

APIA COMMONWEALTH OCEAN DECLARATION

“One Resilient Common Future”

Samoa, 2024

RESTRICTED

HGM(24)(8)

1. We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, representing a third of the world’s population across all continents and the ocean, gathered in the heart of the Blue Pacific Continent, **commit** to robust and ambitious, innovative and transformative action for our ocean towards a true “Common Wealth” of shared prosperity, resilience, and sustainability, building on national and collective efforts.
2. We **recognise** the great environmental, social, cultural, and economic value and benefits linked to the ocean. We cherish our special relationship with the ocean as it is essential to life on our planet. For many of us, *we are the ocean; the ocean is in us*.
3. We therefore remain **gravely concerned** with the global emergency facing the ocean, and that action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 *Life Below Water*. With the global threat of climate change, sea levels are rising, coastal erosion is worsening, and the ocean is warmer and more acidic. Marine pollution is increasing at an alarming rate contributing to ocean deoxygenation and harmful algal blooms. One third of fish stocks are overexploited, marine biodiversity continues to decrease, and approximately half of all living coral has been lost, while alien invasive species and diseases pose a significant threat to marine ecosystems and resources, food security and human health.
4. We **take note** of the disproportionate impacts of these challenges on our Small Island Developing States (SIDS), least developed countries, and coastal communities, and the urgent need to enhance their adaptive capacities and resilience. We **recognise** the need for collective action to address the unique challenges faced by all Commonwealth members and **emphasise** the need to ensure participation and empowerment of all people in ocean-related decision-making and benefit-sharing, especially those in a situation of vulnerability.
5. On this life-giving yet vulnerable blue planet, all countries rely on our one shared ocean for food and nutrition, biodiversity, energy, trade, transport, life and livelihoods. Underpinned by our *Commonwealth Charter*, we have the global reach

and diversity to help forge the inclusive global solutions needed to protect our ocean. This is especially so given that 49 out of 56 Commonwealth countries border the ocean, hold more than one third of all marine waters which are under national jurisdiction, and are home to around half of all coral reefs and a third of all mangroves.

6. We **reaffirm** our Commonwealth Blue Charter adopted in 2018 as representing our commitment to collective action to protect and manage our ocean, and inscribing our shared vision, values and principles for our ocean. We **acknowledge** the multilateral cooperation and implementation of actions through the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups.
7. Pursuant to our commitment in Rwanda in 2022, we **underline** the importance of conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, seas, and marine resources, consistent with SDG 14, and the importance of the ocean-climate nexus in building the resilience of Our *Commonwealth Aiga* (Family). We also **welcome** the convening of the inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting under the leadership of Cyprus in 2024 and **look forward** to demonstrating progress at the next meeting in Kenya.
8. We **emphasise** the universal and unified character of the 1982 *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) and **reaffirm** that UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas must be carried out. We **affirm** the freedoms, rights and duties of all states, including the rights and duties of coastal states in their maritime zones, as set out in UNCLOS. We **reaffirm** our commitment to sustainable ocean governance under UNCLOS, as supported by other relevant frameworks and instruments, including the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, notably SDG 14, the 1992 *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and the *Paris Agreement*, the 1992 *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) and the 2022 *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the CBD*, the 2023 *Agreement Under the UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction* (BBNJ), Conventions of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).
9. We **reaffirm** the principled approach of our Blue Charter and also **underline** the importance of the following principles and approaches: an integrated approach to ocean and coastal zone management; nature-based solutions; ecosystem-based approaches and other response options that build ecosystem resilience, sustainability and adaptation; the use of the best available science and scientific information to meet our ocean commitments, including a sustained Global Ocean Observing System; and the precautionary principle or precautionary approach, as appropriate.
10. We also **reaffirm** the value of the integration of modern science and technologies where there is free, prior and informed consent, with the knowledges and practices of Indigenous Peoples, traditional knowledge of local communities, and local knowledge systems, including those associated with Marine Genetic Resources; the principle of equity as appropriate, including in relation to: persons living with disabilities, gender equality and intergenerational equity, and other marginalised groups; the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

Recognising that our shared ocean binds all countries to One Resilient Common Future, and resolved to act collectively and individually, We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth:

Ocean-Climate Nexus

11. **Recommit** to urgent, ambitious and collective climate action and mitigation, under the Paris Agreement, based on the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities in the light of different national circumstances, to put us on the trajectory for limiting global average temperatures to well below 2°C above preindustrial levels and in pursuit of efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. We also **emphasise** the need for urgent action, including ocean climate action, and support to keep the 1.5°C goal within reach, recognising that human-caused climate change impacts are already being felt in every region across the globe and that temperature increases above this level will exacerbate widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people, with communities vulnerable to these adverse impacts disproportionately affected.
12. **Advocate** for a substantial, progressive and accelerated increase in tangible funding from a wide variety of sources as part of a global effort, with simplified processes, to address the ocean-climate crisis, including research and actions addressing ocean warming, sea-level rise, acidification and deoxygenation.
13. In view of the urgent threat of climate change-related sea-level rise, and the fundamental need to secure the rights, entitlements, and interests of all states and peoples of the Commonwealth, **affirm** that members can maintain their maritime zones, as established and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with UNCLOS, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply, without reduction, notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise. We **acknowledge** the work of the International Law Commission on sea-level rise and the discussions that took place in September 2024 at the high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on addressing the threats posed by sea-level rise.
14. **Urge** members to accelerate ratification of the *BBNJ Agreement* with the intention for the Agreement to enter into force as soon as possible, striving to achieve this in 2025, in order to advance the Agreement's full and effective implementation, in cooperation and coordination with key stakeholders and noting the technical assistance offered by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
15. **Acknowledge** the 2024 Advisory Opinion of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) on the Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law. We **encourage** all States to meet their obligations to prevent, reduce and control the pollution of the marine environment and to protect and preserve the marine environment in relation to the impacts of climate change.
16. Recalling the COP28 *Global Stocktake* and the COP26 call to integrate and strengthen ocean-based action in existing mandates and work plans of the UNFCCC, as appropriate, and noting the *Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue* as a key mechanism for channelling these efforts, **underscore** the importance of ocean-related goals and actions in averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage associated with the

adverse effects of climate change, particularly in SIDS and low-lying coastal countries, and taking these into account in developing and implementing the fund for responding to loss and damage, other innovative climate financing mechanisms and considerations for access to resources and support, noting the importance of flexible, iterative decision-making processes that can adapt to changing environmental conditions and new information.

17. **Highlight** the importance of integrating robust ocean-climate resilience and adaptation strategies, including reflecting these in National Adaptation Plans, Adaptation Communications and Nationally Determined Contributions, as appropriate, emphasising adaptive management and ecosystem-based approaches, nature-based solutions, community engagement, sustainable livelihoods, ethical and equitable inclusion of knowledges and practices of Indigenous Peoples, and traditional knowledge, in coastal resilience planning, leveraging international cooperation frameworks and sharing best practices to enhance resilience against climate-induced threats.
18. **Recognise** the importance of blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes in climate change mitigation and adaptation. We **commit** to protecting and restoring these ecosystems as part of national strategies and sustainable coastal management plans, as appropriate.
19. **Encourage** the development and implementation of comprehensive coastal climate vulnerability assessments and adaptation strategies, taking into account sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and other climate change impacts on coastal communities and ecosystems.

Marine Pollution

20. **Reaffirm** our shared commitment to accelerate action to prevent, significantly reduce and control marine pollution of all kinds by 2025, in particular from land-based activities including marine litter and nutrient pollution.
21. **Recognise** the significant threat posed by chemical pollutants including industrial waste, sewage, agricultural waste and oil spills to marine life and human health; and **commit** to strengthening regulation and collaboration in preventing and mitigating effects caused by these pollutants. We **recognise** and **welcome** the role of international organisations in regulating the safe and environmentally responsible disposal of radioactive substances.
22. **Remain concerned** that the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale, negatively impacting the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. We **note** efforts to address Abandoned, Lost or Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) as a source of plastic pollution, and the impacts of land-based sources of plastic pollution on the ocean. We **support** the work of the IMO in further addressing ship-sourced pollution and dumping in the marine environment, and the work of Commonwealth countries tackling plastic pollution together through the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance.
23. **Call for** an effective and ambitious international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastics, with the ambition of concluding negotiations by the end of 2024, as envisaged by UNEA Resolution 5/14.

24. **Encourage** the exchange of information, expertise, and best practices about safe and sustainable plastic design, additives, alternatives and substitutes, and recycling; and for tackling land and sea based plastic pollution challenges. We **support** facilitation of the provision of scientific and technical assistance, training and capacity development, including in the development of solutions, research capability and the traceability, transparency, monitoring and labelling frameworks to inform evidence-based decision making, policy implementation and environmental assessments. We **highlight** the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Dialogue on Plastics Pollution in advancing work on these cross-cutting issues, including to support global efforts to reduce plastic pollution through trade-related cooperation.
25. **Emphasise** the need for strengthening the regulatory frameworks for controlling marine pollution from all sources.

Sustainable Fisheries

26. **Commit** to collectively improving the sustainability of fisheries, including small scale and artisanal fisheries, and to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, including by:
- i) 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;
 - ii) managing fisheries and aquaculture with a view to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of the sectors;
 - iii) establishing conservation and management measures informed by the best available scientific evidence, taking a precautionary approach where scientific information is absent or inadequate;
 - iv) 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*.
27. **Encourage** capacity building, technology transfer on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, and regional cooperation in the sharing of information and joint operations related to maritime domain awareness, broader maritime security, and enforcement.
28. **Encourage** members to deposit their instrument of acceptance of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, to accelerate its entry into force and implementation, and **call on** members to conclude negotiations on additional provisions on fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing as soon as possible, ensuring appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries, to secure a comprehensive and equitable agreement that will fully deliver UN SDG target 14.6, which had an original target date of 2020.

Marine Protection and Restoration

29. **Reaffirm** our global commitment to ensure and enable that by 2030, at least 30 per cent of our marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation

measures, recognising Indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, and integrated into wider seascapes and ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognising and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including over their traditional territories, and the interests and knowledge of local communities.

30. Also **reaffirm** our global commitment to ensure that by 2030, at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.
31. **Highlight** the importance of evaluating the state of marine and coastal ecosystems in our jurisdictions, and where relevant, establishing protocols and sustainable financing for an effective restoration process, recognising the scientific, technical, financial, social, economic, cultural and operational challenges of this commitment.
32. **Emphasise** the importance of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) as a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development in coastal areas. We **commit to** developing and implementing ICZM strategies that aim to balance environmental protection, economic development, and social inclusion in coastal regions, and **promote** the integration of coastal and marine management across sectors and levels of government.
33. **Agree** to strengthen diverse and inclusive public participation in ocean governance, marine spatial planning and conservation initiatives, and **foster** partnerships with civil society organisations, private sector interests and Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous knowledge holders to leverage local knowledge for sustainable development, strengthen community resilience and enhance the effectiveness of ocean action.

Blue Economy

34. **Urge** cooperation in all of these actions to accelerate transition towards a sustainable, resilient, regenerative and inclusive Blue Economy, with particular attention to supporting the development of blue economies in SIDS and other countries vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of ocean degradation.
35. **Recognise** the critical role of maritime transport in the global economy and **call for** ambitious action, taking into account the IMO's 2023 Strategy for the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ships, complemented by the Voluntary National Action Plans to ensure a just and equitable transition to sustainable shipping and port development, including for workers.
36. **Highlight** that sustainable use of the ocean requires responsible and effective ocean management of 100% of marine waters, informed by the best available scientific information and traditional knowledge, and **encourage** the development and implementation of national *Sustainable Ocean Plans*.
37. **Recognise** the vast potential of marine renewable energy to support a just and equitable sustainable energy transition, and encourage increased investment in alternative marine energy sources, such as wave, tidal, ocean thermal energy conversion, offshore and floating wind, floating solar, green hydrogen and marine biomass energy, by expanding research and development and identifying potential and optimal implementation strategies.

38. **Advocate for** capacity building and knowledge sharing for continually developing, upgrading and transferring technologies on mutually agreed terms, and fostering innovations necessary for transitioning to and maintaining a sustainable blue economy.

Implementation

39. **Commit** to ensuring the effective implementation of the Declaration through the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting and the mechanisms under the Commonwealth Blue Charter, including its incubator, technical assistance programmes and the Action Groups, the Commonwealth Working Group on Sustainable Ocean Finance, the Blue Charter Centre of Excellence recently established at the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (CMMI), and the establishment of a Blue Charter Ministerial Steering Committee, as well as aligning regional frameworks and national policies.
40. **Call for** partnerships and investment from a wide variety of sources to finance implementation, making efforts to ensure simplified access to funding and technical assistance. We **emphasise** the need for targeted technology transfer mechanisms on voluntary and mutually agreed terms to support implementation in countries in special situations, in particular African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and SIDS, as well as the specific challenges facing middle income countries, and for the sharing of knowledge, information (including scientific information), expertise, and good practices.
41. **Look forward** to outcomes and joint announcements at the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2025 in France, as well as a report on the implementation of the Declaration at the next CHOGM.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Apia, Samoa, 26 October 2024.