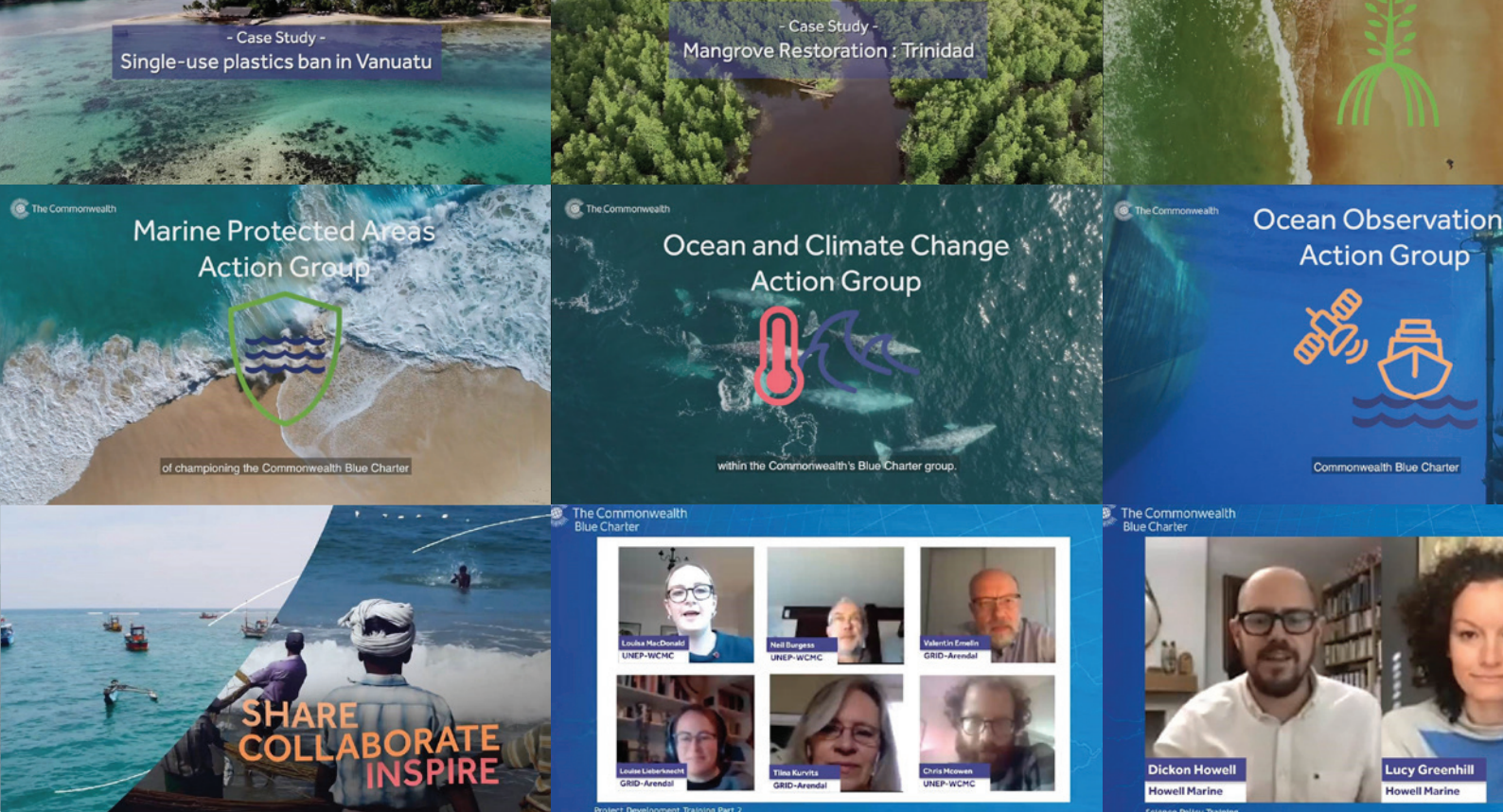
- On average, the CBC website has had a viewing of 2,000 visitors per month.

- **News media:** Between April 2018 and December 2020, the Secretariat produced 59 opinion articles (op-eds), news stories and press releases on the CBC, in addition to regular features and case studies.
- **11 Videos**
 - CBC promotional video (two lengths): Ahead of World Oceans Day 2020 in June, the Secretariat produced two short videos to present the CBC, highlight the main benefits of the programme for member countries, and recap the progress made over the past two years. The main video is approximately 3 minutes long, with a 1-minute version of the same for social media.
 - 6 Action Group videos²: One-minute videos that explain the objectives of the Action Group.
 - 4 case study videos of approximately 2 minutes in duration were selected from the 62 written case studies produced over the past three years. Each video includes footage of country representatives.
- **Sea of Voices user-uploaded videos:**
 - This is an open platform where Commonwealth citizens can send in short videos to celebrate their special relationships with the ocean.
 - More than 25 people from across the Commonwealth have been featured, working, exploring, researching, playing and praying in, on, and next to the sea.

- **Side-events at international fora:**
 - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Second Ocean Forum, July 2018 (Geneva, Switzerland);
 - The 49th Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting, September 2018 (Nauru);
 - United Nations General Assembly, September 2018 and [2019](#) (New York, USA);

the Economy
Group

es

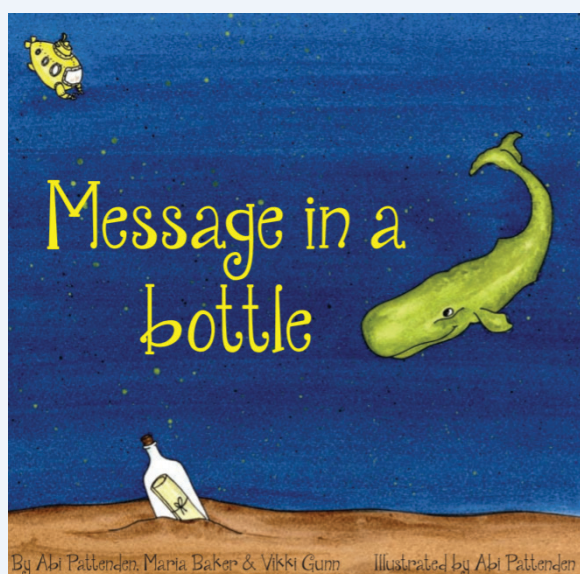


- Two side-events at the Sustainable Blue Economy forum, November 2018 (Kenya), one comprising panel discussions (including an Action Group announcement) and the other a “Blue Fashion” show, highlighting local designs and materials that articulate circular economy principles in the blue economy;
- International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), November 2018 (Monaco);
- An evening reception, in connection with the Oceania Exhibition, December 2018 (London, UK), hosted by the New Zealand High Commission at the Royal Academy of Arts ;
- [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\) 24th Conference of the Parties \(COP24\), December 2018](#) (Katowice, Poland);
- General Assembly of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, July 2019 (Paris, France);
- [First meeting of Ocean Ambassadors](#), August 2019 (Malta);



Four Blue Charter-related MOUs with partners have been signed by the Secretariat. Here, Senior Director Paulo Kautoke is signing with Nekton Foundation's CEO, Oliver Steeds.

- [OceanObs19](#), September 2019 (Hawaii, USA);
- [Our Ocean Conference](#), October 2019 (Oslo, Norway) (this included a high-level meeting to discuss the proposed Blue Charter Action Fund);
- [UNFCCC COP25](#), December 2019 (Madrid, Spain) (this included an Action Group announcement).



The deep-sea creatures have had enough of this rubbish dumped into their gardens and decide to take action.

- **Five quarterly newsletters** with news and announcements.
 - Over the funding period, five newsletters were produced.
 - The fifth CBC quarterly newsletter, published in December 2020, had a total of 334 views, a 30 per cent increase on the fourth quarterly newsletter (August 2020).
- **Message in a Bottle children's book:**
 - In order to educate young children (aged between four and six) about marine litter and its impacts on the marine environment, the Secretariat, with assistance from other organisations, has developed and distributed a children's book *Message in a Bottle* to fourteen countries² at their request.

Sharing good and best practices

- **A knowledge hub/collaborative platform:**³
 - This allows communication across Action Groups and among their members, sharing of documents, plans and projects, and discussion.
 - 257 officials are registered on this password-protected platform.

- **Case studies (62):**
 - 62 examples from around the world highlighting good and best practices have been collated into case studies and are published weekly on the CBC website.
 - 4 case studies have also been developed into video case studies, including footage and perspectives from member countries.
- **Thematic toolkits (16):**
 - There are toolkits for each of the 10 Action Groups, as well as on 6 cross-cutting themes, that reflect the current state of knowledge in each of the thematic areas and recommended training opportunities, as well as knowledge gaps.
 - These documents informed the drafting of Plans of Action by the Action Groups.
 - The six cross-cutting toolkits are on Blue Carbon, Blue Finance, Maritime Security, Ship Registries, Social Sciences and the development of robust Science and Policy Indicators.
- **Knowledge exchange webinars (5):**
 - Moderated by the Secretariat's Ocean Governance Advisers and attended by an average audience of 120 participants per webinar, each webinar recording was summarised into a short video and was shared with CBC members.

² Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Cameroon, Dominica, Fiji, Jamaica, Montserrat, New Zealand, Samoa, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, UK.

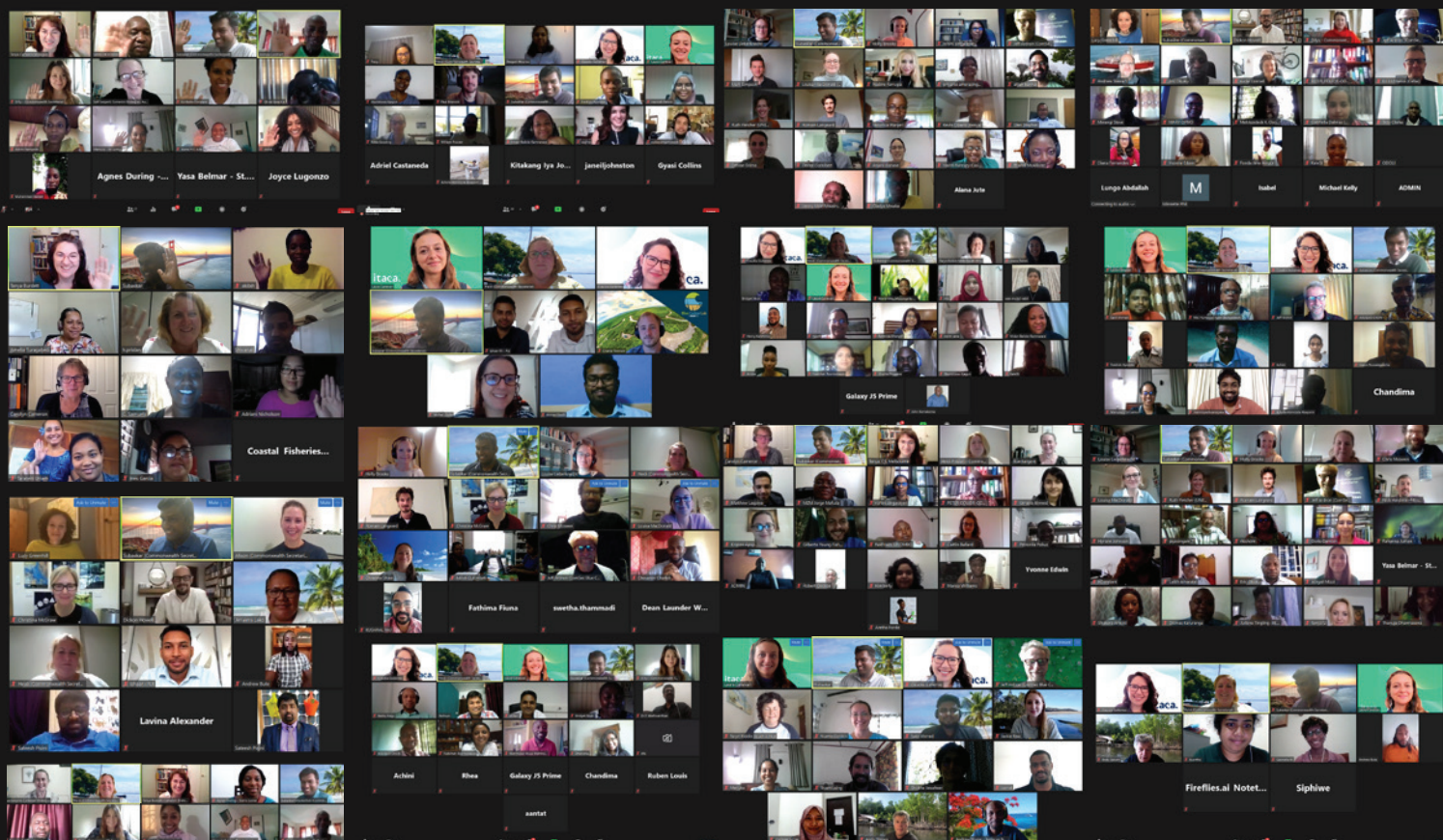
³ Built using Bitrix©

1. [Mapping the Commonwealth One Coral Reef at a Time](#) (World Oceans Day, 8 June 2020) in partnership with Vulcan Inc. included presentations by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the High Commissioner of Maldives to the UK, along with three Action Group Champion countries (Australia, Fiji and Sri Lanka) sharing experiences inventorying and protecting coral reefs.
2. [The Rising Blue Dollar: Sustainable Ocean Financing for Marine Protection](#) (July 2020) in partnership with Blue Finance looked at financing solutions for marine protected areas.
3. [Unlocking the Wealth of Mangrove Ecosystems](#) (July 2020), marking World Mangrove Day, discussed experiences in regenerating these extraordinary ecosystems. The panel included experts from Kenya, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago and the UK.
4. [The Fishing Fields: Sustainable Aquaculture Development Strategies](#) (July 2020) featured fish farming case studies from Cyprus, Egypt, Mozambique and Seychelles, and outlined core factors for success and sustainability.
5. [The Blue View: Opportunities and Challenges for the Blue Economy](#) (August 2020) stressed the need for integrated policy frameworks that help harness wealth opportunities from the ocean in a sustainable way. Expert panellists shared experiences from Kenya, Seychelles and South Africa.





Before the pandemic, Action Groups met face-to-face to set priorities and to learn from one another.



During the pandemic, meetings and training were held remotely.

Developing and delivering five bespoke online training courses

- *Project proposal development* intensive two-day course (twelve hours): The first day looked at good project design, the theory of change and the development of goals, objectives and indicators. The second day saw break-out groups working on concept notes and profiling suitable funders. The course included one-to-one interactions with project development experts and panel discussions with professional fund-raisers.
- *Stakeholder engagement*: Often recommended as good practice, but seldom taught, good stakeholder engagement can “make or break” a marine planning process. Here, experienced practitioners from Australia shared their experiences and recommendations using materials developed over years of hands-on practice.
- *Bridging the science-policy divide*: While scientists are now sometimes taught how to communicate better with policy-makers, the reverse is seldom true. On this course, policy-makers were introduced to the fundamentals of good scientific practices and discussed how these two (sometimes very different) cultures could work better together. Experiences from the UK, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific were shared.
- *Remote sensing of mangroves (for managers) and GIS mapping of mangroves (for technicians)*: These two related courses were specifically requested by countries so they could access assistance in inventorying mangrove assets for national planning (and also as part of reporting Nationally Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC). The technical training was complemented by a non-technical course that explained how remote sensing worked, and why it can be an important tool in meeting national objectives and international reporting requirements.

Outcomes

The indicators, outputs and outcomes of the project per its logical framework (logframe) are presented separately in [Annex 1](#).

In 2020, the Secretariat commissioned two independent monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) assessments. Both note that, while the Action Groups have made positive progress, it is difficult at this early stage to assess fully their longer-term outcomes and impacts.

MEL is further discussed in the next section. Here, we look at early signs of progress as captured by the MEL assessments. The indented text that follows is extracted from the report available as [Annex 4](#). We have added minor clarifications in square brackets [].

"The following examples are early evidence of progress [and good practice] which could be expected to strengthen in the next phase of the Blue Charter's implementation:

- Sri Lanka's (Action Group [Champion] on Mangroves) development and adoption of a *National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilisation of Mangrove Ecosystems*.⁴ As a Champion, Sri Lanka is hoping to share its expertise, noting "within the Action Group, we are trying to encourage other members to look at the possibility of developing a [mangrove] policy so they can use guidance and expert advice from the people involved in Sri Lanka".⁵
- Seychelles (Action Group [Champion] on Marine Protected Areas) announced [last year] that 30% [actually, 32%] of their marine waters have been designated as a marine protected area, beating the global '30 by 2030' voluntary target by a full decade. Seychelles also shared the lessons they had learned from this process with their Action Group to help other members that may wish to emulate them.
- Fiji (Action Group [Champion] on Ocean and Climate Change) developed their first [national] ocean policy which features climate change impacts, cutting across many different marine sectors and ministries. It also outlines how they plan to meet the global voluntary '30 by 2030' marine protection target.
- New Zealand (Action Group [Champion] on Ocean Acidification) are in the process of producing a Commonwealth policymakers' handbook on ocean acidification to be distributed to its members. The handbook will provide policy makers with clear ways to help address ocean acidification at the local level, a need identified during their first Action Group workshop.
- The Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance Action Group co-Championed by the United Kingdom and Vanuatu requires members to make a set of commitments as a condition for joining. As a result, all its members have already taken action by (i) committing to reduce the use of single-use plastic bags by 2021, (ii) implementing a ban on microbeads and rinse off cosmetic products by 2021, and

4 *National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems in Sri Lanka*, Government of Sri Lanka (2020) available at <http://mmde.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/2019/national%20policy%20on%20conservation%20and%20sustainable%20utilization%20of%20mangrove%20ecosystems%20in%20sri%20lanka%20english.pdf>

5 Blue Charter Champion Interview (Country 4)








(iii) taking steps to avoid single use plastics. As co-Champion, Vanuatu has implemented the most stringent plastic import restrictions in the Pacific, and are amongst the most stringent globally.


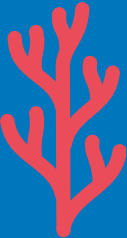

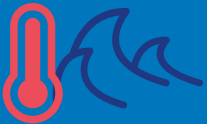
Though some of the Champion countries may have taken these actions regardless of the Blue Charter, there is a reasonable argument that each of the examples listed above benefited from the strong political will and expectations on Champions created at CHOGM 2018 through the Blue Charter Action Group agreement. It can therefore be assumed that the Commonwealth Secretariat contributed to and has helped amplify these positive changes through its ongoing support of the Blue Charter, the Action Groups and their Champions.

Furthermore, whilst the implementation of these actions has been undertaken by a single Champion, discussions between Action Group members have turned to how these efforts can be replicated across the Commonwealth."

In addition to the above-quoted MEL assessment, the Secretariat also hired a researcher to independently assess country-level progress more generally across the Commonwealth. Some of the findings are presented in the table below. However, it must be stressed that *these initial findings have not yet been verified with the individual countries, and are therefore provisional*. The extent to which the CBC and its Action Groups have catalysed and spurred progress is still being researched.

Previous page: mangrove Action Group Champion's focal point Mrs Hasanthi Dissanayake
Above : a selection of the 62 case studies

Theme	Summary of actions
Marine Plastic Pollution 	<p>93% (50) of Commonwealth countries are known to have taken some form of action to address marine plastic pollution, including 46 of the 47 countries with coastlines.</p> <p>Only 5 countries have reached a 30% plastics recycling rate.</p> <p>49% (23) of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have signed up to the UN Environment Clean Seas initiative; this is 37% of the 62 signatory countries.</p> <p>44% (24) of Commonwealth countries have signed the 1996 London Convention; this is 51% of Commonwealth countries with a coastline.</p> <p>7 Commonwealth countries and one UK Overseas Territory are members of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative; this is 47% of the 17 GGGI members.</p> <p>5 Commonwealth countries have signed up to New Plastics Economy Global Commitment.</p>
Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) 	<p>98% of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have one or more MPAs:</p> <p>30% (14) have protected almost 4% or more of their marine waters in MPAs;</p> <p>17% (8) have protected 10% or more of their waters in MPAs;</p> <p>9% (4) have protected 30% or more of their waters in MPAs.</p> <p>7 countries are signatories to the Caribbean Challenge Initiative (20% protected by 2020) but have not met this target.</p> <p>30% (14) of the 47 Commonwealth countries with a coastline have signed one or both of the "30x30" initiatives (30% protected by 2030);⁶ of these, 2 countries have already met this target in their marine waters.</p> <p>54% (25) countries with MPAs have undertaken assessments of management effectiveness (NB: this is a minimum figure).</p> <p>4 countries have registered with the International Union for Conservation of Nature Green List programme.</p> <p>6 countries have an MPA with "Blue Park" status.</p> <p>32% (15) countries have made Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 voluntary commitments relating to MPAs (NB: this is a minimum figure).</p>
Sustainable Coastal Fisheries 	<p>100% (all) of Commonwealth coastal countries have reported at least once on progress with implementing the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing but few have reported regularly.</p> <p>47% (22) of countries with a coastline are making some progress with National Plans of Action for sharks and seabirds, and/or addressing marine turtle by-catch.</p> <p>55% (26) of countries with a coastline are parties to the Agreement on Port State Measures, which is 39% of the total number of parties (66).</p> <p>17% (8) of countries with a coastline have made SDG 14 voluntary commitments relating to fisheries (NB: this is a minimum figure).</p>
Mangroves 	<p>89% (42) of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have mangroves.</p> <p>At least 90% (38) of countries with mangroves have provided some level of protection.</p> <p>38% (16) of countries with mangroves have protected about half or more of their mangroves.</p> <p>79% (33) of countries with mangroves have Ramsar Sites that include mangroves.</p> <p>88% (37) of countries with mangroves have restoration projects.</p> <p>5 countries are members of Mangroves for the Future.</p>

Theme	Summary of actions
Ocean Acidification 	<p>6 countries/territories are members of the Ocean Acidification Alliance.</p> <p>64% (30) of countries with a coastline are represented on the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network.</p>
Coral Reefs 	<p>77% (36) of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have warm water coral reefs.</p> <p>Most (if not all) of these countries have legislation and policies for their protection and management.</p> <p>92% (33) of Commonwealth countries with reefs have protected some coral reef, and 25% (9) have protected over 40%.</p> <p>53% (19) of countries with reefs have restoration underway (minimum figure).</p> <p>86% (31) of countries with reefs have submitted monitoring data for the 2021 Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network report.</p> <p>19% (17) of Commonwealth countries with reefs are members of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI); these make up over one-third of the ICRI membership of 44 countries.</p>
Blue Economy 	<p>43% (20) of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have some form of "blue economy" initiative underway.</p> <p>51% (24) of Commonwealth countries with a coastline have implemented or are preparing Marine Spatial Planning initiatives.</p> <p>12 Commonwealth countries are signatories to the 2018 Jakarta Declaration on the Blue Economy.</p>
Climate Change 	<p>At least 85% (40) of Commonwealth countries with coastlines have blue carbon ecosystems.</p> <p>At least 57% (27) of the Commonwealth countries with coastlines have referenced blue carbon in their Nationally Determined Contributions, in terms of mitigation, adaptation or both.</p> <p>Several countries are implementing blue carbon projects or other ocean/climate initiatives.</p> <p>8 countries/territories are signatories to the Because the Ocean and/or Ocean Pathway declarations.</p> <p>7 Commonwealth countries (and Marshall Islands) form the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership.</p>
General	<p>35% (19) of Commonwealth countries signed the Leaders Pledge4Nature committing to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030; Commonwealth countries made up 24% of the signatories.</p> <p>7 Commonwealth countries (50% of the 14 signatories) are on the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy and have committed to sustainably managing 100% of their marine waters by 2025.</p> <p>38% (18) of the 47 countries that conducted SDG Voluntary National Reviews in 2019 were Commonwealth countries.</p> <p>Almost all Commonwealth countries participate in one or more of the UN Environment Programme Regional Seas Programmes or associated initiatives (Conventions, Protocols).</p>

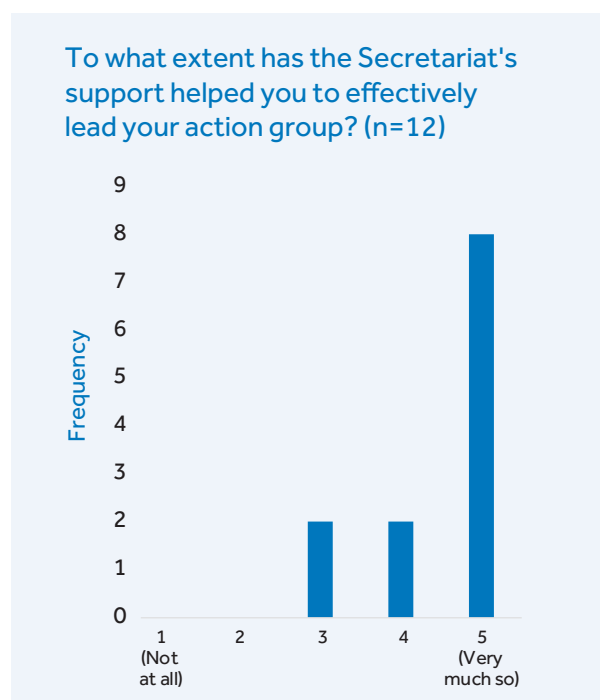
Caption. Summary of some ocean actions taken by the Commonwealth. (Results are yet to be verified by member governments.)

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

In 2020, the Secretariat issued three external contracts to assess the CBC's programmatic progress to date: (i) an independent MEL assessment for the Action Groups; (ii) an independent MEL assessment for the Secretariat; and (iii) investigation of country-specific progress on ocean issues related to each of the Action Groups (summarised in table in the section above). In addition, CBC Champions and members received support to develop MEL frameworks for their respective Action Groups with the support of a MEL contractor.

Here, the results of the second MEL assessment, which looked at the Secretariat, are summarised.

The full report assessing the Secretariat is available separately in [Annex 4](#).



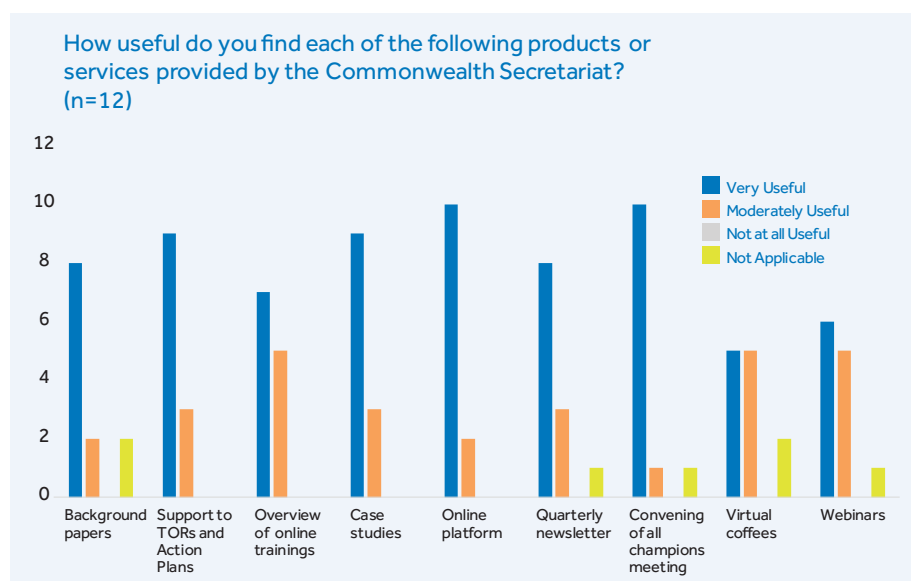
Summary of Action Group Champions' views on the Commonwealth Secretariat's support. Three-quarters gave the Secretariat full marks (5/5).

For the MEL assessment, the evaluator conducted 21 interviews with key stakeholders involved in the

CBC programme. This group included 15 representatives from 12 (of the then 13) CBC Champion countries responsible for (co-)leading the 10 Action Groups; 5 members of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Oceans and Natural Resources Division responsible for delivery and management of the Blue Charter; and the FCDO Programme Manager responsible for the management of the Blue Charter from the donor side.

The independent evaluator concluded, *inter alia*:

- The CBC's high-level goals are very relevant to Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth member country priorities.
- The CBC's country-led model ensures focus areas are relevant to member countries.
- Support provided by the Secretariat is very relevant to the CBC Champions.
- The Secretariat played a vital role in getting Commonwealth Heads of Government to endorse the CBC at CHOGM and in establishing the 10 Action Groups.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat supports the Blue Charter Champions with a range of products and services intended to help them to lead their Action Groups.
- Champions find the support they receive from the Secretariat useful in helping them to lead their Action Groups.
- There is moderate evidence that the Secretariat's support is improving the Champions' capability, opportunity and motivation to lead their Action Groups effectively.
- There are a few examples of member countries taking positive action by developing and introducing new policies and piloting ocean initiatives to which the CBC can credibly claim to have contributed.



Summary of Action Group Champions' views on the usefulness of various Secretariat products and services. *Most Champions (75 per cent on average) found them "very useful".*

Lessons learnt

The text below is abridged from the MEL report (provided in full in [Annex 4](#)).

'The Commonwealth Secretariat team, Champions and other stakeholders interviewed identified a number of valuable lessons learnt during the past two years of implementation:

- There was a much higher level of interest in the Blue Charter than the Commonwealth Secretariat had anticipated. This suggests that the Blue Charter was a timely initiative from the Commonwealth Secretariat that aligned well with the national priorities of the member countries.
- The assumption that the Blue Charter Champions would take an active leadership role has not yet [been fully] borne out.
- Most Blue Charter Champions face significant financial and human resource constraints and do not have the funding or staff time to be able to implement their Blue Charter commitments. All of the Champions interviewed noted that the Blue Charter and their Action Group was only a small part of their role and said they sometimes struggled to prioritise it over other pressing work.
- Three of the Action Groups have some funding from the Champion government, and the remaining seven do not. As a result, Champions are much more reliant on the Commonwealth Secretariat for guidance, coordination assistance and financial support.
- Champions have different views and expectations of the level of support and resources they should be receiving from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Some Champions assumed the Commonwealth Secretariat would pay for travel and Action Group meetings. This was not limited to low and middle-income member countries as Champions from high-income countries also raised the difficulty of accessing financing for their Action Groups as a major challenge.
- Over half of the Blue Charter Champions noted they struggled to attract members to their Action Groups and continue to face challenges in keeping the members active and engaged. Almost everyone interviewed noted that trying to organise meetings over multiple incompatible time zones and connectivity issues only exacerbates this challenge.'

Sustainability

As outlined above, since adoption of the CBC, implementation has progressed swiftly. There are currently 10 CBC Action Groups being led or co-led by 15 Commonwealth countries, with 46 countries having joined one or more of these. These numbers indicate a remarkable beginning, which has been accompanied by positive international attention.

Each of the Action Groups has incorporated sustained plans and activities into its TOR and Plan of Actions, often with a horizon of several years. However, the future viability of the CBC and especially its Action Groups is not assured. Sustained longstanding success, including projects that address the needs of participating member countries, will hinge on gaining access to reliable financial support.

Financially resourcing the CBC and its Action Groups is an identified need that has been growing in urgency. To date, just three of the fifteen Champion country governments have managed to secure internal multi-year funding specifically for their Action Groups. In addition to the positive findings presented in the sections above, the MEL evaluator stressed the following:

"The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Champions need to have access to secure funding to be able to continue to build on the early signs of progress outlined above.

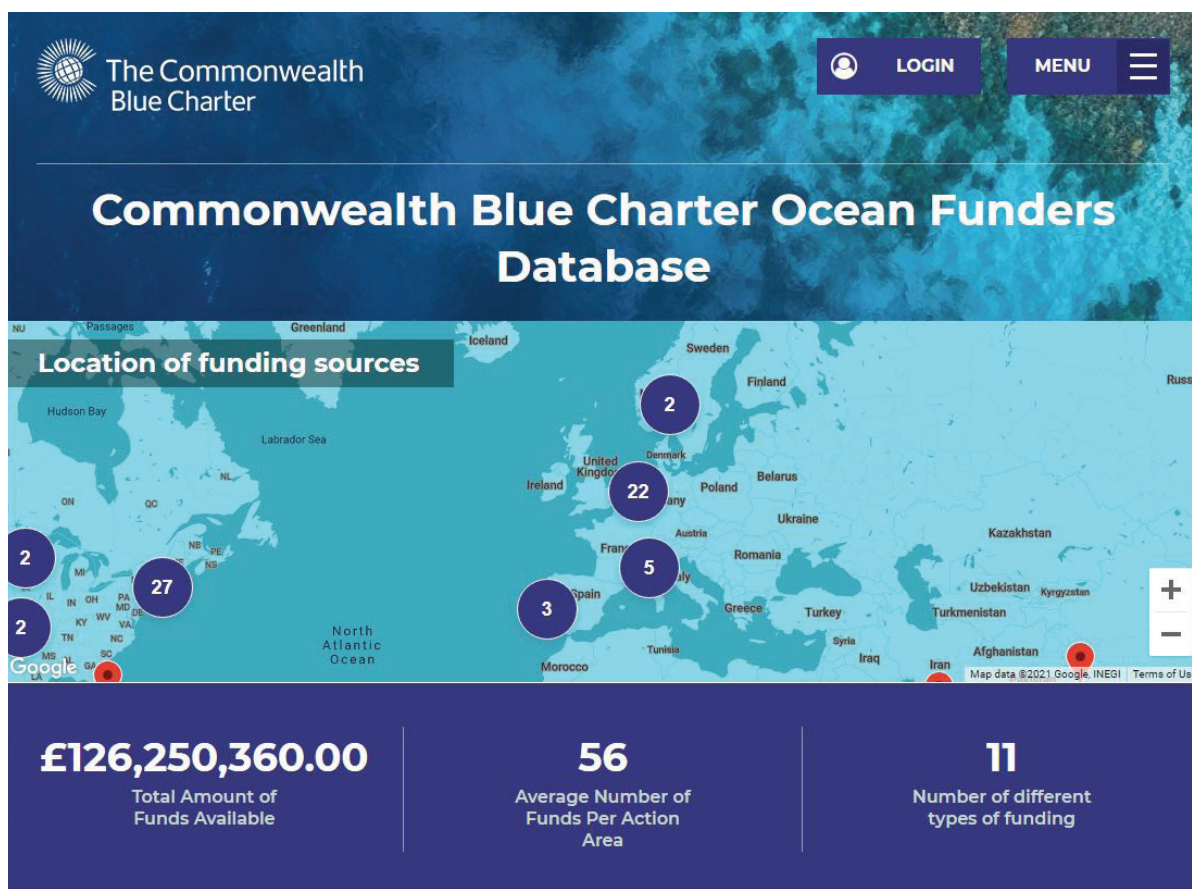
[...]

The Blue Charter acknowledges the essential role that non-state sectors will need to play to meet ocean commitments. The Commonwealth Secretariat identified and cultivated potential strategic partnerships with several private sector organisations and foundations as a way of engaging with non-governmental actors and as a potential future source of funding for the next phase of the Blue Charter. Whilst these partnerships have provided some funding to date, securing additional funding is likely to get more difficult as many donors, foundations have smaller budgets and shift funding priorities towards combatting COVID-19."

In June 2019, at the CBC All Champions meeting, the Champion countries identified mobilising financial support for the Action Groups and their future projects as an issue of overarching concern. They requested the Secretariat to investigate available options, including

the possibility of a bespoke solution. Some of the actions taken by the Secretariat to address this issue include the following:

- *July to December 2019:* The Secretariat invited and examined 19 project concept notes created by the Action Groups. Using these as a basis for its explorations, the Secretariat scoped out existing funding sources and how well they might address the proposed projects.
- *May 2020:* In two remote online meetings (to accommodate time zones), the contact points for Champion countries' Action Groups again expressed concerns regarding financing their activities, and welcomed the Secretariat's ongoing efforts to find solutions. The Secretariat announced that, as part of its efforts to support the Action Groups, it would (i) make arrangements to offer training in the development of project concept notes and funding proposals; (ii) further explore existing options; and (iii) continue work on the development of a bespoke fund.
- *October and November 2020:* Three two-day (twelve-hour) trainings on proposal writing were delivered across two time zones. These covered 52 representatives from 17 countries.
- *November and December 2020:* An expert consultancy was hired to perform a methodical assessment of funding options for the CBC and its Action Groups. It also reviewed the Secretariat's work to date on establishing a bespoke funding mechanism and made several recommendations.
- *February 2021:* A Blue Charter funding database and web interface will be launched. This provides a searchable global database and linked map of funders for which CBC projects could possibly qualify. Access to the password-protected site is for all Action Group members to aid them in seeking funding from existing sources.
- *March 2018–present:* The Secretariat has been a voice speaking up for the needs of the Action Groups, including:
 - Tabling the resourcing topic for further consideration at CHOGMs 2018 and 2021;



Search the funder database

Filter

Geographic area	Ocean topics
Project activity	Eligible recipient
Size of grant/investment	Type of funding

Keyword search

The CBC Funders Database allows Action Groups to search over 113 potential sources of support for their projects.

- Writing four briefing notes and presenting these to High Commissions on the need for resourcing Blue Charter Action Group projects;
 - Researching and proposing the Blue Charter Action Fund, including details of its structure and function, which could attract new philanthropic support outside of the usual government channels.
- Funding for ocean-related projects is limited and very competitive. The CBC team will continue to seek practical and robust resourcing solutions for the Action Groups and their desired projects.

Accompanying Documents

- Annex 1: Expenditure
- Annex 2: Project logframe and indicators (attached separately)
- Annex 3: Action Group member list (attached separately)
- Annex 4: Independent report: *Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Delivery of the Commonwealth Blue Charter Programme (2018–2020)* (attached separately)

The CBC's ten Action Groups share best practices across the Commonwealth. Here, some members of the Sustainable Aquaculture Action Group tour a facility in Cyprus (Champion country).



Annex 1: Expenditure

Below, proportional expenditures are summarised in pie charts, with actual values listed in the table at the end of this section.

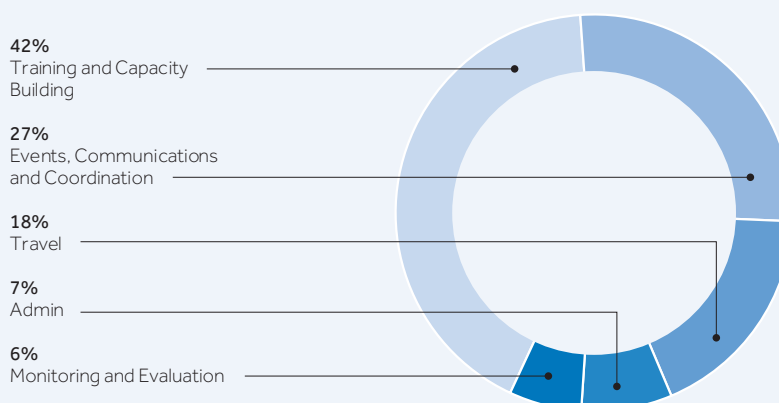
Overview

- The largest proportion of expenditures was focused on training and capacity-building (42 per cent; further broken down below).
- Concerning other expenditures, a bit more than a quarter was for events, communication and coordination (27 per cent), followed by travel (18 per cent), administration (7 per cent) and monitoring and evaluation (6 per cent).
- Originally, training was planned to be delivered in person during the final year of the project. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the approval of FCDO, the plans was changed to online delivery. Although online training poses its own challenges, it has the advantage of being more inclusive. As noted above, 260 officials from 31 Commonwealth countries participated in 5 different course offerings. Such a broad spectrum of course offerings and participation would not have been possible (affordable) had the training been in person.

Solid knowledge foundations and inclusive training

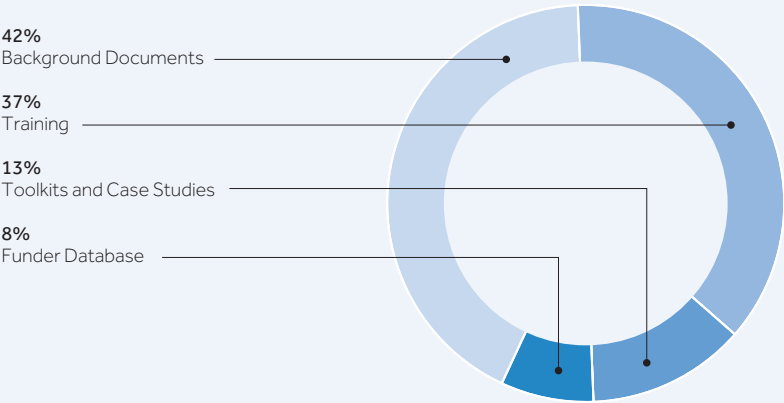
- Background documents and other toolkit materials formed the knowledge “foundation” of each of the 10 Action Groups, accounting for 55 per cent of expenditures on training and capacity-building.

FIGURE 1: Overview of total FCDO project expenditures, February 2018 to December 2020



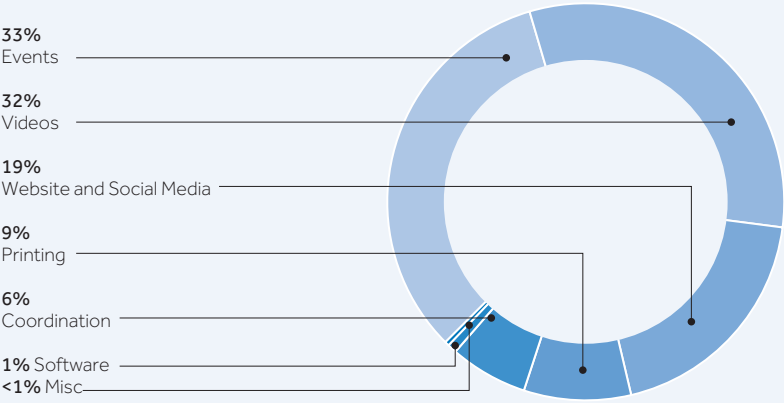
Overview of total FCDO project expenditures, February 2018 to December 2020.

FIGURE 2:
Breakdown of FCDO project expenditure on training and capacity-building



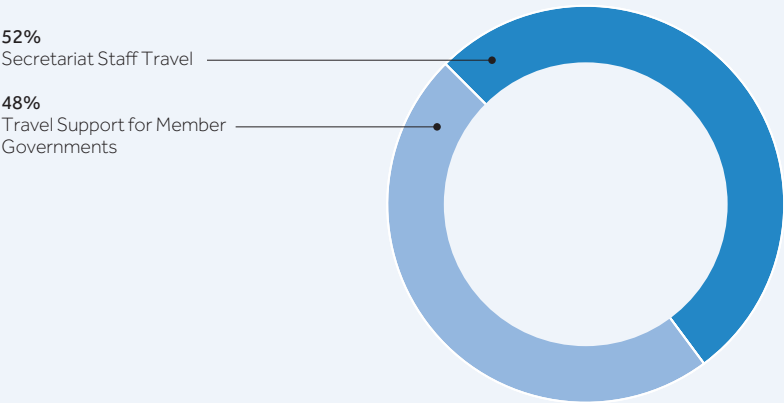
Breakdown of FCDO project expenditure on training and capacity-building

FIGURE 3:
Breakdown of Events, Communications and Coordination Expenditure (from FCDO EBR Contribution)



Breakdown of FCDO project expenditures for events, communications and coordination

FIGURE 4:
Breakdown of Travel Expenditure (from FCDO EBR Contribution)



Breakdown of FCDO project expenditures on travel..

A well-rounded portfolio of events and lasting communications products

- The category of events, communications and coordination consisted of expenditures accounting for 27 per cent of the UK-FCDO Extra-Budgetary Resources (EBR).
- Within this category, approximately one-third went to events, one-third to video products and one-third to various smaller activities such as the website, social media, coordination costs and software.

The videos were not originally planned but became part of our “Plan B” response to the COVID-19 pandemic after events were cancelled (agreed with FCDO). Although the cancellations were unfortunate, these videos can be used into the future.

A balance of travel support for member countries and the Secretariat

- Of the 18 per cent spent on travel, it was about an even split between supporting those member governments that required travel

assistance to Action Group meetings (48 per cent) and assisting the Secretariat (52 per cent) to attend Action Group meetings and international fora.

- Further spending on supporting country representatives to attend in-person meetings and trainings had been planned but was cancelled because of the pandemic.

Generous FCDO support was critical to the Blue Charter's success

- FCDO's generous support accounted for about 80 per cent of all CBC project spending (see table below; EBR: £500k).
- The contribution by the internal Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation made up the remaining 20 per cent of project activities (CFTC: £125k).
- Staff salaries (~four full-time equivalent) were supported entirely by CFTC, and are not included in these figures.

Actual Expenditure					
	FCDO contribution (Extra Budgetary Resources – EBR)				Commonwealth Secretariat CFTC Contribution
	FY 2017/18 2018/19	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	Total	
Output 1 - CBC Implementation	£19,345		£29,535	£48,880	£13,518
Output 2 - Action Groups and Champion countries	£19,345	£95,924	£47,990	£163,259	£57,216
Output 3 - Thematic tool kits	£33,386	£44,844	£6,099	£84,330	£0
Output 4 - Training and knowledge exchanges	£12,983		£71,976	£84,959	£18,035
Output 5 - Sharing and dissemination	£5,744	£21,109	£25,157	£52,011	£36,570
Output 6 - Monitoring & Evaluation	£0	£3,723	£25,800	£29,523	£0
Output 7 - Administration	£7,264	£13,248	£16,525	£37,037	£0
Total	£98,068	£178,849	£223,082	£499,999	£125,339

Summary of total expenditures by logframe project outputs, by financial year (FY), for both FCDO and CFTC. (Note that sub-categories under each Output were summed to create the above pie charts.)

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