

'Blueing' the NDCs

A Review of the Nationally Determined
Contributions of Commonwealth Coastal and
Island Countries for Ocean-Based Actions
and Commitments



The Commonwealth
Blue Charter

'Blueing' the NDCs

A Review of the Nationally Determined Contributions of Commonwealth Coastal and Island Countries for Ocean-Based Actions and Commitments



The Commonwealth

Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Acronyms and Abbreviations	vii
Foreword	ix
Executive Summary	xi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Parties' obligations of Nationally Determined Contribution reporting under the Paris Agreement	1
1.2 A heightened focus on the ocean–climate change interface	2
1.3 Integrating ocean–climate action	2
1.4 Why a review of Commonwealth coastal and island states' nationally determined contributions?	3
2. Analytical Approach and Assumptions	4
3. Snapshot Across the Commonwealth, including SIDS and LDCs	6
3.1 Small island developing states	6
3.2 Least developed countries	7
4. A Regional View of the Commonwealth	8
4.1 Africa	8
4.2 Asia	9
4.3 Caribbean and Americas	10
4.4 Europe	11
4.5 Pacific	11
5. Key Takeaways	14
6. Conclusion	16
Annex 1. List of Nationally Determined Contribution Reports Reviewed	17
Annex 2. Recommendations for the Commonwealth Secretariat for Advancing Ocean-based Actions and Commitments in Commonwealth NDC Reporting	18

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared for the Commonwealth Secretariat by Nadine Robinson (consultant).

The author would like to thank Dr Jeff Ardron, Heidi Prislán, Subaskar Sitsabeshan, Dr Rebecca Hitchin and Hilary Enos-Edu, Commonwealth Secretariat, for their helpful edits and comments.

This report was made possible through the generous contribution of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COP	Conference of Parties
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LDC	least developed country
MPA	marine protected area
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
SBSTA	UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice
SIDS	small island developing states
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented and time-bound
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change

Foreword



The Commonwealth is home to 2.5 billion people, spread across five continents and six great basins of our one shared ocean. None of our member countries are unaffected by the impacts of climate change, but 49 of our 56 Commonwealth countries border ocean, and the Commonwealth citizens who live in ocean-reliant economies are bearing the brunt of climate change tangibly and urgently.

Yet as climate change advances, there is still not enough momentum on tangible action. The gap on emissions, finance and justice has widened, while the window for action continues to narrow. Inaction is unacceptable. We must commit ourselves to urgent action on land, ocean, energy, finance and resilience.

This report presents the findings of a review of ocean-based actions and commitments contained in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of the Commonwealth's 49 coastal and island states (the 'Commonwealth Ocean'). It provides a first glance of ocean-based commitments and actions across the Commonwealth, including analyses looking at regions, small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDC).

The Commonwealth has a long history of global advocacy on climate change, dating back to the 1989 Langkawi Declaration on the Environment, which underscored the need for worldwide collaboration on climate change to avert permanent and irreversible damage to our environment and way of life.

Our leadership, combining diplomacy and practical action, continues today, and I hope that this report crystallises efforts across the Commonwealth family to ramp up climate action and ambition. Our only way forward is to face the storm together, steering in a common direction and taking bold, courageous collective action.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, KC

Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

February 2023

Executive Summary

Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reports are the main mechanism by which countries communicate their ambitions and efforts in support of the Paris Agreement. At the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2022, the global community reconvened in Egypt to measure progress. But how prominently do vital ocean-based commitments and actions figure in this process? Focusing on the ocean–climate nexus is a key part of tackling the climate crisis, including limiting global temperature rise above pre-industrial levels to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to hold such an increase to 1.5°C. The preambular paragraph to the 2018 Commonwealth Blue Charter, adopted by Commonwealth countries, highlights the fact that the ocean produces half of the world's oxygen and absorbs approximately one-quarter of our carbon dioxide emissions, as well as absorbing most of the world's extra heat.

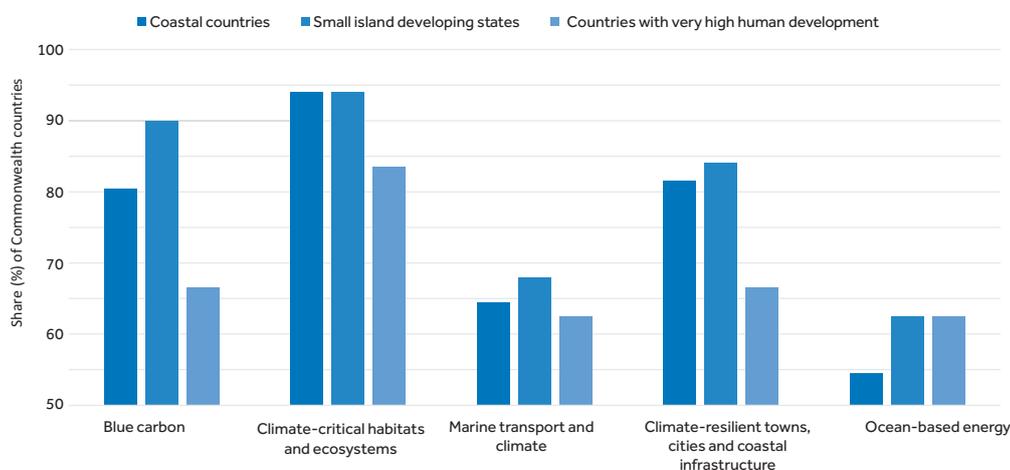
This Commonwealth report presents the findings of a review of ocean-based actions and commitments contained in the NDCs of the 49 coastal and island states within the Commonwealth (the 'Commonwealth Ocean'). It examines five key themes that are critical to the ocean–climate nexus:

- restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation, including mangroves, saltmarshes, seagrasses and other blue carbon sinks;
- protecting critical habitats and ecosystems to increase resilience to climate impacts;
- supporting emissions reduction in maritime shipping ('green shipping');
- building coastal resilience, including that of communities, cities and infrastructure; and
- transitioning to ocean-based renewable energy.

Our review of Commonwealth Ocean countries' NDCs produced the following overall findings (also summarised in Figure 1):

- 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

Figure 1. Commonwealth countries' ocean-based actions and commitments



- just one-third of developed countries¹ in the Commonwealth have mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments.

However, some countries have publicly announced greater ambitions concerning the ocean–climate nexus, with associated plans and actions, which

were not captured in their most recent NDCs. This is a missed opportunity: codifying these ambitions in NDCs may help to mobilise resources to aid in their delivery, as well as provide an important accountability mechanism.

1 Categorised as 'very high human development' in the UN Human Development Index.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a review of ocean-based actions and commitments contained in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of coastal and island states within the Commonwealth.² The paper begins by introducing the Paris Agreement and its obligation of reporting NDCs, and explains the broader context for a heightened focus on the ocean–climate nexus. It is followed by a brief discussion of the methodological approach taken. The paper offers a snapshot of disclosed ocean-based actions and commitments across the Commonwealth membership, including from regional, small island developing state (SIDS) and least developed country (LDC) perspectives. Key takeaways emerging from the review are presented at the end.

1.1 Parties' obligations of Nationally Determined Contribution reporting under the Paris Agreement

The international community reconvened in Egypt from 6 to 18 November 2022 for the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). At COP27, the Parties discussed progress towards meeting the landmark 2015 **Paris Agreement** goal³ of keeping global temperature rise this century to well below 2°Celsius⁴ above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit such an increase to 1.5°Celsius.

Article 3 of the Paris Agreement obliges Parties to the agreement to communicate their ambitions and efforts towards achieving this goal through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). For developed countries, these contributions have taken the form of 'economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets',⁵ whereas developing countries 'should continue enhancing their

mitigation efforts, and are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances'.⁶ Adaptation actions may also be included in NDC reporting.

The Paris Agreement includes a ratcheting-up mechanism whereby ambitions, as articulated in the NDCs, are progressed over time with increased ambitions over the previous contribution, subject to the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' in the light of different national circumstances'.⁷

At the most recent UNFCCC Conference of Parties, COP26 held in Glasgow, United Kingdom, a Decision was adopted whereby Parties are encouraged to communicate in 2025 an NDC for the period 2025–2035, a further NDC in 2030 for the period 2030–2040, and one every five subsequent years thereafter.⁸ This frequency of reporting will facilitate the tracking of progress over time and across consistent time periods. As of 26 October 2022, the UNFCCC Secretariat's public registry contained 194 active NDC reports. These range from intended Nationally Determined Contributions submitted in 2016 to the most recent NDCs submitted in September 2022, some of which are second NDCs or enhanced or revised versions. NDCs⁹ highlight the ambitions and efforts planned at the national level and may also contain some information on corresponding actions taken since the previous reporting.

The Paris Agreement contains a formal mechanism for assessing 'collective progress towards achieving' its purpose and long-term goals,¹⁰ which is complementary to the above NDC reporting frequency. The first global stocktake will take place

2 Of the 56 Commonwealth member countries, 49 are coastal and island countries. The remaining 7 are landlocked countries.

3 See Article 2 of the Paris Agreement, available at: https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

4 Celsius is also known as centigrade.

5 Article 4.4. of the Paris Agreement.

6 Ibid.

7 Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement.

8 Decision 6/CMA.3 'Common time frames for nationally determined contributions referred to in Article 4, paragraph 10 of the Paris Agreement', available at: <https://unfccc.int/decisions>.

9 For a list of reports reviewed, see Annex 1. In this paper, the abbreviation NDC refers to the most recent reports (i.e., those listed as active on the UNFCCC NDC public registry), including those that all NDC-related documents submitted to the UN – whether initial NDCs, revised or enhanced first or second submissions.

10 See Article 14 of the Paris Agreement. Ibid.

in 2023, with subsequent ones every five years. The results of the global stocktake will inform Parties 'in updating and enhancing, in a nationally determined manner, their actions and support in accordance with the relevant provision of the Agreement, as well as in enhancing international action cooperation for climate action'.¹¹ This paper contributes to the evidence base being assembled for the global stocktake.

1.2 A heightened focus on the ocean–climate change interface

The Preamble to the Paris Agreement contains the sole reference to the ocean in the Agreement, 'noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans'.¹² Subsequently, there has been an amplified focus on the interface between the ocean and climate change.

For example, the outcome document of COP26, **The Glasgow Climate Pact**,¹³ in its Preamble, reiterates 'the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests and the oceans'. The main text of the Glasgow Climate Pact also '[e]mphasizes the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems to achieve the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through forest and other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by protecting biodiversity, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards'.¹⁴

In June 2022, the second United Nations Ocean Conference – *to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development* – was held in Lisbon, Portugal. In the outcome document,¹⁵ government delegations, comprising Heads of

State/Government and high-level representatives, 'reaffirmed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time'. The delegates added that they were:

*deeply alarmed by the adverse effects of climate change on the ocean and marine life, including the rise in ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, deoxygenation, sea level rise, the decrease in the polar ice coverage, shifts in the abundance and distribution of marine species, including fish, the decrease in marine biodiversity, as well as coastal erosion and extreme weather events and related impacts on island and coastal communities, as highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its special report entitled *The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate and its successive reports*.¹⁶*

The outcome document further emphasised the 'particular importance of implementing the Paris Agreement...'¹⁷ and adapting to climate change's unavoidable effects, and reaffirmed the importance of implementing the Glasgow Climate Pact.

Delegates also welcomed the COP Decision to:

*recognize the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring ecosystems, including marine ecosystems, to deliver crucial services, including acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts and supporting sustainable livelihoods, including for indigenous peoples and local communities.*¹⁸

1.3 Integrating ocean–climate action

The UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) released in September 2022 its informal summary report of the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue held in June 2022. The dialogue addressed the importance of strengthening and integrating national ocean and climate action under the Paris Agreement. The report points out that 'Ocean-based measures offer significant [climate change] mitigation and adaptation options.' It further 'highlight[s] the need for a mandate for the inclusion of ocean-based action in national action, such as NDCs, to help

11 Paris Agreement, Article 4.3.

12 Page 1 of the Paris Agreement, available at: https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf.

13 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2021_10_add1_adv.pdf

14 Paragraph 38, p.5 of the Glasgow Climate Pact.

15 2022 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Outcome of the Conference. A/CONF.230/2022/12, 17 June, p.2, available at: N2238907.pdf (un.org).

16 Ibid, p.2.

17 Ibid, p.3.

18 Ibid, p.3 (para 6).

accelerate national level action and cross-country policy and technology transfer'.¹⁹ Four ocean-based climate solutions emerged:

- protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems;
- creating climate-resilient fisheries and aquaculture;
- scaling up offshore renewable energy; and
- decarbonising the shipping sector.

These points indicate the nature of potential ocean-based actions one might expect to see in island and coastal countries' NDC reporting. The SBSTA Chair and report author, Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, commented there was 'a new opportunity for strengthening ocean and climate change action under the UNFCCC'.²⁰ In the lead up to COP27, the UNFCCC articulated the need to 'blue' the Paris Agreement, i.e. to 'make the ocean a place for real climate innovation and action'.²¹

1.4 Why a review of Commonwealth coastal and island states' nationally determined contributions?

In 2018, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in London, UK, leaders adopted the Blue Charter.²² This sets out the Commonwealth member states' shared commitment to work together to protect and manage the ocean. In it, members acknowledge the importance of achieving the Paris Agreement goal to 'limit damage to many marine ecosystems' and highlight the value of both the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC as they apply to the ocean. To deliver on this commitment, the Commonwealth Secretariat has facilitated the establishment of ten member-led

action groups, including the Ocean and Climate Change Action Group, championed by Fiji Islands.

Moreover, in the Communiqué from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Rwanda in June 2022,²³ Commonwealth leaders:

*stressed the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation, adaptation, and finance in this critical decade to address the gaps in the implementation of the goals of the Paris Agreement and welcome the substantive progress made at COP26, the Glasgow Climate Pact.*²⁴

At the same time, they:

*acknowledged the critical role of the ocean in mitigating and adapting to climate change and supporting sustainable blue economies for resilient economic recovery, especially for small island states.*²⁵

While there is some analysis available of ocean-based actions and commitments in NDCs, existing reviews do not offer a view across the Commonwealth. This review considers the most recent NDC reports of the Commonwealth's 49 island and coastal country members. It assembles the evidence base to ascertain whether Commonwealth countries have incorporated and mainstreamed²⁶ ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs. The paper further highlights some of the ocean-based actions and ambitions made by Commonwealth countries at the climate–ocean nexus, which can serve as examples of good practice, and can be catalysts for further action.

19 UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (2022), *Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue*, informal summary report by the chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, 23 September, p.21 (para 90), available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/OceanAndClimateChangeDialogue2022_summary%20report.pdf.

20 Ibid, p.1.

21 UNFCCC (2022), "'Blueing" the Paris Agreement at COP27', article, 27 September. <https://unfccc.int/news/blueing-the-paris-agreement-at-cop27>

22 The Commonwealth (no date), Commonwealth Blue Charter, available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter>.

23 The Commonwealth (2022), 'CHOGM 2022 Communiqué, Leaders Statement and Declarations on Delivering a Common Future', available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/chogm-2022-communicue-leaders-statement-and-declarations-delivering-common>.

24 See paragraph 52 of the 2022 CHOGM Communiqué.

25 See paragraph 63 of the 2022 CHOGM Communiqué.

26 The Cambridge Dictionary definition (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mainstreaming>) defines 'mainstreaming' as 'the process of becoming accepted as normal by most people'. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mainstream#:~:text=%3A%20having%2C%20reflecting%2C%20or%20being,of%20a%20society%20or%20group) defines 'mainstream' as a 'prevailing current or direction of activity or influence'. In this paper, 'mainstreaming' is intended to refer to the occurrence where key ocean-based themes have been materially integrated and embedded into the Nationally Determined Contribution report and have become a key part of the report.

2. Analytical Approach and Assumptions

The Nationally Determined Contributions reports, submitted as of 22 October 2022, were reviewed from the Commonwealth member states, with the exception of seven landlocked countries.²⁷ In total, 49 countries' reports and two reports from self-governing states in free association with New Zealand, i.e. Niue and Cook Islands, were reviewed. Niue and Cook Islands' content was reviewed as part of the New Zealand country analysis, but is not included in New Zealand's country figures.

Five key themes at the ocean–climate nexus were considered in this review of NDC reporting, developed from the Terms of Reference of the Commonwealth's Fiji-led Ocean and Climate Change Action Group:²⁸

1. **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation** including mangroves, saltmarshes, seagrasses and other blue carbon sinks;
2. **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** to increase ocean health and resilience to climate impacts;
3. **supporting emissions reduction** in maritime shipping;
4. **coastal resilience** including of communities, cities and infrastructure; and
5. **ocean-based renewable energy**.

The above categories are also in keeping with those of a related review by the Ocean Climate Platform, Conservation International, IUCN, GIZ, Rare, The Nature Conservancy and WWF,²⁹ and those used at the UN Ocean Dialogue.

Based on the above and taking into account any additional narrative around the blue economy and the value of coastal and ocean-based resources and ecosystems, consideration was given to whether it was reasonable to conclude that the country had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments in its reporting. A distinction was made between referring to oceans and marine resources and embedding them fully into the NDC. No assessment, however, was made regarding the quality of the reporting.

This paper presents findings of a review of NDC reporting; it does not, and is not intended, to be a repository or cover all the ocean-based actions and commitments undertaken by Commonwealth countries. Rather, the paper offers a first glance of areas of focus at the ocean–climate nexus, both in terms of ambitions and potential actions.

The analysis is based on the most recent NDC reporting. In some cases, the initial scoping report of actions with respect to a country's NDC contributions was submitted as the baseline reporting document. Of the 49 countries' NDC reports reviewed, 5 were submitted in 2022, 27 in 2021, 11 in 2020, 1 in 2018 and 5 in 2016. Thus, the majority of NDCs reviewed are fairly recent. As stated earlier, all Parties are encouraged to communicate in 2025 an NDC for the period 2025–2035, so a next new batch of NDCs is expected then. Reports reviewed in this paper were also of varying lengths, with the shortest being 4 pages and other NDCs of more than 100 pages; the average was approximately 39 pages. While the UNFCCC states that 'All Parties shall provide the information, necessary to facilitate clarity, transparency in communication, transparency and understanding' to their second NDCs, Parties were strongly encouraged to apply the guidance for new/updated NDCs in 2020. There are, however, no specific questions or entries related to the global ocean in the standardised tables that aim to provide the information necessary for clarity, transparency and

27 Commonwealth landlocked countries, i.e., Botswana, the Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia, were not reviewed.

28 The Commonwealth (no date), Ocean and Climate Change, Action Group on Ocean and Climate Change, available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter/ocean-and-climate-change>.

29 Lecerf, M, Herr, D, Thomas, T, Elverum, C, Delrieu, E and Picourt, L (2021), *Coastal and marine ecosystems as Nature-based Solutions in new or updated Nationally Determined Contributions*, Ocean & Climate Platform, Conservation International, IUCN, GIZ, Rare, The Nature

Conservancy and WWF, available at: <https://ocean-climate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/coastal-and-marine-ecosystem-2806.pdf>.

understanding of each Party's NDC.³⁰ It has been observed in this review that much of the disclosures related to ocean-based actions and commitments falls within the narrative text and not the table itself where one has been provided.³¹

Moreover, some of the NDCs were drafted with reference to other key documents. It was not possible given the sheer volume of reports to examine these referenced reports. It also became apparent – based on the author's and the Blue Charter Team's knowledge – that there were

some countries with greater ambitions, more plans, actions and progress than disclosed in their active NDC report. For consistency only, the document marked 'active' on the NDC public registry was reviewed. In some instances, some of the active documents referred to the previous submissions; however, these were not reviewed to ensure consistency in the overall approach, on the assumption that any indications of ocean mainstreaming would be apparent in the most recent reporting.

30 See the box-out entitled 'What must a Party include in its NDC under Article 4', in section 2 of UNFCCC (2021), 'Moving Towards the Enhanced Transparency Framework', webpage, available at <https://unfccc.int/enhanced-transparency-framework#2.-Linkages-between-Communication-of-Nationally-De>

31 UNFCCC (2020), 'Provisions/process for NDCs, Katowice guidance on ICTU', virtual workshop, 26–28 October, MENA Region. See in particular, the slides entitled 'Guidance for ICTU of NDCs', available at: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NDC%20preparation%20and%20submission%20process%20in%202020%20and%20ICTU%20elements%20for%20NDCs%20%28Day%201%29.pdf>.

3. Snapshot Across the Commonwealth, including SIDS and LDCs

Of the 49 Commonwealth countries' NDC reports reviewed, 59 per cent had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and/or commitments. More specifically, 61 per cent had specified ambitions and/or actions related to blue carbon. Eighty-eight (88) per cent had described their measures and ambitions related to conserving and protecting climate-critical ecosystems and habitats. Twenty-nine (29) per cent had some discussion related to maritime transport and

the reduction of greenhouse gases related to shipping. Moreover, 63 per cent had expressed ambitions or identified actions related to climate-friendly coastal towns and cities or climate-resilient infrastructure. On the other hand, only 9 per cent had stated ambitions and/or measures around ocean-based energy. The summary of findings from across the Commonwealth, and disaggregated by region, and SIDS and LDCs grouping are contained in Table 1.

Table 1. Review Summary of 'blueing the NDCs' disaggregated by regions, SIDS and LDCs

Category	Climate-critical habitat/ecosystem protection	Climate-resilient towns, cities, infrastructure	Blue carbon	Marine transport and climate	Ocean-based energy	Mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments
Pan-Commonwealth (49)	88% (43)	63% (31)	61% (30)	29% (14)	9% (10)	59% (29)
SIDS (25)	88% (22)	68% (17)	80% (20)	36% (9)	25% (7)	76% (19)
LDCs (8)	88% (7)	75% (6)	63% (5)	25% (2)	13% (1)	63% (5)
Regions						
Africa (14)	100% (14)	93% (13)	64% (9)	29% (4)	14% (2)	64% (9)
Asia (8)	100% (8)	63% (5)	63% (5)	13% (1)	25% (2)	63% (5)
Caribbean and Americas (13)	85% (11)	54% (7)	69% (9)	23% (3)	23% (3)	62% (8)
Europe (3)	33% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	33% (1)	0% (0)
Pacific (11)	82% (9)	55% (6)	64% (7)	55% (6)	22% (2)	64% (7)

*Note that the figures in brackets refer to the total number of country reports in the category.

3.1 Small island developing states

The Commonwealth is home to 25 of the 38 countries on the UN small island developing states list.^{32, 33, 34} Cook Islands and Niue are also considered SIDS.

32 That is, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Fiji, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Maldives, Mauritius, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Singapore, Solomon Islands, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

33 List available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sids/list>.

34 See UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Small Islands Developing States, available at: www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sids/sidlist.htm.

In the SIDS category, slightly more than three-quarters (i.e., 76%) of Commonwealth countries reviewed had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments in their most recent NDC reporting. This was considerably higher than across the other regional groupings, and in contrast to both LDCs and Commonwealth island and coastal countries as a whole.

When considering the five different themes, the following picture emerged for Commonwealth SIDS countries. Four in five countries (i.e., 80%) noted some actions or commitments related to **restoring, conserving and financing critical**

coastal vegetation, including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. Additionally, 88 per cent had disclosed actions and commitments related to **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** key to ocean health and climate resilience. There were also disclosures by 68 per cent of Commonwealth SIDS countries related to **climate-resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**. And 36 per cent referred to **marine transport** and climate in their NDCs.

Moreover, a quarter of reports from the SIDS category disclosed commitments and/or actions related to exploring **potential for ocean-based renewable energy**. Further details of actions and commitments disclosed in NDCs by SIDS countries are contained in the regional section of this paper.

Both Cook Islands and Niue also made NDC submissions. Highlights of their actions and commitments are shown in Text box 1.

Box 1. NDCs from small island developing states, Cook Islands and Niue

In addition to the 49 country NDC reports reviewed, the UNFCCC registry also included two NDCs from the Pacific from Cook Islands and Niue, which contained some ocean-based actions and commitments.

Cook Islands' NDC from 2016, for example, included its action to designate 'its entire EEZ [exclusive economic zone] of almost two million [square] km as marine park as evidence of its national commitment to the global efforts of building the resilience of marine ecosystems' (p.2). Inclusion of marine protected area targets is an example of an ocean-based action contained in multiple NDCs.

Niue's NDC from 2016 also refers to the 'transport sector transition away from fossil fuels' and its dependence on 'imported fuel for land, sea and air transportation' (p.10 and p.5).

3.2 Least developed countries

There are 14 Commonwealth countries (Bangladesh, The Gambia, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia) that are least developed countries (LDCs).³⁵ They comprise a quarter of the Commonwealth's member states. Of these, five are landlocked (i.e. Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia) and are therefore not included in the figures in Table 1. The eight Commonwealth LDCs reviewed (Bangladesh, The Gambia, Kiribati, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Togo and Tuvalu) represent 17 per cent of the 46 countries worldwide in the LDC category.³⁶

The review found that 63 per cent of non-landlocked Commonwealth LDCs had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments into their NDCs. In terms of the five themes considered in this review, 88 per cent had disclosed actions and commitments related to **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** key to ocean health and climate resilience. Sixty-three (63) per cent noted some actions or commitments related to **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation** including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. There were also disclosures by three-quarters of countries in the region related to **climate-resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**. A quarter of non-landlocked Commonwealth LDC countries also made mention of **marine transport** in their NDCs, and 13 per cent contained commitments and/or actions related to exploring **potential for ocean-based renewable energy**.

35 UN list of least developed countries (as of 24 November 2021), available at: www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/lcd_list.pdf.

36 UNDESA, Least Development Countries, available at: www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html.

4. A Regional View of the Commonwealth

With the exception of Europe, the overall level of mainstreaming of ocean-based actions was fairly consistent across regions, i.e., ranging from 62 to 64 per cent. Greater differences between the regions were seen under the marine transport and climate-resilient towns, cities and infrastructure themes.

4.1 Africa

The 14 Commonwealth African coastal and island countries' latest NDCs were all submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2021 (i.e., Cameroon, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania and Togo) with the exception of Kenya, which was submitted in 2020.

In the African region, 64 per cent of Commonwealth coastal or island states had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments to some degree in their national NDC reporting.

Ambitions and actions related to **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** are featured in the NDC reporting of all 14 African Commonwealth countries. Coastal and marine ecosystems were referred to in The Gambia, where actions focused on support to 'the planning, rehabilitation and management of buffering coastal ecosystems to build the resilience of fisheries and tourism development ...' (p.26). Seychelles also referred to blue habitat interventions, defining blue habitats as the 'ecosystem services from coastal wetlands and marine resources' (p.16).

Ambitions and actions around marine spatial planning were also disclosed in NDCs, such as Kenya's. Seychelles had expressed its commitment to 'implementation of its adopted Marine Spatial Plan and the effective management of the 30 per cent marine protected areas within the Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone' (p.6). Protected areas was a common theme in several African NDCs, with Cameroon indicating its intent to strengthen its protected areas network, and Sierra Leone proposing to support scaling up of its marine protected areas (p.25). This was echoed by

Namibia which looked to 'Identify and proclaim marine protected areas to conserve biologically sensitive sites' (p.29). Gabon referred in its NDC to its participation in The High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People³⁷ which has the shared goal of 'protecting at least 30 per cent of the world's land and ocean by 2030' (p.13).

Some African countries referred to natural capital (for example, Mozambique [p.26] and Seychelles [p.34]). Many disclosed their intentions and actions related to nature-based solutions. For example, Nigeria referred to analysis of nature-based solutions for sectors with significant adaptation and mitigation co-benefits (p.v), and Togo also referred to co-benefits from nature-based solutions (p.41). Kenya mentioned scaling up natural-based solutions for mitigation (p.8), and Mauritius stated its potential for adaptation (p.4). Another theme that emerged from the African NDCs related to integrated approaches to ecosystems management. For example, Mauritius emphasised: 'Developing and implementing an integrated approach which combines tourism, biodiversity, forestry and agricultural sectors with the coastal zone management' (p.28), while both Mauritius (p.9) and Seychelles (p.7) referred to integrated 'ridge to reefs' visions and approaches'.

Sixty-four (64) per cent of African Commonwealth countries' reports noted some actions or commitments related to **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation**, including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. For example, Kenya referred to 'conducting blue carbon readiness assessments for full integration of blue carbon/ocean climate actions into NDCs' (p.15). Some African NDCs contained blue carbon targets; for example: 'Seychelles will protect its blue carbon ecosystems, i.e., at least 50% of its seagrass and mangrove ecosystems by 2025, and 100% of seagrass and mangrove ecosystems by 2030' (p.6). And both Mozambique and Sierra Leone had mangrove restoration targets of 5,000 hectares by

37 High Ambition Coalition home page, available at: www.hacfornatureandpeople.org/home.

specific set time frames (p.67 and p.25). Namibia pointed out its 'abundance of blue carbon waiting to be discovered' and added that its challenge was 'to figure out how and where to act to strengthen blue carbon opportunities', then committing to 'highlight the integration of blue carbon in its future NDC revision process' (p.23).

Moreover, 29 per cent of the African NDCs reviewed made some form of disclosures in their NDC related to **maritime transport and climate**. For example, Gabon was working on enhancing its understanding of human activities, in particular bottom trawling, on marine ecosystems and their carbon emissions and absorptions. Gabon was also exploring how data-driven fishing methods can aid in marine ecosystem protection, emissions reduction and carbon sequestration (p.28).

Almost all Commonwealth island and coastal countries in the African region (i.e. 93%) made some disclosures about their actions or ambitions related to **climate-resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**.

Fourteen (14) per cent of African NDC reports contained commitments and/or actions related to exploring the **potential for ocean-based renewable energy**. However, it emerged throughout the analysis of NDCs across the regions that, while many countries had ambitions or actions to increase the renewable energy mix, it was often unspecified whether ocean-based energies formed part of this mix. Namibia stated it aimed to 'enhance the use of renewable energy potential across the ocean and coastal environments' (p.29). Similarly, Seychelles stated that it undertook 'to make a major shift towards the low carbon economy', and referred to promoting bioenergy and marine technologies (p.24).

4.2 Asia

Of the eight island and coastal countries in the Asian region of the Commonwealth, India's active NDC was submitted in 2022. Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka submitted their NDCs in 2021. Brunei Darussalam, Maldives and Singapore submitted their NDCs in 2020.

In the Asian region, 63 per cent of Commonwealth coastal or island states had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments to some degree in their national NDC reporting.

All Asian Commonwealth countries had disclosed actions and commitments related to **protecting**

climate-critical habitats and ecosystems

key to ocean health and climate resilience. For example, Brunei identifies protection of both terrestrial and marine biodiversity as a priority (p.14). This is echoed by Malaysia, which refers to the: 'Preservation of vulnerable terrestrial and marine ecosystem and expanding protected areas', including fisheries zones within the marine and coastal protection corridors (p.12). Sri Lanka refers to an: 'Ecosystem-based Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) adopted in areas of high climate vulnerability to enhance resilience' (p.32). Pakistan has also identified nature-based solutions as an area for action in its NDC (p.40).

There is also a strong focus on marine and coastal ecosystems. For example, Bangladesh's stated contribution included 'afforestation and reforestation in the coastal areas, islands and degraded areas – 150,000 ha' (p.10). India also refers to 'better adapt[ing] to climate change by enhancing investments in development programmes in sectors vulnerable to climate change', including 'coastal regions' (p.2).

Singapore's contribution also refers to enhancing 'marine and coastal habitats' (p.24), as does Sri Lanka's, that is, to 'identify and declare coastal and marine natural areas of high priority for building resilience for climate change impacts (p.42).

As with the African region, targets related to ecosystem and habitat conservation and preservation are stated in the NDC reporting. Examples include the Maldives 'initiatives to protect and preserve our fragile environment'; and its 'commitment to protect at least one island, one reef and one wetland from each atoll in our country' (p.i). Maldives refers to its action of '[f]acilitat[ing] research to address knowledge gaps and climate change impacts on coral reefs and marine ecosystems in order to promote [their] sustainable and resilience-based management' (p.17). And Pakistan's NDC contains a protected area target to enhance 'protected areas cover from 12% to 15% by 2023' (p.12).

Sixty-three (63) per cent of Asian Commonwealth countries had disclosed in their NDCs ambitions or actions related **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation** including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. For example, Pakistan's NDC refers to the: 'Conservation and restoration of mangroves, peatland ecosystems, and coastal and marine ecosystems to reduce emissions and revive natural

carbon sink' (p.36). Sri Lanka's NDC also points out that: 'Soft solutions for shoreline management such as mangrove restoration [have] mitigation co-benefits under Forestry Sector and contributing to Biodiversity Sector-related adaptation benefits' (p.42).

Sri Lanka was the only Commonwealth Asian country to refer to **marine transport and climate** in its NDC, with examples of actions or ambitions related to understanding and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the marine sector, ratifying Annex VI of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and 'introducing energy efficiency measures and fuel quality improvement programmes to coastal shipping and fishing boats and vessels' (p.14).

One quarter (i.e. 25%) of the Asian NDC reports contained commitments and/or actions related to exploring the **potential for ocean-based renewable energy**. As in the case of other regions, it was difficult to ascertain whether any of the broader renewable energy ambitions and actions set out in the NDCs were ocean based. In stating ambitions around renewable energy, Maldives identified in its NDC that 'ocean currents and waves surrounding the islands can be considered as potential renewable energy sources for the Maldives and other SIDS', but noted that technologies to harness them remained at 'pilot stage globally' and were 'commercially unavailable' (p.11). Singapore also noted 'constraints in deploying alternative clean energy' and mentioned floating and offshore as 'innovative modes of deployment' (p.17).

Within the Asian region, 63 per cent of the country NDC reports reviewed contained some disclosures about their actions or ambitions related to **climate-resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**.

4.3 Caribbean and Americas

The 13 countries in the Commonwealth's Caribbean and Americas region had differing report submission dates, as follows: Antigua and Barbuda (2021); The Bahamas (2016); Barbados (2021); Belize (2021); Canada (2021); The Commonwealth of Dominica (2022); Grenada (2020); Guyana (2016); Jamaica (2020); Saint Kitts and Nevis (2021); St Lucia (2021); Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2016); and Trinidad and Tobago (2018). More than half of the reports from this region were submitted in the last two years.

In the Caribbean and Americas region, 62 per cent of Commonwealth countries had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments to some degree in their national NDC reporting.

In particular, 85 per cent had disclosed actions and commitments related to **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** key to ocean health and climate resilience. Some of the commitments and actions are related to ecosystem-based approaches (EBAs) and related innovative financing adaptations. For example, Antigua and Barbuda disclosed a conditional 2030 target to 'engage on the potential adoption of OECS [Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States] regional agreements on the conservation and enhancement of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases for the results-based payments' (p.22).

Similarly, The Bahamas stated its commitment to the Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI),³⁸ which builds on work done under the UN Convention on Biodiversity (UN CBD), 'to provide for the protection of 20% of [its] near shore environment by 2020' (p.7). Dominica emphasised the 'critical role of protected areas...by maintaining intact and healthy ecosystems necessary to mitigate natural disasters' (p.4). Barbados' NDC stated that it had legislation in place to protect water resources and the marine environment and committed to 30 per cent of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to 'be dedicated as a Marine Managed Area' (p.8). Barbados' reporting also identified a 'need for the establishment of internationally agreed accounting methodologies for coral reefs, seagrass beds and the open ocean' (p.14).

In addition to the various measures to protect climate-critical habitats and ecosystems, approximately 70 per cent noted some actions or commitments related to **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation** including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. For example, Antigua and Barbuda's report contained a conditional target that by 2030, 'All remaining wetlands, watershed areas, and seagrass bed areas with carbon sequestration potential are protected as carbon sinks' (p.19). Another approach taken, as cited in The Bahamas NDC, was for mangrove ecosystems to be offered protection by law: 'The Forestry Act...protects designated mangrove and mangrove ecosystems and important biological and ecosystem services impacted by sea level rise' (p.7).

38 See: www.caribbeanchallengeinitiative.com.

The Barbados NDC report pointed out that current Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) methodologies did 'not account for "blue carbon", despite the fact that coastal ecosystems in particular play an important role in carbon sequestration. It is estimated that of all biological carbon captured, more than half (55%) is captured by marine organisms' (p.14).

This was echoed by Belize in its report, which emphasised that **blue carbon**, i.e. basin, fringe and island mangrove and seagrass ecosystems, play many important roles as a nature-based solution to climate change with mitigation, adaptation and resilience co-benefits. As Belize stated:

These ecosystems sequester and store significant amounts of carbon, help to ameliorate flooding of low-lying areas on the mainland, safeguard frontline communities and infrastructure from climate impacts and build greater resilience, making their healthy function a triple-win for Belize by contributing to the national carbon sink, offsetting sea level rise and coastal erosion while expanding habitat for biodiverse resources, and supporting a more resilient tourism and aquaculture industry. (pp.1–2).

In this regard, Belize had quantified the climate influence of its mangrove ecosystems, 'estimated to currently hold total ecosystem carbon stocks of approximately 92,962,893 (92,963 Kt) tCO₂e, and annually sequester around 431,644 (432 Kt) tCO₂e/year' (p.15). Its NDC also includes a specific measurable, achievable, results-oriented and time-bound (SMART) target of:

enhanced capacity of mangrove and seagrass ecosystems to act as a carbon sink by 2030, through increased protection of mangroves and by removing a cumulative total of 381 KtCO₂e between 2021 and 2030 through mangrove restoration. (p.16)

There were also disclosures by over half (i.e. 54%) of countries in the region related to **climate- resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**.

In comparison, there was less narrative around **supporting emissions reduction in marine shipping or ocean-based renewable energy**, with only three countries having some references in their NDC reporting to either. For example, Canada's NDC refers to its work with domestic and international partners to reduce emissions from other modes of transportation, including marine

(p.4). Dominica's report contains a commitment to 'develop and agree on a 1.5°C-consistent vision for aviation and shipping' (p.43), with a corresponding national target of '100% emissions reduction in the shipping sub-sector by 2030' (p.54). Corresponding actions include the development of synthetic fuels and augmentation of sea port facilities with off-grid electricity (p.54).

While many countries had made some form of disclosures in their reporting about renewable energy, it was often unclear whether this encompassed ocean-based renewable energies. The Bahamas cited its 'hopes to focus efforts on the development of indigenous renewable energy resources' and included a specific reference to the oceans. Similarly, Barbados cited its aspiration to be a centre of excellence for research and development (R&D) in renewable energy technologies in its NDC (p.3). Barbados' NDC report also referred to:

Support for research and development of renewable energy and energy storage technologies appropriate for SIDS, in particular ocean energy in line with the national strategy to develop its blue economy (p.18).

4.4 Europe

There are three European countries in the European region of the Commonwealth: Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom. Cyprus and Malta did not have bespoke NDC reports but are included as part of the NDC for the European Union (EU), which was prepared by Germany on the EU's behalf and submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2020. The United Kingdom recently updated its NDC, which was submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2022.

Of the five themes considered as part of this review, the only disclosures made by the United Kingdom were in relation to climate-critical habitats and ecosystems and ocean-based energies. It was therefore concluded that in the European region, ocean-based actions and commitments had not been integrated into the NDCs.

4.5 Pacific

The 11 countries in the Pacific region of the Commonwealth and two reports from self-governing states in free association with New Zealand* had differing report submission dates. These were as follows: Australia (2022); Cook

Islands* (2016); Fiji (2020); Kiribati (2016); Nauru (2021); New Zealand (2021); Niue* (2016); Papua New Guinea (2020); Samoa (2021); Solomon Islands (2021); Tonga (2020); Tuvalu (2016); and Vanuatu (2022). Thus, the majority of Pacific countries had submitted new, updated or enhanced NDC reports in the past two years.

In the Pacific region, 64 per cent of Commonwealth countries had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments to some degree in their national NDC reporting.

Eighty-two (82) per cent of Pacific Commonwealth countries had disclosed actions and commitments related to **protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems** key to ocean health and climate resilience. This figure mirrored that of the Caribbean and Americas region. Australia, for example, referred to 'investing in the health and resilience of our ocean ecosystems' and the need to address the climate and biodiversity crises 'holistically'. This included work to strengthen the national marine parks network and further investments for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef (p.5).

Tonga's NDC contains a 'commitment to expand the area covered by Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Special Management Areas (SMAs) to 30% of the Tonga's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)' (p.viii). Fiji also set targets related to its EEZ, with the ambition of allocating 30 per cent of its EEZ as marine protected areas (MPAs) and working towards 100 per cent management of its EEZ by 2030 (p.5). It also contained other specific time-bound targets – for example, to 'plant 30 million trees by 2035' (p5).

Other actions and commitments were made by Vanuatu. Its NDC includes commitments to 'establish and manage buffer zones and climate-sensitive ecosystems, and undertake enrichment planting within these areas' (p.11) and also to quantify 'the value and benefit of ecosystem services for resilience' (p.16). Like Fiji, Vanuatu has set time-bound targets, such as conserving 'at least 17% of important biodiversity areas' and '10% of marine areas' by 2030 (p.16). Solomon Islands contains a target to protect at least 20 per cent of the terrestrial and inland water and 15 per cent of coastal and marine areas, 'enabling [an] ecological, representative and well-connected system of protect[ed] area in the country' (p.15).

Ecosystem resilience and restoration, for example, featured in the NDCs of Kiribati and Nauru. Kiribati's NDC identifies promoting healthy and resilient ecosystems as one of 12 major strategies in its Joint Implementation Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (p.26). Nauru's NDC includes actions and ambitions related to ecosystem restoration and management, flora and fauna preservation, and collation of data on the impacts of climate on fisheries. Papua New Guinea's NDC identified damage to coral reefs as a priority adaptation area (p.22), with actions disclosed including but not limited to coral rehabilitation, creation of MPAs and promotion of biodiversity conservation through ecosystem-based approaches (p.26).

Sixty-four (64) per cent of Pacific Commonwealth countries had disclosed in their NDCs ambitions or actions related **restoring, conserving and financing critical coastal vegetation** including mangroves and other blue carbon sinks. For example, Fiji refers in its NDC to: '...conserving ocean reservoirs as carbon sinks through supporting the restoration, enhancement and conservation of coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, sea grasses and coral reefs' (p.6). Kiribati recognises the interface between mangrove management and climate change:

Kiribati will proactively protect and sustainably manage its mangrove resources, as well as protect and enhance coastal vegetation and seagrass beds. Together these actions represent effective stewardship of more than 6 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide stored, more than 100 times the current annual national emissions inventory. (p.6)

Over half (i.e. 55%) of Pacific countries mentioned **marine transport** in their NDCs. Samoa stated that the NDC's development included a focus on 'opportunities to reduce emissions in the energy sector', which included maritime transport (p.8). Means and requirements in this area included, for example, 'develop[ing] shore side electricity supply for vessels', 'expand[ing] Samoa's efforts to install solar panels on vessels', studying the 'viability of low carbon maritime transport options', and 'introducing renewable energy technologies to vessels' (p.9). Fiji included an ambition to reduce domestic maritime shipping emissions by 40 per cent (p.4). Nauru highlighted its action, a climate-

resilient port facility (p.7), and the contribution this would make to greenhouse gas emissions: 'Ships will spend considerably less time at sea, and the need to operate a ferry for loading and unloading will be eliminated'. It quantified this contribution, noting that: 'Over the 50 years of the port's lifetime, estimated reductions in CO₂ emissions are 535,400 tons' (p.14).

Similar to the Caribbean and Americas region, there were also disclosures by over half (55%) of countries in the Pacific region related to **climate-resilient cities, towns and coastal infrastructure**. Approximately one-fifth of Pacific Commonwealth countries included commitments and/or actions related to exploring the **potential for ocean-based renewable energy**.

5. Key Takeaways

Based on the desktop review of 49 Commonwealth countries' most recent Nationally Determined Contribution reports, a number of key takeaways emerge.

1. **Three in five Commonwealth countries have mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments into their NDC.** More specifically, 59 per cent of Commonwealth coastal and island countries have mainstreamed ocean-based commitments, plans and actions into their Nationally Determined Contribution reporting.
2. Some countries had greater ambitions at the ocean–climate nexus, with associated plans and actions that were not captured in their NDCs. This represents a missed opportunity.
3. The percentage of countries mainstreaming ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs across the five regions of the Commonwealth was generally the same, with the exception of Europe. This mirrors the picture across the pan-Commonwealth, with between 62 and 64 per cent of regions – compared to 59 per cent of Commonwealth coastal and island countries – mainstreaming ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs. The low figures for the European region may be partially because two of the three Commonwealth countries reviewed (Cyprus and Malta) did not have their own bespoke NDCs, but were included in the submission by the EU.
4. **There were variations between regions under each of the five key ocean-based themes considered.** For example, the most disclosed theme was climate-critical habitats and ecosystems, where all African and Asian countries made disclosures in their NDCs. Other notable variations included countries in the Pacific making the most disclosures of the regions on marine transport and climate, and African countries making the most disclosures of the regions in their NDCs around the theme of climate-resilient towns, cities and coastal infrastructure. Europe had the highest disclosures related to ocean-based energy.
5. **Commonwealth SIDS led the mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs,** with 76 per cent doing so in comparison to 59 per cent pan-Commonwealth (non-landlocked countries).
6. Of the five areas focused on in the review of NDC reports (i.e. blue carbon; conserving and protecting climate-critical habitats and ecosystems; marine transport; climate-resilient coastal towns, cities and infrastructure; and ocean-based energies), **the most Commonwealth countries disclosed information around the climate-critical habitats and ecosystems theme.** Much of the narrative around climate-critical habitats and ecosystems related to forest ecosystems. Overall, 'forests' appeared well-integrated into the NDCs. However, it was somewhat unclear whether this usage of the term 'forests' included mangroves and coastal wetlands.
7. **Ocean-based energies was the least disclosed theme.** In total, 9 per cent of Commonwealth countries made some form of disclosure on ocean-based energy, notwithstanding many stating they sought to increase the level of renewable energy in their energy mix. Report preparers could make it explicit whether their targets on renewable energy included ocean-based energies.
8. The **interface between marine transport and climate** was not disclosed as much in comparison to other themes, apart from in the Pacific region. Shipping falling outside of the Paris Agreement may be a factor in this.
9. NDCs are an **existing mechanism for countries that can be used to communicate their ambitions, plans and efforts at the ocean–climate nexus.** Not

all Commonwealth countries appeared to fully use and take advantage of this mechanism. Moreover, there is no single approach to how ocean-based actions, plans and commitments are integrated into the NDCs. In some instances, it was difficult to distinguish between aspiration and tangible actions, although some NDCs were very clear on which actions stated were conditional or not.

10. Reporting portrays information at a static point in time. However, effective **mainstreaming extends beyond integrating ocean-based actions and commitments into NDC reporting**, and should also be embedded in the process of developing, revising and enhancing climate ambitions and the underlying plans to achieve them, and governance structures for monitoring progress in this area.

Box 2. Adopting a Human Development Index (HDI) lens

Does the lower figure for Europe suggest a pattern for developed economies in terms of ocean-based action and commitment mainstreaming in the NDCs? With this question in mind, the review therefore also considered those island and coastal Commonwealth countries categorised as having 'very high human development' in the 2021 UN Human Development Index (i.e. Australia, The Bahamas, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom; see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developed_country).

Adopting the 'very high human development' lens, it was found that one-third of the countries had mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments into their NDCs. Disaggregated by theme, the disclosures in this group were as follows: 33 per cent on blue carbon; 67 per cent on climate-critical habitats and ecosystems; 17 per cent on marine transport; 33 per cent on climate-resilient towns, cities and infrastructure; and 25 per cent on ocean-based energies. Thus, with the exception of disclosures on habitat and ecosystem protections and ocean-based energies, **there was a pattern of fewer disclosures by developed economies.**

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper highlighted the findings of a review of 49 Commonwealth countries' active NDC reports. NDCs are a strategic tool for communicating transparently a country's ambitions and actions and related plans in support of the Paris Agreement goal. The consistency in timeframes allows for country progress to be compared over consistent timeframes. NDCs can further act as an accountability mechanism, in that tangible progress against targets can be measured over time. This will particularly be the case in 2023, when the UNFCCC embarks on its global stocktake of progress.

Moreover, NDCs may also help to mobilise resources to aid in their delivery. While, 59 per cent of Commonwealth island and coastal countries have mainstreamed ocean-based actions and commitments, two in five could do more. The NDC reports tell us that there is a suite of opportunities at the ocean–climate nexus that could be accelerated, and that more remains to be done to 'blue' the NDCs to reap the benefits of the ocean–climate nexus.

It has been established that oceans are fundamental to achieving climate goals. Many Commonwealth countries have articulated their ambitions and underlying actions for supporting the achievement of the Paris Agreement goal. Yet, without adequate technical assistance, capacity-building and finance, the ambitions and priority areas identified by Commonwealth coastal and island states, many of which are conditional, may not be fully realised. In 2021, the Commonwealth Secretariat identified and highlighted at COP26 that the importance of the ocean was not matched by funding. For example, only 2 per cent of the Green Climate Fund³⁹ has been allocated to ocean projects, only 1.6 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) supports the ocean economy,⁴⁰ and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 is the least funded of the UN SDGs.⁴¹ The amount of finance currently allocated does not appear sufficient to realise Commonwealth countries' ambitions as articulated in their NDCs and other key strategies and policy documents.

39 Green Climate Fund, 'Project portfolio', available at: www.greenclimate.fund/projects.

40 See: SDG Financing Lab: <https://sdg-financing-lab.oecd.org/>.

41 See: SDG Funders, 'Life below water', available at: <https://sdgfunders.org/sdgs/dataset/recent/goal/life-below-water>.

Annex 1. List of Nationally Determined Contribution Reports Reviewed

The following list contains the most recent NDCs reviewed in this report (as available on 22 October 2022) and the date they were submitted, as specified on the UNFCCC public registry of NDCs.

1. Antigua and Barbuda – 2 September 2021.
2. Australia – 16 June 2022.
3. Bahamas, The – 31 October 2016.
4. Bangladesh – 26 August 2021.
5. Barbados – 30 June 2021.
6. Belize – 1 September 2021.
7. Brunei – 30 December 2020.
8. Cameroon – 11 October 2021.
9. Canada – 12 December 2021.
10. Cook Islands – 1 September 2016.
11. Cyprus (EU NDC) – 18 December 2020.
12. Dominica – 4 July 2020.
13. Fiji – 13 December 2020.
14. Gabon – 6 July 2021.
15. Gambia, The – 2 September 2021.
16. Ghana – 4 November 2021.
17. Grenada – 1 December 2020.
18. Guyana – 20 April 2016.
19. India – 26 August 2022.
20. Jamaica – 1 July 2020.
21. Kenya – 28 December 2020.
22. Kiribati – 21 September 2016.
23. Malaysia – 30 July 2021.
24. Maldives – 28 December 2020.
25. Malta (EU NDC) – 18 December 2020.
26. Mauritius – 5 October 2021.
27. Mozambique – 27 December 2021.
28. Namibia – 30 July 2021.
29. Nauru – 14 October 2021.
30. New Zealand – 3 November 2021.
31. Nigeria – 30 July 2021.
32. Niue – 28 October 2016.
33. Pakistan – 21 October 2021.
34. Papua New Guinea – 20 December 2020.
35. Samoa – 30 July 2021.
36. Seychelles – 30 July 2021.
37. Sierra Leone – 30 July 2021.
38. Singapore – 31 March 2020.
39. Solomon Islands – 19 July 2021.
40. South Africa – 27 September 2021.
41. Sri Lanka – 24 September 2021.
42. St Kitts and Nevis – 25 October 2021.
43. Sant Lucia – 27 January 2021.
44. St Vincent and the Grenadines – 29 September 2016.
45. Togo – 12 October 2021.
46. Tonga – 9 December 2020.
47. Trinidad and Tobago – 28 February 2018.
48. Tuvalu – 22 April 2016.
49. United Kingdom – 29 September 2022.
50. United Republic of Tanzania – 30 July 2021.
51. Vanuatu – 9 August 2022.

Annex 2. Recommendations for the Commonwealth Secretariat for Advancing Ocean-based Actions and Commitments in Commonwealth NDC Reporting

This paper assembled the evidence base on the mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments in Commonwealth NDC reporting. Ten potential interventions are identified here to further enhance mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments in Commonwealth NDCs going forward.

1. Communicate these findings at COP27 to draw attention to the wealth of actions and ambitions within the Commonwealth, coupled with the missed opportunities, and to encourage more countries to enhance their reporting of ocean-based actions and commitments.
2. Share this report with the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Group on Ocean and Climate Change, championed by Fiji, to inform its next steps.
3. Undertake a follow-up survey with Commonwealth members and a second review in the next 6 to 12 months, to include any new or revised NDCs submitted, and in particular to inform the negotiations at the UNFCCC related to discussions of the Global Stocktake of NDCs, taking place in 2023.
4. undertake primary research and convene an action group meeting focused on capturing and discussing Commonwealth countries' ambitions and plans on ocean-based energy.
5. Take advantage of the recent memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Commonwealth Secretariat to explore potential areas for collaboration and strengthen the inclusion of marine transport and climate ambitions and actions in NDCs.
6. Undertake a series of in-depth national case studies to identify good practices (for example, using SMART targets) in mainstreaming ocean-based actions and commitments into NDCs, including examining the process of preparing NDC revisions and the governance mechanism in place to measure progress. This could be drawn from a select number of Commonwealth SIDS countries, who led mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments in their NDCs. This would also afford an opportunity to interview some of the different users of NDC reports to ascertain how decision-useful they are to them. The case studies could also consider how natural capital accounting and valuation may have been used to inform the development of NDCs. The case studies could conclude with further guidance on how to better mainstream ocean-based actions and commitments in NDCs, and could be translated into a handbook of good practice. Capacity-building webinars and workshops could then be implemented to help to disseminate the findings and support those preparing NDC reports.
7. Lead and convene a multi-stakeholder dialogue on mainstreaming ocean-based actions and commitments in NDCs at the next UN Ocean Conference.
8. Explore the possibility of establishing an ocean fund for Commonwealth countries to enable access to dedicated resources for ocean mainstreaming actions, many of which – although identified in the NDC reports – were conditional on securing funding and other forms of technical assistance. This

could include any linkages to or alignment with the Commonwealth Blue Charter Project Incubator.

9. Codify the actions and ambitions related to mangrove and seagrasses by Commonwealth countries in a short paper, to give a fuller picture of the impact this is having and to identify good practices. This could also tie into the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy,
10. Embed the mainstreaming of ocean-based actions and commitments into Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) programmatic interventions and add this as a dedicated service line for the technical advice offered by the Commonwealth Climate Finance Hub.

the Pan-Commonwealth Network of Forest Conservation Initiatives.

Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org

