

16 July 2018

Welcoming Session: Seafood and Marine Value Chains and Sustainable Development Goal 14

Notes for remarks by the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Excellencies, distinguished delegates...friends...

It is a special pleasure for me to participate as a member of this panel.

A third of the world's national coastal waters lie with the jurisdiction of Commonwealth countries, helping to sustain livelihoods and ecosystems globally.

From the time that SDG14 was agreed by the international community back in 2015, the Commonwealth has played a full part in convening support and developing thinking on its effective implementation.

Indeed, we were here in Geneva for the first meeting to discuss the trade-related aspects of the goal.

Very important progress was made this year in April at CHOGM - our Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Our Heads of Government adopted the Commonwealth Blue Charter, setting out the principles by which Commonwealth member countries will lead international efforts by sustainably developing and protecting their ocean.

Our Heads agreed to establish Action Groups on ocean issues led by Commonwealth member countries, which will collaborate with partners at the national, regional, and international levels, in addressing identified priority ocean issues of member countries.

We at the Commonwealth Secretariat have been mandated to take forward a Commonwealth Blue Charter plan of action to support this.

This opens up broad new horizons for Commonwealth collaboration - making use of the distinctive goodwill and connectivity there is among our member nations - to carry forward work on Seafood and Marine Value Chains and Sustainable Development.

As we in this room are only too aware, the ocean governance policy landscape is highly fragmented.

The UN framework of rules covers certain aspects, while the scope of the WTO remit seeks to address others.

This is not optimal, and tends to impede effective management and retard progress towards attaining sustainable development objectives.

The SDGs aim to overcome such impediments, and the Commonwealth shares this ambition.

So I am pleased that since our valued partnership with UNCTAD to advance this agenda began in September 2015, substantial momentum has been gained on SDG14 - and more broadly on the sustainable Oceans Economy agenda.

Our shared approaches, which garner goodwill, trust and transparency will be instrumental in advancing the trade-related aspects of SDG14, especially in order for the early harvest of targets to be met by 2020.

This approach is reflected in the Commonwealth Blue Charter, drawing on the broader Commonwealth Charter, which brings together the values and principles around which all members of the Commonwealth family of nations unite towards a common future.

Blue ecosystems are being degraded at an unprecedented rate and this is not an issue any country can solve alone.

The Commonwealth collectively, and through mutual support, adds to the contribution of each and every one of our member countries, and is working to accelerate the pace of global efforts on ocean conservation.

We are unlocking the power of 53 nations on what is clearly one of the most pressing causes of our time.

The magnitude of action required to move towards the fulfilment of SDG14 is formidable, and would be daunting for many of our smaller and more vulnerable member countries, so it is imperative that we work towards ever more inclusive and mutually supportive partnerships.

These, together with multidisciplinary approaches encourage innovation and reduce duplication of effort and means we can learn from failure as well as from success.

This attitude is reflected in the agenda for this forum, and we especially welcome the inclusion of a focus on services trade.

SDG14 interacts with many of the other targets included in the 2030 Agenda.

The Oceans Economy is of particular economic significance for Small Island Developing States - although of course even within that category there is broad variation in geographical, socio-historical and environmental contexts.

Yet despite these differences, sustainable fisheries management is of utmost importance for most.

For example, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas has an Exclusive Economic Zone of over 600,000 square kilometres compared to a land area of 14,000.

Kiribati comprises 33 islands with a total land area of only just over 800 square kilometres, yet more than 3.5 million square kilometres of marine waters lie within its jurisdiction.

Over recent years, exports from small economies categorised as ‘fish’ have accounted for less than 5 per cent of the total, but for over 90 per cent of processed exports.

So the sector is an important driver of value-adding economic activities and the expansion of formal employment opportunities.

However, although on paper the aggregate numbers look good, as with many of the Global Value Chains on which Commonwealth countries depend, there is only limited data on the value-added contribution made by enterprises involved in processing activities.

Furthermore, the data may not include information about geographical extraction or movement of primary fish products.

Although caught in the waters of Small or Vulnerable Economies, and passing through their ports, they may not be registered as exports if they are caught by vessels registered under foreign flags.

So we need to interrogate findings more deeply, look at trends, and explore the influence of policy variables.

This will help us to develop appropriate public policy frameworks which will enhance the gains from trade and advance the SDGs.

We also have to tackle the issue of harmful fishing subsidies, which severely undermines access to markets and competitiveness for producers in small states - particularly artisanal producers.

These are some of our Commonwealth areas of concern and focus, and we are delighted to be working with all participants towards strengthening the position of our developing country members so that they are able to add value, diversify and seize trade opportunities while also improving environmental and social sustainability within the seafood value chain and related services.

We look forward to recommendations on policy and for other actions to be considered by member states within the multilateral trade system.

For the Commonwealth, seafood and marine value chains and sustainable development are of vital importance to the objective I have so often declared of putting the ‘common’ into ‘wealth’, and the ‘wealth’ into Commonwealth.