



The Commonwealth  
Blue Charter

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Establishing an Action Group and becoming a Champion country

### 1. What is the Commonwealth Blue Charter?

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is a multilateral agreement by all 56 Commonwealth countries to actively cooperate to address ocean-related challenges and meet their commitments for sustainable ocean development including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 14 (Life Below Water). It was enthusiastically and unanimously adopted at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018.

### 2. What are the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups?

Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups implement the Blue Charter through cooperative, multilateral action. They are member-driven and led by Champion countries, supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

To date, 16 countries have stepped forward to be a Champions on a topic that they each have identified as a high priority. Blue Charter Action Groups are:

- Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (marine plastic pollution)
- 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

### 3. What is the role of a Champion country?

Champion countries will provide leadership to the Action Group, entailing:

- coordinating membership of the Action Group with the Commonwealth Secretariat;
- developing terms of reference with the Commonwealth Secretariat, to be reviewed and approved by the Action Group membership;
- developing plans of action together with the Action Group membership;
- coordinating on-the-ground practical action and co-developing projects with member countries and partners;
- organising Action Group meetings, together with the Commonwealth Secretariat, at least one per year, to be held in the Champion country or one of the Action Group member countries; and
- reporting on progress of the Action Group.

### 4. Is there a preferred focus area for an Action Group?

A possible focus area is proposed by a member country wishing to champion the topic according to their ocean priorities, experience and expertise. The focus area should have potential application across the Commonwealth. Action Group topics may tie into a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) or other international commitment, although this will not always be the case.

If the Action Group focus area you are interested in is already being championed by another Commonwealth country, you may consider discussing a co-Champion role with them. The Commonwealth Secretariat can help facilitate this.

### 5. What are the benefits of becoming a Blue Charter Champion country?

The Commonwealth Blue Charter has been welcomed across the world since its adoption in April 2018. Becoming a Champion country will demonstrate not

just your support for this global initiative but also your leadership on that ocean issue.

In your specific focus area as a Champion country, you have a unique opportunity to help shape the agenda for progress by advocating to build momentum for your focus area and guiding the process for selection of action issues by the Action Group.

Becoming a Champion also enables your country to showcase your expertise or highlight a national need, raise awareness of your domestic action and help guide the development of necessary tools and training. Champion countries support the sharing of best practice between Commonwealth countries, and link with partners to achieve progress on an international scale.

## 6. How do I establish an Action Group and become a Champion?

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Blue Charter team welcomes an early discussion with your country about the possibility of creating a new Action Group. We would be happy to talk you through the process and discuss issues that you may wish to consider.

A formal expression of interest is required from your Head of Government or relevant Minister to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, outlining your country's intention to lead an Action Group, the proposed theme and its objectives.

Following this, the Commonwealth Secretariat will liaise with the relevant ministry officials regarding a short two-page concept note on the Action Group.

The Commonwealth Secretariat will liaise with you regarding formal announcement on your Championing of an Action Group. To ensure maximum exposure, the announcement could be timed to coincide with a key international ocean event or at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in June 2020 in Kigali, Rwanda. As CHOGM generates considerable media presence, announcements can expect broad and positive exposure.

## 7. Can I be the Champion of an Action Group, and the member of another?

Yes, Commonwealth countries can participate in more than one Action Group, and in different capacities. The number of Action Groups that countries choose to join will depend on their national priorities and capacity to attend Action Group meetings, events and interact with the Champion countries and other members. Travel support to attend Action Group meetings may be provided to eligible countries, although this cannot be guaranteed.

## 8. How is an Action Group expected to operate?

The Action Group's mode of operation will be determined through its Terms of Reference (ToR), which will initially be drafted by the Champion/s with support and guidance from the Secretariat, and then distributed to the Action Group's members for consideration and revisions as necessary.

The ToR will reflect the principles contained in the Charter of the Commonwealth and the Blue Charter, with details customised to suit the specific Action Group focus and membership. The ToR will generally outline the aims and issues of the Action Group, along with anticipated actions such as (pilot) project development, training and capacity building.

## 9. What support could I expect from the Commonwealth Secretariat?

The Commonwealth Secretariat has a mandate from Commonwealth Heads of Government to work with member countries to develop and coordinate the Blue Charter implementation plan, including supporting the establishment of member-led Action Groups. We do this in a number of ways:

- Providing guidance on establishing an Action Group, including Terms of Reference and Action Plans; ideas and advice for successful Action Group meetings, and sourcing specialist background information to support Action Group objectives.
- Establishing a community of Champion countries through hosting an All-Champions workshop in June 2019. This brought together Action Group Champions to share lessons learned, build partnerships and work together to overcome barriers to progress.
- Assisting Action Groups in building partnerships that support Action Group delivery, including with civil society, science and academia, non-governmental organisations, foundations, philanthropies and other private sector groups.
- Supporting and attending Action Group meetings and events, upon request, in order to present Blue Charter background material, deliver training and share relevant expertise.
- Supporting Action Group communications, including profiling Action Groups through editorial opinion articles (op-eds), sharing news stories and generating press releases on Action Group and other major ocean-related announcements by member countries. We will also promote your Action Group through our social media channels on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

- Producing a quarterly newsletter with news and announcements from the Action Groups and members' activities that we will share across the Commonwealth's extensive networks.
- Providing a bespoke online knowledge hub/ collaborative platform, to aid communication and knowledge sharing between Action Group members.

Wider Action Group benefits from the Secretariat include access to our experts across the range of Commonwealth programmes, including oceans and natural resources, youth, gender, trade, climate, debt management, small states, rule of law, and human rights teams. Requests can be made to the Commonwealth Secretariat for specific technical assistance in these areas. Being a member of an Action Group also amplifies technical assistance from the Secretariat, providing access to like-minded countries, their approaches and experiences.

## 10. What is the expected size or composition of an Action Group?

Action Groups are open to all Commonwealth states, so the size and composition will be determined by the level of interest from others. Participation is voluntary, and invariably some topics are more popular than others. It is worth considering what group size and composition is ideal to achieve efficient and effective action on a particular topic when developing ideas for the Action Group.

While membership of Action Groups is for Commonwealth members, achieving the ambition of the Group will require cooperation with a wider range of partners, including regional organisations, civil society, science and academia, non-governmental organisations, philanthropy, foundations and the private sector. (Principle 16 of the Charter of the Commonwealth recognises the importance of including civil society.) Each Action Group determines the role it sees for these non-member partners when developing its ToR.

## 11. How are Action Group members/ partners recruited?

Part of the role of a Champion country is to build membership of the Action Group. An effective approach to this is through diplomatic outreach to other Commonwealth member states, for example, via correspondence, outreach by country missions or using London-based High Commissions. The Commonwealth Secretariat will also circulate information through our networks.

To assist with building additional partnerships, the Commonwealth Secretariat can help introduce the Action Group to our network of potential partner organisations to find those with interest and experience to contribute to the objectives of the Action Group.

## 12. What are the resource or financial implications of being a Champion country?

Establishing and participating in an Action Group is voluntary and therefore each Action Group Champion is expected to support their own commitment as much as possible.

Resourcing commitments of Champions include providing personnel to act as contact point for the Action Group to liaise with members and the Commonwealth Secretariat, as well as to lead the drafting of a concept note on its scope, its Terms of Reference and its Action Plan, and to mobilise momentum within the Action Group.

Champions are also expected to be able to support the Action Group's activities in other ways commensurate with their means. These could include through hosting some meetings, by providing capacity-building expertise and running training courses, by funding travel to meetings, or by other in-kind means of support. However, any country is welcome to step forward as a Champion irrespective of their financial capacity, so please discuss this with us further if you have any concerns.

The Commonwealth Secretariat may also be in a position to organise or assist with some Action Group activities and to provide travel support to attend Action Group meetings. Requests for this assistance will be assessed and prioritised on a needs basis and is also dependent on our own budget position, so cannot always be guaranteed.

## 13. What is the expected life span of an Action Group?

There is no fixed term for Action Groups. The minimum life span of an Action Group is a CHOGM cycle (normally two years); however, most Action Groups expect to continue for up to five years and beyond in order to achieve their ambition and objectives.

## 14. Is there a deadline to create an Action Group or become a Champion?

There is no deadline. Commonwealth member countries are welcome to establish an Action Group at any time.

## 15. We are unable to establish an Action Group at this time, but how else can we be involved with the Commonwealth Blue Charter?

All Commonwealth countries are warmly welcomed to join existing Action Groups. For more information, please visit our FAQs on joining an Action Group:

<https://bluecharter.thecommonwealth.org>

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