

# The Commonwealth and Climate Emergency

Nicholas Watts, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London

Chair, Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)

Chair, UN SIDS “Sharp End” partnership

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“How to reach Carbon Neutrality/Climate Neutrality?”

# The Commonwealth

- <https://thecommonwealth.org/member-countries>
- Three Pillars
  - > Governments
  - > Intergovernmental Organisations (Secretariat, Foundation, Commonwealth of Learning)
  - > Civil Society, incl: Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (IFCO network)
- ‘Commonwealth Family’, ‘Network of Networks’, shared policy style
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) : Heads meet in Retreat without officials

# The Commonwealth

- Not a treaty organization
- 54 Nations, c. 72 'countries' including dependencies
- 'ABC' nations: Australia, Britain. (UK), Canada, New Zealand
- 32 small states including 26 SIDS (Small Island/Developing States)
- Tiny budget (UK, Australia, Canada NZ suspended funding)
- Convening power: CHOGM, Ministerials (in wings of UN)
- Access for Commonwealth Organisations (NGOs, AOs)
- 54 votes at the UN

# Commonwealth governance

- 4-year terms of Secretary General (interviews with past SGs just completed)
- CHOGM every 2 years
- Chair-in-Office: CHOGM host nation between meetings (i.e. 2 years), currently UK (Boris Johnson)
- Head of Commonwealth (Her Majesty the Queen, to be succeeded by Prince Charles, decided at London CHOGM 2018)
- Current SG Baroness Patricia Scotland QC, born Dominica, British citizen, campaigning for a second term)

# Climate Change in the Secretariat

- Delegates from Malta to Paris, Malta commitments
- No Head of Climate 2016 – October 2019, appointed October 2019:  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/unnikrishnan-divakaran-nair-b55a3723/?originalSubdomain=in>

# CHOGM Commitments

“A collaborative common approach to addressing global warming may be the single biggest contribution the Commonwealth can make to our planet this century.”  
Michael Sippitt, Commonwealth Environmental Investment Platform, March 2020

- 1989 Langkawi Declaration on the Environment:  
<https://thecommonwealth.org/langkawi-declaration-environment>  
“The main environmental problems facing the world are the ‘greenhouse effect’ (which may lead to severe climatic changes that could include floods, drought and rising sea levels), the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, marine pollution, land degradation and the extinction of numerous animal and plant species.”
- Kampala CHOGM 2007 → Lake Victoria Action Plan 2009
- The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration, Trinidad and Tobago 2009  
<https://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-climate-change-declaration>
- 2018 Commitment to 1.5 C (“1.5 to stay alive” of SIDS)
- **2021 Kigali, Rwanda CHOGM and NDC ambitions for COP 26 (Glasgow)**

# Commonwealth track record on climate

- CHOGM Declarations
- Heads left Malta in 2015 for Paris (Paris Agreement) and New York (SDGs)
- Set up Commonwealth Finance Access Hub in Mauritius
- <https://queenscommonwealthcanopy.org>  
“I have been especially touched by one such project, The Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy, which has been proposed by Commonwealth countries wanting to harness their collective expertise and resources to protect the world’s forests.” Her Majesty The Queen COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING, MALTA 2015
- Sustainable Urbanisation: A Call to Action across the Commonwealth (‘Cities Cluster’ of IFCO <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-and-insight/the-civil-engineer/july-2020/sustainable-urbanisation-across-the-commonwealth>)
- The Commonwealth Blue Charter: oceans focus includes climate, biodiversity: <https://bluecharter.thecommonwealth.org>

# The Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups (each led by one or more 'champion countries')

The Commonwealth Blue Charter works through a set of Action Groups, each devoted to a particular ocean issue. Action Groups are driven by member countries, led by 'Champion' countries. So far 13 countries have stepped forward to be Champions on 10 topics:

- Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance
- Coral Reef Protection and Restoration
- Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods
- Marine Protected Areas
- Ocean Acidification
- Ocean and Climate Change
- Ocean Observation
- Sustainable Aquaculture
- Sustainable Blue Economy
- Sustainable Coastal Fisheries.

# Commonwealth Finance Access Hub

- <https://thecommonwealth.org/climate-finance-access-hub>
- Form-filling assistance to access GCF
- Assistance to Tonga, Barbados, Jamaica, Mauritius, Antigua and Barbuda, St Lucia, recently also Zambia and Belize
- Capacity-building, knowledge management, SDG priorities, project set-up
- Accessed USD 33M over 4 years 2016-2020, 'USD 572 M in pipeline'

# The Commonwealth and China

- Chinese infrastructure and Commonwealth countries' indebtedness
- Chinese adaptation funding proposals for Kiribati (going fishing?)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/10/kiribatis-presidents-plans-to-raise-islands-in-fight-against-sea-level-rise>
- China's 'One China' policy at the UN: SIDS and Taiwan

# Stranded assets, ironies of discoveries

- Guyana
- Mozambique
- Ghana

# Conclusion: “All mouth and no trousers” or a dormant asset waiting to mobilise?

- Reimagining
- Not to act is also a decision
- Engaging with China
- High profile claim of support for SIDS, but:
- Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK
- India: new coalmines in Adivasi forest areas
- Symbolic impact of SIDS’ mitigation activities
- SIDS lead on DRR responses (Cuba)
- How to re-energise the Commonwealth contribution?