COMMONWEALTH
SECURITY &
RESILIENCE
GROUP

Commonwealth Maritime Domain Awareness Summit 2025

Communique

Introduction

On 25 June 2025, the Commonwealth Security & Resilience Group hosted the inaugural Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Summit at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House.

Building on the mandate set by leaders at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa, the Summit focused on identifying practical, actionable interventions to strengthen MDA capability across the Commonwealth.

For the vast majority of Commonwealth countries—many of them coastal or island nations—enhancing maritime domain awareness is not just a strategic priority, but a necessity.

The following key takeaways summarise the Summit's priority thematic recommendations and highlight specific opportunities for enhanced Commonwealth cooperation in boosting MDA capabilities across the association.

Key Takeaways

1. Information and Data Sharing

- Information sharing is essential to MDA but must be backed by staff, systems, and legal frameworks to ensure effective enforcement and coordination.
- Intelligence is often available (e.g. in counter-narcotics), but many states lack the assets or operational capacity to act on it.
- Information sharing must combine open-source data, surveillance inputs, and institutional knowledge from multiple sectors.
- A recurring issue was the inability to convert data into action due to insufficient personnel or legal clarity.
- Private sector actors expressed concerns about reporting mechanisms and liability when sharing sensitive data with authorities.
- MDA involves security information and participants proposed linking information-sharing efforts to the Commonwealth's mutual legal assistance mechanisms.
- Fusion centres and integrated platforms were identified as practical ways to improve real-time coordination.
- New technology options for collecting data are now more accessible than ever and can help bridge the information and data gap.
- With all data and information in the digital - and increasingly AI - age resultant vulnerabilities must be recognised and addressed as an equal priority. The

digital/maritime nexus is a growing priority. Maritime cyber and digital resilience must go hand-in-glove with core MDA competence.

Future Actions:

- Promote best practices and standards for interoperable and multistakeholder fusion centres to support real-time coordination.
- Establish MDA Working Group to explore best methods for trusted, secure, and digitally resilient frameworks for information and data sharing. Bringing together government and private sector leaders.
- Identify areas for enhanced open-sourced data sharing, especially where commercial technologies can be used across member states or where pre-existing mechanisms can be readily accessed by Commonwealth states.

2. Small Island and Large Ocean State Capacity Building

- SIDS face disproportionate challenges managing vast EEZs with limited resources. Monitoring, enforcement, and analysis often depend on external actors.
- Sustainability of capacity-building efforts was a recurring concern. With the endurance of programmes beyond immediate funding or training programmes a priority.
- National representatives noted that contested maritime boundaries limit enforcement and regional cooperation.
- Many Pacific and Caribbean states lack trained personnel to process and interpret data from advanced surveillance technologies.

Future Actions:

- Facilitate the introduction of new, affordable technology solutions with a higher skill, lower manpower requirement for rollout in small island states and states with a low capacity to high coastal value ratio. Explore mechanisms for these to be kickstarted by wealthy nations.
- Design scalable training models that embed human–technology integration, allowing states to absorb and act on MDA intelligence.
- Continue to showcase best practice in regional cooperation frameworks, and using these networks and his architecture for training and technology proliferation.

3. Commonwealth Common Operating Picture Platform & Innovative Financing

- Multiple interventions called for a Common Operating Picture (COP) platform to enable Commonwealth-wide maritime coordination. This would integrate diverse surveillance data sources and enhance real-time response capabilities.
- Technology providers showcased affordable, scalable surveillance tools, suitable for SIDS and low-resource states.
- The COP concept was linked to broader goals, including:
    - Marine spatial planning
    - Enforcement of environmental treaties (e.g. BBNJ)
    - Monitoring of IUU fishing, plastic dumping, and deep-sea mining
- The Summit showcased Belize's blue bond (structured with The Nature Conservancy), which:
    - Reduced national debt by $189M
    - Funded marine conservation ($4.2M annually)
    - Committed to protecting 30% of its ocean area
- Financing mechanisms such as nature bonds, blue bonds, conservation funds, and climate-linked investments were discussed as viable options to sustain MDA capability and data infrastructure.
- There was broad support for integrating MDA infrastructure (e.g. COP systems) into marine protection financing strategies.

Future Actions:

- Consolidate expressions of interests in a Commonwealth-wide COP Platform, leveraging commercial and open-source tools
- Facilitate coordination between environment, finance, and defence ministries across member states to align MDA systems with marine conservation objectives.

4. Sustained Dialogue and Multistakeholder Engagement

- Participants across regions emphasised the need for more routine, structured engagement on MDA innovation, capacity building, threat analysis, and best practice sharing.
- There was strong support for multi-stakeholder collaboration, involving regional bodies, industry, technology providers, civil society, and academia.
- MDA was identified as a cross-cutting issue, relevant to security, development, climate resilience, trade, and diplomacy.
- Several stakeholders proposed establishing regular technical working groups or formalised expert convenings under Commonwealth leadership.

Future Actions:

- Institutionalise an annual Commonwealth MDA Summit, convening governments, private sector, regional bodies, and technical experts.
- Establish technical working groups
- Position MDA as a strategic cross-cutting theme in the lead-up to CHOGM 2026

Additional Key Reflections

- HE Jovilisi Suveinakama, High Commissioner of Fiji, presented the 'Oceans of Peace' initiative of the Prime Minister of Fij. The Initiative is Pacific-led and looks to formally declare the Pacific Ocean a zone of peace, stability and cooperative governance. Its relationship with MDA was highlighted, including an opportunity to provide a normative framework 'to underpin surveillance, enforcement and security coordination.'
- Saher Shoaib, Blue Economy Advisor of the Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN), presented their draft policy paper on expanding the role of women in Maritime Domain Awareness and their ambitions to work with the Commonwealth Security & Resilience Group and other stakeholders in the room on issuing and following up on the paper.

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NEXT STEPS:

Join our Information and Data Sharing Working Group

Express Interest in the MDA Common Operating Picture Platform

MDA Summit 2026 Early Registration List

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