

Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance Action Plan

In 2018, under the Commonwealth Blue Charter, the UK and Vanuatu formed the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (CCOA), bringing together Commonwealth members to drive change on the global stage. CCOA is the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Group focussed on tackling plastic pollution in the ocean and Great Lakes.

Pollution remains a key threat to the health of our ocean. Plastic pollution causes wide-ranging harm including by choking, entangling, entrapping or smothering wildlife, as well as damaging key ecosystems like corals, seagrasses and mangroves which play a major role in mitigating climate change. Plastics are found throughout land and aquatic food chains and have been detected in the human body. The full implications of plastic pollution for human health are yet to be fully understood. Health risks arise from open burning of plastic waste and leaching of chemicals of concern, whilst communities' wellbeing and economies are impacted by degraded, polluted environments.

Without meaningful action and a move towards circular economies, the amount of plastic entering the aquatic environment is projected to triple by 2040¹. A new international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution is now under negotiation with the aim of completing the instrument text by the end of 2024, providing a new opportunity for collaboration across the Commonwealth.

Whilst plastic pollution is a global symptom of modern living and failures in waste management, not all Commonwealth countries are equally equipped to deal with the negative impacts. CCOA will work to redress that imbalance, by marshalling the efforts and resources across its membership to enable sharing of knowledge and experience, and support the development of capacity to address this issue.

In 2018, CCOA members committed their intention to reduce plastic waste in the ocean, through one or more of the following:

- i. Take steps to eliminate all avoidable single-use plastic waste;
- ii. Significantly reduce single-use plastic carrier bags by 2021;
- iii. Ban the sale and manufacture of microbeads in rinse-off cosmetic and personal care products by 2021.

This new Action Plan provides a framework for bringing CCOA members together to agree to actions to tackle plastic pollution.

Vision

CCOA's vision is to end plastic pollution in the Commonwealth, with the ambition to reduce additional plastic pollution to zero by 2040, protecting human health and the environment from adverse effects of plastic throughout its life cycle.

¹ Lau, W. 2020. "Evaluating scenarios towards zero plastic pollution." *Science (Science)* 369 (6510): 1455-1461. doi:10.1126/science.aba9475.



Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Advocate for ambitious global action to end plastic pollution by supporting the negotiation, ratification, and implementation of an ambitious Internationally Legally Binding Instrument to end plastic pollution.
- **Objective 2:** Exchange information, experiences, expertise, and best practices about plastic alternatives and substitutes and for tackling land and sea based plastic pollution challenges, including abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), and problematic plastic products (including single use plastics and difficult-to-recycle plastics).
- **Objective 3:** facilitate the provision of scientific and technical assistance, training and capacity development, including in the development of solutions, research capability and the monitoring frameworks to inform evidence-based decision making, policy implementation and environmental assessments.

The Action Group will avoid duplication and instead maximise synergies and opportunities to amplify impact by working with other organisations and programmes such as the Global Plastics Action Partnership (GPAP) and others.

CCOA members are encouraged to support and implement relevant global initiatives, such as the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, the UN Clean Seas Initiative, and the London Convention/London Protocol on dumping waste at sea to reduce the amount of plastic waste entering the ocean. Members are also encouraged to engage with Regional Action Plans on Marine Litter, identifying opportunities to harmonise with their national approaches and actions.

Where possible, members will be encouraged to make available resources and capacity building to support those that need assistance in tackling plastic pollution, to improve the environment, their health and their livelihoods. For example, developing solutions to strengthen waste management systems and implement monitoring frameworks.

Recognising that plastic pollution cannot be solved by government actions alone, CCOA will bring together networks of member countries, inter-governmental agencies, scientists, businesses and non-governmental organisations from across the Commonwealth to take action on plastics, share best practices, leverage funding and push for global action. Opportunities to bring stakeholders together for coordinated action could be identified through initiatives such as National, or where relevant and appropriate, Regional Marine Litter Action Plans. Opportunities will be provided to highlight societal impacts of plastic pollution and community action, giving voice to underrepresented groups.

Plastic pollution is only a part of the wider pollution challenge faced by Commonwealth countries. CCOA will therefore explore options for expanding its scope over the long term to tackle broader marine pollution issues in pursuit of a clean ocean to meet Sustainable Development Goal 14.1.



Priorities

CCOA Members are already planning and / or undertaking a range of activities which support the group's Vision and Objectives, including:

- Constructively engaging with the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for an ambitious international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.
- Tackling existing plastic pollution and its impact.
- Improving monitoring and data gathering, particularly in relation to microplastics.
- Raising awareness of plastic pollution issues and solutions, and educating the public, industry and other stakeholders.
- Exchanging knowledge and building capacity to address Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear and Single Use Plastics.
- Exchanging knowledge and building capacity to identify suitable alternatives and substitutes to plastic.
- Strengthening regulatory authorities and frameworks.
- Developing national action plans or strategies.
- Improving infrastructure and support for managing and reducing plastic waste.

To deliver the Vision and Objectives, CCOA will support members in their activities through the short-, medium- and long-term priorities identified below. A significant focus for CCOA will be facilitating knowledge exchanges to harness the expertise, experience and skills of its members. Knowledge exchange events could take on a variety of formats to suit the subject matter and preferences of contributors, including webinars, presentations, or roundtable / open floor discussions.

Short term Activities *[Actions for completion by the end of 2024]*

Rebuild the CCOA network to strengthen its effectiveness:

- Update the membership contact list to ensure effective communication and coordination among CCOA members.
- Rebuild the CCOA network and familiarise member focal points with the Group.
- Update the CCOA webpage.
- Review previously agreed Action Group commitments and identify barriers to achievement.

Exchange knowledge on key topics to tackle plastic pollution:

- Arrange knowledge exchanges on Abandoned Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear and the development of National Action Plans for tackling plastic pollution.
- Dissemination of best practice guidance on tackling Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear based on local community data collection.

Support constructive and effective engagement in the INC Process, including through developing mutual understanding of the texts and the negotiation process:

- Deliver training to support country engagement in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) process for a new international legally binding instrument on plastic



pollution.

- Undertake Capacity building webinars / knowledge exchanges on aspects of the international legally binding instrument and the negotiation process as it develops, including holding events at INC meetings.

Build Scientific capacity to tackle plastic pollution:

- Capacity building activities around monitoring plastic pollution, including laboratory training and support.
- Host a session on Tackling Plastic Pollution Together, at the Ocean Decade Conference (Barcelona, April 2024) showcasing CCOA work and developing our international network (subject to the proposal for the event being accepted).
- Development of models for plastic pollutant dispersion and marine litter detection, including support with sampling to inform future modelling.

Medium term priorities [*Actions for completion by end of 2025*]

Shift CCOA's focus to supporting implementation of the International Legally Binding Instrument:

- Expand the role of CCOA in supporting implementation of the international legally binding instrument, including through increased opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and best practice on implementing key aspects of the instrument.

Exchange knowledge on key topics to tackle plastic pollution:

- Knowledge exchanges regarding Single Use Plastics and plastic alternatives and substitutes, as well as building on previous activity in relation to National Action Plans. Share lessons learned, success stories and best practices from the Prevention of Marine Litter in The Caribbean Sea (PROMAR) project.
- Sharing of best practice on the disposal and recycling of plastic packaging.
- Supporting awareness and education efforts, including through supporting the incorporation of marine litter and its impacts in education curriculum.
- Strengthen collaboration with international organizations and other relevant stakeholders to tackle plastic pollution. This could include joint research projects, knowledge exchange programs, and collaborative initiatives.

Capacity building in critical areas for tackling plastic pollution:

- Building capacity in the use of Artificial Intelligence to support marine litter monitoring.
- Promote technological innovation in plastic waste management, including the development and adoption of new technologies for plastic waste reduction, recycling, and disposal.



Long term priorities *[Actions for completion by end of 2028]*

Continued focus on supporting implementation of the International Legally Binding Instrument:

- Maintain the role of CCOA in supporting implementation of the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including through increased opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and best practices on key aspects of the instrument.

Explore opportunities to widen CCOA's focus and connections to other programmes:

- Explore opportunities for the CCOA to expand its focus to tackle other forms of pollution beyond plastics in support of the wider clean ocean agenda, including identification of priorities and actions to take forward.
- Explore synergies with the UN Decade of Ocean Science, including the potential for CCOA to become an Ocean Decade Programme.

Continue capacity building and network development activities, adapting to the needs of members:

- Continue targeting critical capacity gaps through capacity building activities and knowledge exchange events. An important focus area in the long term is likely to be impact assessment frameworks and monitoring programmes to measure the effectiveness of plastic pollution reduction initiatives.
- Arrange events in the margins of other international meetings to continue building and maintaining important networks to support country priorities.

Operating Principles

1. The Action Group will hold most of its activities virtually but aim to host at least one face-to-face meeting annually. The Group will take advantage of opportunities for face-to-face meetings in the margins of other meetings / events, particularly those focussing on plastic pollution, such as the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee;
2. Action Group meetings will include meetings to establish and review its work plan, action items, progress, and jointly develop new project concepts, as well as meetings and workshops on specific topics and needs of the Action Group. These will include knowledge exchange events on key topics to build understanding, guide effective solutions, and drive policy decisions, to tackle plastic pollution;
3. The Action Group will submit updates on progress to the Commonwealth Secretariat at least twice a year (one written and one verbal via teleconference), to be used in Secretariat reporting requirements, and for dissemination to other Action Groups. The annual written report will briefly outline progress on the implementation of the work plan and may include information on projects, case studies, events, training, products and other areas of progress relevant to the Action Group;
4. The Action Group will encourage interaction, membership and knowledge sharing with relevant bodies, groups and partners, both inside and outside the Commonwealth, including community-based organisations, Indigenous peoples, local communities, private sector, non-Commonwealth countries, and regional organisations;



5. The Action Group may call upon scientific and technical assistance as required;
6. Decisions of the Action Group will be made by its Commonwealth Government membership by seeking consensus in a timely manner. If consensus cannot be achieved, a decision may be taken by the Chair of the meeting to hold a vote requiring a two-thirds majority.
7. The Action Group will seek, consider and welcome project-related partnerships with international organisations such as NGOs and other institutions who are willing to work with the Action Group on projects to achieve its objectives;
8. The Action Group may include non-Commonwealth countries as Observer members, who like all members are welcome to participate in meetings, but may not vote;
9. Observers and Project Partners may be proposed through submissions from member countries or directly by the organisations and countries themselves for consideration by the Action Group;
10. These terms of reference may, from time to time, be updated based on a decision of the Action Group's Commonwealth member countries, per the terms above.

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and Responsibilities of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance

The role of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance is to contribute to the overall objectives of the Commonwealth Blue Charter and work alongside and in conjunction with all other Action Groups.

The Action Group shall seek to:

1. Establish an Action Plan, in collaboration with the Action Group members and the Commonwealth Secretariat, that includes cross-pollination between Action Groups, private and public sector and global events;
2. Develop strategic objectives and proactively encourage the development and delivery of projects, knowledge sharing and collaboration, based on the best available science and traditional knowledge;
3. Review and consider any changes necessary to the action plan to achieve the Action Group's objectives, including where appropriate, considering any scientific or other evidence submitted by Members or produced through any other international organisations.
4. Engage with partners including Indigenous Peoples, and Local Communities (IPLCs);
5. Foster additional project-related partnerships, including with civil society, research bodies, and regional bodies;
6. Engage non-Commonwealth countries as Observer members, as appropriate;
7. Develop indicators to measure progress with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat;
8. Monitor and evaluate progress of action areas and report to the Commonwealth Secretariat;

Responsibilities of the Champion Countries

The role of the Co-Champions of the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance include:



1. Organising at least one meeting annually to establish, review and revise the Work Plan/Action Plan, develop project proposals with members and partners, and action items for reporting progress;
2. Setting of the agenda, location and logistics for related meetings in coordination with the Commonwealth Secretariat;
3. Encourage and work with other member countries to (co-) host events;
4. Identify needs and encourage capacity building among members;
5. Develop indicators to measure Action Group progress, in collaboration with the Action Group and with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat.
6. In cooperation with Action Group members, identify potential partnerships, collaboration and cooperation with international organisations such as NGOs, the private sector including industry that rely on the marine environment, partners such as Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and institutions that will contribute towards the achievement of the Action Group's objectives, plans and projects.
7. Encourage members to work collaboratively in the development of pan-Commonwealth pilot projects and knowledge exchanges through the development of project proposals and multilateral dialogues.

Responsibilities of member countries

1. Nominate policy and / or technical level experts to represent them at meetings / workshops;
2. Follow up and implement activities as agreed in a timely manner;
3. Provide timely input/updates to the Champion country on jointly agreed activities and relevant national progress;
4. Participate in regular meetings and activities of the Action Group – virtual and face-to-face;
5. Contribute to the processes of developing project concepts, funding proposals, and indicators to measure progress, with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat;
6. Provide information, insights, and research to be shared among member countries (e.g. through the online collaborative platform);
7. Assist the Champion Country in welcoming and reaching out to potential Project Partners, Observers, and supporters of the Action Group.
8. Work with the Champion countries in the formulation of pan-Commonwealth pilot projects and knowledge exchanges through the development of project proposals and multilateral dialogues.

Responsibilities of the Commonwealth Secretariat

1. Enhance communication between Action Groups and external organisations through the development of communication tools such as the online collaborative platform, newsletter, and social media;
2. Maintain effective and open dialogue with each of the Action Groups to provide guidance in relation to technical assistance, deliverables, and reporting;
3. Attend (when possible) and assist in the coordination of activities at international events to promote the Action Groups and their on-going projects;
4. Be available for advice and strategic guidance in relation to technical and scientific matters, reporting requirements, and the Blue Charter;



5. Organise webinars and meetings for the Action Groups, including one meeting annually for all Champion countries.
6. Working with the Action Groups, provide background information, guidance, and training materials on topics relevant to the Action Groups, including facilitating the exchange of information relevant to the Action Group's objectives.
7. Assist the Action Group in developing monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks, including indicators to measure progress, as required.
8. Assist the Action Group in the mobilisation of resources (e.g. training and mentoring to develop project concept notes), as required.

