

Small island nations are calling for strengthened global support for ocean and climate change action, just days before Commonwealth leaders convene in Kigali, Rwanda, to decide on the group's priorities for the next two years.

In their executive sessions later this week, heads of government are expected to discuss issues such as shared climate ambitions, financing climate and ocean action, and rebuilding sustainable green and blue economies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, among other key items on the agenda.

During a breakfast meeting co-hosted on Tuesday June 21st at Lemigo Hotel by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the High Commissioner Jitoko Tikolevu addressed an audience of mainly envoys from fellow island nations, from Tuvalu to Cyprus to The Bahamas. .

He said, "The ocean and climate are inextricably interconnected and the health of our oceans dictate the livelihoods of millions of people around the world, from the Pacific to the Atlantic... The challenges facing our oceans and its resources are diverse and complex and yet our answer is simple, we need action!"

According to Mr Tikolevu, the ocean's function both as a 'carbon sink' and a source for nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation, warrants more acknowledgement in climate negotiations, which focus mainly on reducing carbon emissions.

His remarks were followed by a roundtable discussion with representatives from the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean, about actions being taken to address ocean and climate change issues, and how the Commonwealth can support.

The Head of Oceans and Natural Resources at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Dr Nicholas Hardman-Mountford said that the harsh reality of climate change is that it affects all sectors of society, and all realms of the planet, including the ocean.

"The climate crisis is also an ocean crisis. Action Groups under the Commonwealth's flagship ocean programme, the Blue Charter, are each responding to climate change under their respective themes." He added

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is a historic commitment by 54 countries to work together to find solutions for global ocean challenges.

Since its endorsement at the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018, at least 16 countries have stepped forward to champion ten thematic Action Groups, comprising like-minded members willing to share knowledge and align strategies to tackle issues such as marine plastic pollution, unsustainable coastal fisheries and disappearing coral reefs.

The Action Group on Ocean and Climate Change is championed by Fiji.

Commonwealth Blue Charter programme lead at the Commonwealth Secretariat Dr Jeff Ardron presented the meeting with a report detailing progress achieved over the past four years. He said:

“The Blue Charter Action Groups have proven themselves to be a good model by which countries can take the lead on the climate and ocean issues most important to them. Over the past four years, we have trained more than 450 representatives from more than 40 countries. Now we are focussing on getting more Climate-Ocean projects up and running.”

A survey conducted by the Secretariat of its membership shows that 75 percent of countries reported that the Commonwealth Blue Charter had helped to progress national ocean policy or legislation and allowed them to better interact with external partners.