



# The Commonwealth and Climate Change



The Commonwealth





## Message from Secretary-General

The 24th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP 24) is taking place against the backdrop of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming, which concludes that a temperature rise of 1.0°C has already occurred and that climate change impacts resulting from this warming are being felt in many parts of the world. An increase of at least 1.5°C is now a real and imminent danger for millions of people and requires comprehensive adaptation measures as well as financial and technological support for developing countries.

Given that 31 of the world's 39 small states are Commonwealth members and that they are on the frontline of this struggle, the Commonwealth is an active partner in contributing to the global debate on climate policy unfolding here during the COP. My earnest hope is that negotiations in Katowice are concluded in a manner that will allow us to regenerate and preserve our Common Earth by 'Changing Together' – the theme of COP 24.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC  
Secretary-General of  
the Commonwealth

## The Commonwealth and Climate Change

The Commonwealth has a long history of commitment to addressing climate change and supporting member countries in dealing with its adverse impacts. Collective political will to protect the planet for future generations has been explicit and robust, ever since the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment of 1989, when Commonwealth leaders resolved to act both individually and as a group on a programme of action on the environment and climate change.

In 2015, just before the UN Climate Conference in Paris (COP21) Commonwealth heads of government made a commitment to limit global temperature rise below 2°C, while aiming for 1.5°C from pre-industrial levels. This undertaking was reaffirmed at COP21 and captured in the global agreement known as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

At their Summit in 2018, Commonwealth leaders reiterated their call for urgent action to mitigate climate change, reduce vulnerability and increase resilience, including enhanced participation of young people in climate action.

### Real problems, real solutions

The Commonwealth's multidisciplinary work to support member countries on climate change includes programmes on



climate finance, youth, climate law and ocean governance. The Commonwealth also contributes to the global climate change discussion by sharing experiences and highlighting key issues related to small island developing states

and least developed countries. New work areas, including a 'common earth' approach and regenerative development are in progress.

## Unlocking Climate Finance

In many Commonwealth countries, sea levels are on the rise, storms are increasing in both intensity and frequency, and arable land is turning into desert. Although the international community has pledged billions to address climate change, countries find it extremely difficult to draw from financing mechanisms - such as the Green Fund - for projects to help people adapt to climate change and mitigate its effect.

The Climate Finance Access Hub (CFAH) helps Commonwealth small and vulnerable states access funding for climate projects by placing highly-skilled climate advisors in ministries, building the capacity of governments to formulate sound climate strategies and then secure the resources they need to put them into action.

Advisors have taken up long-term positions in government environmental departments and agencies and also in regional bodies such as the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre in Belize. They have created

a pan-Commonwealth network that is being managed by a Hub in Mauritius.

CFAH receives support from Australia, the United Kingdom and Mauritius. To date, it has provided assistance to eight countries across the Commonwealth: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, Namibia, Mauritius, eSwatini, Tonga and Vanuatu. Fiji and Solomon Islands are in line to receive technical assistance, with another four countries to be added soon.

The CFAH has already mobilised £4.15 million for projects to address climate change, with another £207 million in the pipeline.

## Small States and Vulnerability

Thirty-one of the 53 Commonwealth countries are classified as small states. Often, climate change puts their economies at risk. The Commonwealth is helping them build their resilience and adapt to climate change.

To strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR), the Commonwealth is developing an online portal that will integrate all DRR financing facilities. Small states will enjoy quicker and less complicated access to financing as a result, helping them manage natural disaster risks, including those linked to climate change.

The Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence in Malta provides training to help small states absorb high levels of financing. Preliminary research shows they are losing out on an estimated \$4.1 billion of aid opportunities because their governments do not have the capacity to deal with the complex process of negotiating, receiving and managing development assistance.

The Commonwealth is also mobilising international support for a universal definition and common measurement of economic vulnerability, which would include climate shocks. This Universal Vulnerability Index will provide clarity on the exposure of countries to climate change, making it easier to mobilise support.



## Ocean and Climate Change

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is an agreement by all 53 member countries to actively co-operate on ocean-related problems and meet commitments for sustainable ocean development.

The Charter of the Commonwealth provides the underlying principles for the Blue Charter, ensuring that the Commonwealth takes a fair, equitable, inclusive and sustainable approach to ocean economic development and protection.

Blue Charter Action Groups are member-driven, led by 'champion' countries. So far, 12 countries have stepped forward to be champions on nine topics they have identified as priorities. Fiji champions the action group on ocean and climate change. This group will work with

## The Commonwealth Blue Charter

Blue Charter Action Groups	Champion Countries
1. Aquaculture	Cyprus
2. Blue economy	Kenya
3. Coral reef protection and restoration	Australia, Belize, Mauritius
4. Mangrove restoration	Sri Lanka
5. Marine plastics ('Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance')	UK, Vanuatu
6. Ocean acidification	New Zealand
7. Ocean and climate change	Fiji
8. Ocean observations	Canada
9. Marine protected areas	Seychelles

existing networks to improve ocean health through climate action. It will also explore financial mechanisms to enable a 'blue carbon' approach – restoring the ability of coastal

ecosystems to store carbon in mangroves, coastal swamps and seagrass.



## Engaging Youth

The Commonwealth helps young people address climate change through the Commonwealth Youth Climate Network, which builds the capacity of young people to tackle climate change and advocate about it from a youth perspective.

In addition, the Commonwealth has launched a policy toolkit to help governments boost green and blue growth through youth entrepreneurship. The first of its kind, the toolkit was developed by the Commonwealth in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

## Raising youth voices for climate action

Members of the Commonwealth Youth Climate Network advocate within governments and international agencies to ensure that succeeding generations are spared from the harshest effects of climate change. The Network empowers young people to translate climate change programmes into effective policies that have a measurable impact on youth well-being.

Young Commonwealth representatives will be active on the ground at COP24 via:

- An **intergenerational climate dialogue** between the Commonwealth Secretary-General and young climate leaders that will focus on youth and the Paris Agreement implementation process.
- **Policy advocacy workshops** co-hosted by the CYCN and YOU GO (the official youth entity of the COP24) focusing on climate change education, training and public awareness (Article 12 of the Paris Agreement) plus Action for Climate Empowerment.
- **Participation** at the UNDP-World Bank *Invest4Climate* platform that will bring philanthropists and business leaders together in a discussion about innovative climate finance mechanisms.



## Law and Climate Change

Countries need effective legal frameworks to implement the Paris Agreement. The Law and Climate Change Toolkit supports them with a global resource on climate change law.

Developed by the Commonwealth in partnership with the UN, the toolkit provides a guided assessment of laws on climate adaptation and mitigation. A live pilot version is now online including an assessment tool for framework climate laws and energy laws. Modules on agriculture and urban planning law are under development. Member countries are invited to submit expressions of interest in piloting of the toolkit.

## Contact Information

For more information on climate change-related programmes of the Commonwealth Secretariat, please contact:

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