



## Report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and the Law of the Sea

Submission by the Commonwealth Secretariat | June 2021

### About this Submission

This Submission is prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat in response to the invitation by the United Nations for contributions to the Report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

The Secretariat is pleased to provide additional information on its activities and interventions in the area of oceans and the law of the sea.

marine waters in national jurisdiction;

- 32 of our members are small States;
- 25 of our members are small island developing States, ('SIDS'), sometimes referred to as 'Large Ocean States.'
- As indicated in its previous submission, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides technical assistance support to member countries in the development of policies, laws, design of fiscal regimes and strengthening of national institutions as they seek to implement the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Strengthened resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries is one of the targets of SDG 13.<sup>2</sup> Building on early Commonwealth work in this area, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Neither sea-level rise nor its rate has been or is likely to be geographically uniform. (SG Report on Oceans), para 9. See also the Holdgate Report at note 7.

<sup>2</sup> SDG 13, Target 13.1.

Secretariat is engaging in research with Guyana, Kiribati and Tuvalu, 3 SIDS impacted by sea level rise for whom rapid assessments were previously conducted.<sup>3</sup>

These countries present examples of cross regional geographic similarities

The Report posited that poor countries, and poorer groups within countries, have less capacity to adjust, with poor countries being in general, more vulnerable since their economies are more dependent on

management, and as a means of increasing accountability in policymaking, which relies heavily on evidence.<sup>12</sup> (Preston et al., 2010).

The utility of satellite data for calculating baselines and referencing conditions for measuring the direction and rate of change for projects relating to sea-level rise, flooding, land degradation, fisheries, coastal protection, food security, exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and maritime boundary agreements is well known.<sup>13</sup>

However, unless such earth observation (EO) data and information is made accessible and comprehensible for member countries, and there is the capacity to utilise the data to source climate finance for projects and programmes, then most vulnerable nations remain at risk. Without access to quality data, policymakers, decision-makers, project designers and technical support staff in ministries, lack the requisite information for making sound, evidenced-based climate change proposals with concrete justifications to enhance access to climate finance for bankable policies, projects, and actions. Improved use of data can help contribute to turning country priorities and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) commitments into climate finance investment plans and projects, addressing the financing gap where the implementation of many NDCs depends on external financing.

Through the CCFAH, the Secretariat uses the geospatial-based CommonSensing platform to provide technical assistance to Fiji, Solomon Island



(Hoegh-Guldberg et al. 2014).<sup>17</sup> This points to the need for a joined-up approach, which addresses sea level rise in conjunction with other environmental events, and the social, economic and political circumstances that accompany them.

Mangroves are especially important to low-lying island nations vulnerable to climate change and sea-level rise and maintain important functional links with adjacent coastal habitats.<sup>18</sup> Coastal development and human impacts make mangrove species already adapted to living on the landward margin of mangrove forests particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise if, owing to coastal development, their dispersal and resettlement inland is impeded. Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC) training courses in coral reef and mangrove mapping for managers and technicians, focus on remote sensing and GIS technologies to help with mapping and monitoring local and regional coral reef ecosystems and mangrove forests.

## Living Lands Charter

Managing the effects and mitigating the impacts of sea level rise is complex across regions and at the country level. The Secretariat notes that the land sector generates about a quarter of net carbon emissions caused by humans, through activities such as logging, raising methane-producing livestock, and unsustainable soil management. These contribute to climate change, with impacts such as extreme weather, drought and floods further degrading soil, forests and wildlife.

Commonwealth leaders are working towards adoption of a 'Living Lands Charter', which includes a programme of action on climate change impacts on land incorporating aspects under the three Rio Conventions on biodiversity, climate change and desertification.

## Summary

The pursuit of these ongoing activities against the backdrop of the disparate effects of COVID-19 across the Commonwealth and beyond, affords them greater urgency and relevance. As noted in the Report of the Secretary General, given the potential indirect effects among interconnected social, governance, economic, ecological and physical systems, the impacts of sea-level rise could indirectly impede the achievement of other Goals. Striving to remain on course for attainment of the SDGs will require awareness of these interfaces and sustained cooperation and partnerships at every level. The Commonwealth Secretariat welcomes the efforts of the United Nations on this topic and looks forward to further collaboration in the future.