
The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities (The Republic of Iraq)

No 1481

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and the Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities

Location

Governorates of Al Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan and Al Basrah
Republic of Iraq

Brief description

This is a serial nomination of seven sites, consisting of three archaeological sites and four wetland marsh areas.

The Archaeological Cities of Uruk and Ur together with Tell Eridu Archaeological Site form part of the remains of a hierarchy of Sumerian cities and settlements that developed in southern Mesopotamia between the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE, in what was then a rapidly urbanising area of small states in the marshy delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The cities flourished between 4th and 2nd millennium BC and their prosperity was underpinned by agriculture around the rivers and marshes, and by trade from sea ports, such as at Ur along the Persian Gulf.

Between 2120-2000 BCE, monumental architecture emerged in these cities, particularly ziggurats, religious structures reflecting a complex cosmology. All three sites have remains of these religious structures and also cuneiform tablets that developed around the same time and were used to document the economic and religious life of ancient southern Mesopotamia.

At the time these cities were flourishing, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flowed jointly across the Mesopotamian plain to a marshy delta at the edges of Ur. Gradually over centuries the two rivers diverged and their deltas moved to the south-east, with the result that the ancient marshes became saline and eventually dried out, leading to the demise of the cities by around 1700 BC. And, as the coastline regressed, newer marshes evolved downstream towards the Persian Gulf. Four areas of these newer marshes have been nominated, mainly for their natural value, but also for some emerging archaeological evidence. The marshes were mostly drained in the 1990s, forcing the Marsh Arab communities who lived there to move away. Parts of marshland areas are now being re-flooded to recreate the marshes and their habitats.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of 3 *monuments* and 4 *sites*.

[Note: the property is nominated as a mixed cultural and natural site. IUCN will assess the natural significances, while ICOMOS assesses the cultural significances.]

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

07 July 2000 for "Ur"

29 October 2003 for "The Marshlands of Mesopotamia"

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

29 January 2014

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Cultural Landscapes, on Archaeological Heritage Management, and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the properties from 6 to 13 October 2015.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent by ICOMOS to the State Party on 6 August 2015 to request further information on the selection of components, the relict cultural landscape and the mixed property. The State Party replied on 16 November 2015, sending additional documentation which has been taken into account in this evaluation. An interim report was sent by ICOMOS to the State Party on 21 January 2016 which included the recommendations of the ICOMOS Panel in relation to reconfiguring the nomination in order to allow the three main cultural components of Ur, Uruk and Tell Eridu to be put forward separate to the four wetland components; and for the boundaries of the cultural components of Ur, Uruk and Tell Eridu to be extended to include relict marshlands.

The State Party responded on 23 February 2016. This response included a new environmental justification for the overall series related to the unstable deltaic landscape and the way the cities and the wetland marshes of the delta reflect the impact of environmental change and the severe environmental and cultural threats of today. This response is reflected in this report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

11 March 2016

2 The property

Description

NOTE: The nomination dossier submitted for this serial property is quite slight and, moreover, more details are provided for the natural aspects than for the cultural aspects. The graphic and photographic evidence is inadequate and descriptions are mainly historical rather than covering details of the archaeological components.

In contrast to today when much of southern Iraq appears to be alluvial desert, during the 6th to 3rd millennia BCE, the Persian Gulf and its marshy delta used to extend over several hundred kilometres further inland towards the north-east. And around the edges of the marshes, in what is now a parched landscape, arable fields were irrigated by river water. These fertile fields supported the growth of small states and with them the beginnings of the first cities.

The three archaeological sites, two cities and one sacred site, are nominated to reflect the network of cities across southern Mesopotamia. The other components of the series are four wetland marshes, the nearest over 40 kilometres to the east of Ur in the present day marshy delta of the Persian Gulf; they are seen to have symbolic associations with the remains of the ancient cities.

Around 5,500 BC, during the Ubaid period, a network of these cities started to form. Gradually the cities began to foster specialised trades, such as weaving, and these led to the growth of a network of trade routes. By 3,350 BCE a hierarchy of cities of different sizes had emerged within a rapidly urbanizing area.

The main cities of what has become known as the Sumerian civilisation were Nippur, Shuruppak, Uruk, Ur, Larsa, Bad-Tibira, Lagash, Girsu, and Umma while Eridu was a major cultural centre. There were also numerous smaller towns under the influence of their bigger neighbours.

Formed on small mounds around 30 km from each other, the cities were mostly inter-visible, linked by waterways, and surrounded by arable fields, beyond which were shifting marshes that provided fuel, fodder for sheep and cattle, and plenty of game, fish, and waterfowl.

As early as the Ubaid period, some of the marshes were drained through the building of dams and irrigation canals. These were later much developed and extended by the Sumerians who built major dams on the Tigris and Euphrates and elaborate irrigation canals to expand agriculture far inland. Traces of these major hydrological constructions and of ancient irrigated fields are still found within the sites and their surrounding landscapes.

A critical invention of this area was writing which probably developed from incised clay tokens used for accounting after the 6th millennium BC. The writing

included pictograms and symbols for numbers in what has become known as cuneiform script. Some of the earliest examples of this written script were found in the cities of Uruk and Jamdet Nasr around 3,300 BCE. The large corpus of cuneiform tablets uncovered to date give an extensive insight into the Mesopotamian world and highlight the importance of the wetland environment for the economy, belief system and literature.

By the second half of the 3rd millennium an elaborate cult religion had also developed. Each city-state had its own pantheon of gods, with a chief deity believed to reside in the city's main temple and many other gods in temples all over the area, some specifically associated with the marshes. Temples played an important role in the social and economic life of the cities, central to the development of administrative practice and writing.

The three cities included in the property contain examples of the development of the massive religious structures that would be a key feature of Mesopotamian cities for millennia: the ziggurat. Ziggurats took the form of terraced step pyramids. They were built in cities of ancient Mesopotamia and also in the western Iranian plateau after c. 2,000 BCE. In the Mesopotamian area, nearly thirty ziggurats have been discovered by archaeologists. These date from the end of the 5th millennium BCE to the 3rd century BCE.

The Eridu ziggurat is considered the oldest known example of this building type. The form that appears to have developed at Eridu and also later at Uruk, eventually reached maturity at Ur, which has one of the largest and best preserved remains of ziggurats.

The marshes of the joint delta of the Tigris and Euphrates River were the setting for the first cities. Starting in the 2nd millennium BCE, the two rivers began to diverge and a tongue of land formed between them causing the sea coast to regress towards the south-east. Gradually the marsh landscape around the cities became first more saline, and then more arid, undermining the whole basis of the cities' prosperity. As the coastline moved south-east, new marshes were formed, that fostered from at least the 9th century AD communities of what became known as Marsh Arabs or Ma'dān who had no known link with the Sumerians.

In these wetland marshes, four sites have been nominated to represent the ancient marshlands that once supported the cities.

These seven component sites of the series are considered separately, as follows:

Ur

Although Ur was once a coastal city, at the mouth of the Euphrates, on the Persian Gulf, it now sits well inland in an arid landscape south of the current course of the river.

Ur emerged as a city-state during the First Ur Dynasty (2670 BCE), when, as the capital of Sumer, it became one of the wealthiest Sumerian cities and developed a highly complex and centralised administration system. Its wealth was derived from its location close to the Persian Gulf on which it developed a port, one of the largest on the Gulf. Two of the three identified harbours of Ur, one on the northern corner of the city wall, and the second along the western wall, are in the buffer zone (none of them yet excavated), while the main port is outside the buffer zone. According to the State Party, it has yet to be excavated and the boundaries might be extended at a later stage.

The archaeological site is surrounded by a mud brick wall of oval shape. Within is a ziggurat, several other temples, palaces, residential quarters, and a burial site including the so-called royal tombs. Some of the public buildings are in the buffer zone. Few details have been provided of the individual component parts.

Some 80,000 cuneiform tablets have been retrieved from the city and testify to the use of written records on an unprecedented scale. The tablets provide details of a centralized bureaucratic administration, and highlight the importance of the wetland environment for the economy, belief system and literature, although ICOMOS notes that few details have been provided as to what is said and how it relates to the nominated sites.

Currently old barracks in the boundary are used as a temporary visitor centre. These will be removed as soon as a new visitor centre envisaged in the new management plan is completed.

Uruk

Uruk was the largest settlement in ancient Iraq and the main force of urbanization in southern Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BCE. Uruk (modern name Warka) lies about 80 km northwest of ancient Ur. The original city of Uruk was situated southwest of the Euphrates River. Today, the site lies to the northeast of the river as its river changed its course – a key factor in the decline of the city. Uruk's history covers four millennia from the end of the Ubaid period (c. 3,800 BCE) to the late Sassanid period (7th century CE).

The archaeological site of Uruk is composed of three 'tells' and there is evidence of multiple cities built on top of one another.

Its archaeological remains are said to illustrate several phases of the city's growth and decline, the architectural evolution and sophistication of public buildings, and the spatial organization of a vast and complex city with its sacred precincts encircling monumental temples – including two ziggurats, residential quarters organized by professions, and a canal system. However ICOMOS notes that few specific details are provided on each of these components.

The earliest cuneiform texts were found in the temple precinct, while *The Gilgamesh Epic*, the earliest literary text, also originated in Uruk. The city wall of Uruk is mentioned in this epic as one of the major building tasks of this famous king. At the height of its power, Uruk was surrounded by a double circular mudbrick wall 9.8 km long. The archaeological remains of the city wall have been verified in several small trenches and excavations, as well as by a geophysical survey. It was up to 5 m thick and strengthened by semi-circular bastions. The building material was mainly mud brick with some burnt brick. The city wall was first erected in the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC and remained in use until at least the Seleucid period (3rd century BC).

Just before Uruk entered its final period of decline, under Parthian rule (250 BCE to 227 CE), the Temple of Charyos was built, parts of which still survive.

The land around Uruk was extremely well supplied by canals, some recently identified through magnetometry. The canal system flowed through the city connecting it with the maritime trade on the ancient Euphrates River as well as with the surrounding agricultural land, in and around lowland marshes.

Tell Eridu

Eridu was a religious site rather than a city, as evidenced by its extensive temple complex with the remains of a ziggurat, and the sacred mound that underlies it, where eighteen successive temples were built over during a period of 3,000 years. The main tell is surrounded by six smaller tells – only one of which is within the boundary of the site. Five of the smaller mounds together with the depression that marks the site of the original lagoon are within the buffer zone. Only 1 to 2% of its surface has been excavated. As with the other two archaeological sites, ICOMOS notes that few details have been provided of component parts.

Ahwar Marshes

Four sites have been nominated in the Ahwar marshes.

Although the nomination states that the Ahwar marshes '*provide unique cultural services*', '*exemplify the ancient marshlands where key civilizations developed and agriculture development was pioneered*' and contain '*numerous archaeological sites*', the link between the marshes around the ancient cities and the Ahwar marshes is symbolic rather than historical. An archaeological study of a few sites was undertaken during the time the marshes were drained forty-five small archaeological tells have been identified within the boundaries or buffer zones of the marshes with pottery showing occupation from the 4th millennium BCE to the early Islamic period, but these sites do not relate to the Sumerian cities. The main cultural value of the Ahwar is their association with the Marsh Arabs for which the nomination dossier provides no details.

History and development

This has been included within the description above.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The analysis is based on comparisons for two aspects of the series: first the role of marshland resources in the development of the cities and cultures in ancient southern Mesopotamia; and secondly the way the remains of Uruk, Ur and Eridu testify to the outstanding contribution of all southern Mesopotamian cities to the history of the Ancient Near East.

The comparisons are undertaken for four different cultural aspects/fields: western and eastern Asian societies that developed in wetland environments or along major rivers more or less contemporaneously to the Ubaid and Sumerian periods; specific cultures that developed in wetlands within arid environments spanning different periods and geographical areas; relict cultural landscapes affected by environmental and historical changes in deltas that have been inscribed; and monumental structures similar to the ziggurat.

Although the development of urban settlements occurred in Upper Mesopotamia as well as in Lower Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium, it is argued that southern Mesopotamian cities developed to a much larger size than those in the north, especially in the late 4th and 3rd millennia.

The Pharaonic sites of Ancient Egypt already inscribed on the World Heritage List are seen to reflect monumental structures of religious and political importance, rather than the development of towns near the river.

In the Indus valley, although there is evidence of occupation from the 8th millennium BCE, urban centres emerge from around 2,500 to 1,800 BCE, at least a millennium later than in southern Mesopotamia. The sites of Mohenjo Daro, built in the middle 3rd millennium BCE reflects monumental architectural and town planning, as do the Archaeological Site of Harappa, and the Archaeological Site of Rehman Dheri, while it is suggested that the Archaeological Site of Mehrgarh (6500-2500 BCE) should be seen as a pre-urban settlement.

Various World Heritage inscribed sites in China are considered and also some on the Tentative List, but at a somewhat superficial level and it is suggested that they do not reflect the emergence of cities. Many sites in China could have been cited that do reflect early urban development and links to natural resources although overall they do reflect completely different cultural traditions. Similarly references are made to Tiwanaku and Olmec cultures which again reflect completely different cultural traditions.

A few comparison are also offered with relict cultural landscapes inscribed on the World Heritage List but these are not considered by ICOMOS to be relevant.

ICOMOS considers that the rise of the network of Sumerian cities through the development of the marsh and riverine hinterland, with very specific religious structures and the emergence of writing, reflects a very specific type of urban development in a particular area, in response to a very particular environment, over a long period of time. ICOMOS does not consider that a global comparative analysis in terms of the development of cities related to rivers and marshes is that enlightening. Rather the cities as a whole reflect the emergence of urban structures in a certain part of the globe and what should have been set out was the geo-cultural area within which meaningful comparisons might have been made.

ICOMOS nevertheless considers, on the basis of its own comparisons, that the cities of southern Mesopotamia can be considered as a discrete group with different characteristic to those further north.

In terms of how the three nominated sites, two cities and one sacred site, might reflect the whole network of Sumerians cities in southern Mesopotamia, it is suggested in the additional information they have provided in November 2015, that the sites of Uruk, Ur and Eridu, are the most intensively investigated early urban sites and therefore the best documented. Furthermore, it is suggested that for the remainder of the early urban sites in southern Mesopotamian (e.g. Umma) on the edges of the ancient marshes, either individual sites have not yet been sufficiently excavated or that extensive looting has irremediably affected their integrity. However few details are provided on these other cities to allow an understanding of how they relate to these put forward. Furthermore it is suggested that other sites might be nominated in the future but without details being provided as to which these sites might be.

In terms of providing justification for the choice of sites, comparisons are made with other cities that have ziggurats, and the three chosen are seen to have the best preserved remains. This focus on the ziggurat perhaps explains the fact that the boundaries exclude important urban and landscape features (see below) but is inadequate to justify why these three sites can reflect the whole lower Sumerian civilisation.

ICOMOS considers that given the enormous importance of the whole network of Sumerian cities, if the three selected sites are to be seen to reflect them all, then much clearer information is needed on how these cities might be seen as a group, what the overall characteristic were, and how the three nominated sites could be seen as either typical or exceptional. To achieve this, much more information is needed on the wider network of Sumerian cities as well as on overall city sites, their component parts and their symbiotic relationship with their surrounding landscapes. Currently there is more of a focus on the ziggurats rather than on the overall urban forms and their supporting infrastructures, that would allow a full understanding of the complexity, power and economic basis of these city states.

For the Ahwar marshes, no details have been provided as to how the four components were selected in terms of cultural parameters and the impression given is that natural parameters were the only ones used for selection. The specific marsh areas are not referred to in the analyses.

Thus the overall series has not been compared: rather the analysis has concentrated on the three cities and their marsh hinterlands that existed while they were flourishing.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis has not so far adequately justified consideration of this serial property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

The three urban sites:

- Were originally situated within the marshy landscape of the deltaic plain;
- Developed, between the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE, into some of the most significant urban centres of southern Mesopotamia and saw the origin of writing, monumental architecture, and complex technologies and societies;
- Offer a complete testimony to the growth and achievements of southern Mesopotamia urban centres and societies, and to their outstanding contribution to the history of the Ancient Near East and mankind as a whole;
- Document the economic and symbolic role of the wetland resources and landscape for the cultures of ancient southern Mesopotamia;
- Are testimonies of the antiquity and achievements of southern Mesopotamian cultures and of the impact of the unstable deltaic landscape upon the rise and fall of their large urban centres.

The three natural components of the marshes:

- Testify to the history of human occupation in the Ahwar marshes, through their several dozen small archaeological mounds.

ICOMOS considers that this justification highlights the main weakness of the series of seven components as not all the components convey a similar justification for Outstanding Universal Value. For a series, each component needs to contribute to the overall Outstanding Universal Value of the whole series, and thus to each of the criteria, and the components need to reflect cultural, social or functional links over time. In the nominated series these conditions have not been met.

ICOMOS does not consider that the cultural value of the current series of seven sites has been justified. The nominated natural marshes with their limited archaeological evidence, do not relate directly to the three cities, and cannot be said to represent the ancient marshlands around the cities. There are no cultural, social or functional links between the three cities and the four natural marshlands that have persisted over time.

ICOMOS considers that the three cities do have the potential to justify Outstanding Universal Value in the way they represent and reflect the early development of extensive and complex cities in southern Mesopotamia and their contribution to the history of the Ancient Near East and mankind as a whole, as well as their symbiotic relationship with the now relict marshlands that supported their prosperity.

In order to achieve this, the current series would need to be reconfigured with the three urban sites separated from the four wetland marshes. Moreover, far more information would be needed on precisely how the three archaeological sites reflect the planning, architectural, economic, and symbolic aspects of Sumerian culture, how they relate to the other Sumerian cities and to trade networks, and how they exploited the marshes and their riverine surroundings.

ICOMOS considers that this justification for the cultural value of the whole series has not been substantiated at the current time.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

In terms of the series as a whole, the integrity is difficult to define for two reasons. First, a full justification has not been provided to show how the three cities might reflect the whole Sumerian culture, and indeed there is mention of other sites coming forward in the future. Secondly, the inclusion of the four wetland marshes in the series to reflect the former relationship of the cities with their then adjacent marshes, is not convincing.

In terms of integrity of the individual sites, there is overall concern that not all the elements are included in the individual boundaries. The nationally protected areas are larger than the nominated sites and more readily encompass elements of the cities. But even these larger boundaries do not reflect all the elements that are crucial to understanding the relationships of the cities with the now relict marshlands.

Further the conservation condition of the three urban sites is not good (as detailed under conservation below) and certain elements have already suffered irreversible erosion and are also highly vulnerable to collapse, leaving a severe doubt as to how the integrity of the sites can be sustained.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the whole series has not so far been met; and that the integrity of the individual sites that comprise the series is highly vulnerable to the lack of conservation which is leading to erosion of archaeological evidence and the potential collapse of some structures.

Authenticity

In terms of authenticity of the overall series, there is inadequate justification as to how all the seven component sites contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the series under the cultural criteria. It is therefore not possible to evaluate the overall authenticity of the series.

In terms of material authenticity of the three urban archaeological sites, although there is no doubt of the link between the fabric and what they convey, that link is extremely vulnerable for some areas, where lack of conservation and maintenance has caused irreversible erosion of the mud and burnt brick fabric and the potential collapse of some structures (as detailed under Conservation).

The material authenticity of the four wetland marshes is difficult to assess in material terms as archaeological evidence is limited and in terms of associations, there are no cultural, social or functional links between the three cities and the four natural marshlands that have persisted over time.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the whole series has not so far been met; in terms of individual component sites, that the authenticity of the three urban archaeological sites is highly vulnerable to the loss of archaeological evidence, and that the authenticity of the four wetland marshes has not been demonstrated.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have not so far been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (v) (and natural criteria (ix) and (x)).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the remains of the Mesopotamian cities of Uruk and Ur together with Tell Eridu offer a complete testimony to the growth and subsequent decline of southern Mesopotamian urban centres and societies from the Ubaid and Sumerian periods until the Babylonian and Hellenistic periods. The three cities were major religious, political, economic and cultural centres which emerged and grew during a period of profound change in human history. They bear witness to the full repertoire of the contribution of southern Mesopotamian cultures to the development of ancient Near Eastern

urbanized societies and the history of mankind as a whole: the construction of monumental public works and structures in the form of ziggurats, temples, palaces, city walls, and hydraulic works; a class structured society reflected in the urban layout which included royal tombs and palaces, sacred precincts, public storehouses, areas dedicated to industries, and extensive residential neighbourhoods; the centralized control of resources and surplus which gave rise to the first writing system and administrative archives; and conspicuous consumption of imported goods.

ICOMOS considers that in principle this criterion could be appropriate but only for the three archaeological sites, and what needs to be set out much more clearly is how the three nominated sites reflect the 'full repertoire of Mesopotamian culture' and the overall network of cities, and particularly the basis for their prosperity in terms of hydraulic works and trade. The current nomination does not provide the essential details needed to make this case. Further all the necessary attributes need to be within the nominated boundaries, which is currently not the case (see boundaries below).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not so far been justified.

Criterion (v): *be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the three cities, originally near freshwater marshes together with the 'newer' wetland marshes to the south-east, exemplify the impact of the unstable deltaic landscape of the Tigris and Euphrates upon the rise and fall of large urban centres in southern Mesopotamia. Testimonies of this relict wetland landscape are found today in the cities' topography as traces of shallow depressions which held permanent or seasonal marshes, dry waterways and canal beds, and settlement mounds formed upon what were once islets surrounded by marsh water.

Architectural elements, archaeological evidence and a corpus of cuneiform texts document how the landscape of wetlands provided natural resources for building, fuel, food and agriculture and water transportation and also contributed to shaping religious beliefs, cultic practices, and literary and artistic expressions of successive cultures in southern Mesopotamia.

ICOMOS considers that undoubtedly the cities of Southern Mesopotamia developed as powerful trading and religious centres through exploiting the resources of the surrounding fresh water marshes, and their proximity to the Persian Gulf. Currently the three nominated archaeological sites encompass three cities but not the relict marshes of their hinterland that could have

provided the details needed to understand how the marshes were used for agriculture, in particular through the extensive canal systems and how they declined when the area dried out. Furthermore this justification does not apply to the four wetland marshes. The four marshland areas that have been nominated cannot be said to relate to the cities in historic or cultural terms.

ICOMOS considers that in principle this criterion could be appropriate but only for the three city sites, and if the boundaries were extended to include some of the relict marshland areas.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not so far been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the serial approach has not so far been justified. In conformity with *Operational Guidelines*, paragraph 137b) each component of a serial nomination needs to contribute to Outstanding Universal Value and thus to each of the criteria. In the nominated series that is not currently the case. ICOMOS considers that the three archaeological sites have the potential to satisfy the cultural criteria, with extended boundaries and the provision of more detailed information and justification. The rationale for the choice of sites need strengthening, all the key urban attributes need to be within the boundaries, and the relationship between the cities and the relict marshlands needs to be substantiated through inclusion of some relict marshlands within the boundaries. ICOMOS does not consider that the wetland marshes have the potential to satisfy a similar justification for cultural criteria. The wetland marshes have interesting cultural associations but these do not relate to the proposed justification for the cultural criteria, nor do they demonstrate any cultural, social or functional links over time with the archaeological sites, in conformity with paragraph 137a) of the *Operational Guidelines*, that component parts should reflect cultural, social or functional links over time.

ICOMOS considers that the criteria have not so far been justified.

4 Factors affecting the property

Following excavations in the 1930s, the sites were mainly left unattended and unprotected until the 1960s, and since then there has only been intermittent work undertaken.

In the last 85 years, erosion of the remains of the mud built structures from rain, strong winds, and sometimes uncontrolled access by visitors, have all contributed to the alarming deterioration of the three urban sites, and particularly the excavated areas. This erosion, compounded by the lack of regular maintenance, has led at best to decay and at worse to complete disintegration

of some of the excavated remains (see Conservation below).

A further problem is the impact of inappropriate conservation materials, such as concrete on the ziggurat of Ur, which has caused cracks that allow water penetration to some upstanding remains.

At Ur, some vegetation growth (especially in areas where water and moisture accumulate), as shown on a high-resolution map produced with the help of a drone, by an Iraqi-Italian mission currently working there, causes undercutting and collapse of mud brick walls. Once it dries-up in summer, this vegetation also contributes to fire hazards.

The lack of maintenance and protection between the 1930s and 1960s allowed some looting to take place. Clan elders expressed to the mission their continuing concern that looting and illegal excavations still persist.

Modern graffiti are visible on the surface of the bricks on the ziggurat of Ur and on the royal graves.

The Integrated National Energy Strategy for 2013-2030 (INES), recognises the impact of the oil extraction plants on heritage and the necessity to preserve the needed distance between these plants and the archaeological sites is clearly stated.

The construction of upstream dams, in Iraq and in neighbouring countries could have adverse impacts, such as damage to archaeological deposits from a raised water table resulting from intensified irrigation. The reduced flow of water in the rivers could also impact adversely on the four recreated marshland areas.

A military base (Camp Ader) set up by the United States of America 300 m away from the edge of the buffer zone has threatened the stability of some of the buildings on the site. The military base was returned to the Iraqi army in 2009 and there are now more limited activities.

The city of Nasiriyah borders the archaeological site of Ur.

The municipality has put forward a plan to build a ring road, which will connect Ur directly to the Nasiriyah-Baghdad highway and will avoid the city centre. This project includes proposals for a visitor centre and a high standard hotel in the city centre and a bridge over the Euphrates. None of these developments are in the vicinity of the Ur Archaeological site. Nevertheless ICOMOS recommends that detailed plans of the project should be provided.

Within Ur, various structures have been constructed to support excavation teams within the buffer zone. A dig house and guard house are located after the entrance of the site about 350 m to the north east of the ziggurat. Another dig house, hosting international archaeological missions, is located 450 m from the ziggurat. A

laboratory adjacent to the living quarters of the guards and their families is situated 275 m northeast of the ziggurat.

All these modern buildings are within the official boundaries of the protected archaeological site and inside the proposed buffer zone. Currently these buildings do not have water, drainage or electricity connected and ICOMOS considers that provision of these would have to be carefully planned to avoid disturbing intact archaeological deposits or visual impact, and may be undesirable.

Until 2014, electrical poles and wires ran along the paved road from the Ur's main entrance to the foot of the ziggurat. These have now been removed, as have a paved road and parking areas built in the 1960s over an excavated area, an enclosure of the ziggurat.

At Uruk, a dig house and a guard houses are located inside the property. A small station of the Antiquity and Heritage Police is in the buffer zone. No services are connected. An agricultural village is situated just outside the buffer zone, but there seems to be no encroachment.

At Ur, currently visitor numbers are very low and on average the site has received less than one thousand visitors a year over the past five since the withdrawal of the US army at the airbase near to Ur, and before the 2003 war, the number of visitors was only slightly higher.

Tourism is not thus currently a pressure factor. At Eridu, no visitors are recorded at the site, there are therefore no visitor facilities nor impact from visitation. Furthermore, there are no plans to encourage visitation for the years to come, on account of the sites' remoteness, challenges to ensuring its protection against visitors, and because there are little visible remains. ICOMOS considers that plans for visitation can only be considered after a comprehensive, multi-year, research and conservation project has been implemented.

At Uruk, very few visitors access the site: they usually come as part of delegations. No school trips are presently organized there. Signage has been installed by the State Board of Antiquity and Heritage (SBAH) in front of major monuments.

The potential power of attraction of these three sites for international visitors is high. ICOMOS considers it is essential to put in place forward plans for the development of appropriate tourism and interpretation strategies in order to ensure that tourism does not become a negative force but these must be linked to improved conservation as currently none of the three archaeological sites are in an adequate state for the arrival of visitors.

ICOMOS considers that the main threat to the property is the almost complete lack of consolidation and maintenance of the excavated areas until very recently,

and the subsequent loss of the archaeological resource from erosion and collapse.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

For all three sites, the protected archaeological areas go beyond the boundaries of the nominated areas to encompass the buffer zones as well. As has been set out above, key archaeological sites that should be part of the sites, now lie in the buffer zone.

Recent non-invasive investigations have led to an improved understanding of the relationship between the three cities and the relict marshlands of their hinterlands which supported their wealth and growth, through for instance identification of networks of canals. The boundaries need to encompass some of these areas to allow an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the cities and the now relict marshes.

Ur

Some of the public buildings are in the buffer zone, as are three of the harbours, while the main harbour of Ur is situated outside the buffer zone. All of these key sites should be within the boundaries. Further recent non-invasive surveys have identified crucial element of canals in the hinterland of the site which should also be reflected within the boundaries.

Eridu

The nominated site is small with a large buffer zone that encompasses its surrounding wall and several small tells, all of which should be in the boundary.

Uruk

As with the other two sites, the protected area encompasses the site and its buffer zone. The ruins of the Bit Akitu (the New Year festival house) to the North-East of the mudbrick city wall are outside the buffer zone boundary and should be included within it.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the three nominated city sites and their buffer zones need to be re-assessed on the basis of more detailed surveys to allow the boundaries to fully reflect the necessary attributes.

Ownership

The whole property is owned by the State Party.

Protection

The three archaeological sites are protected by the Antiquities and Heritage Law and Law no. 55 of 2002, the latter considered as private Law having priority over the public laws. In case of any contradiction between the two, the private Law no. 55 would take precedence.

Registration in the Official Gazette includes both the sites and their buffer zones. What this means is the acknowledgment that important archaeological sites extend beyond the boundary of the nominated component sites.

The nomination dossier sets out clearly in an Annex an Analysis of the Legal and Regulatory Framework.

Provided that the nomination of the property results in its inscription on the World Heritage List, the Government will issue a cabinet legal decree recognizing the special status of all components as a World Heritage property.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate.

Conservation

At Ur, an aerial survey carried out recently by drone has been completed to a high definition. In addition 3D photogrammetry of most of the standing monuments has been undertaken. For most of the rest of the three sites, documentation is quite inadequate.

There is currently no overall archived documentation of the excavation reports or plans, nor a plan on what documentation is needed and how this will be achieved. For Ur, a Digitization Project, run in partnership by the British Museum and the Penn Museum, was launched in 2013 to collate and digitise some of the finds related to the campaigns of Woolley of the 1920s and 1930s but has not yet commenced collaboration with the Iraq Museum. For Uruk, the German Institute is beginning to collate information on past excavation work.

Ur

The Iraqi mission to Ur restored the ziggurat during the 1960s and 1980s using fired bricks laid with cement. Substantial excavations and consolidation works were also undertaken including the three flights of stairs and the lower portions of the western end of the south frontage.

Today, the ziggurat shows cracks and erosion, both in the modern restoration and in the original core. For the latter, a solution needs to be found as a matter of urgency to stop water infiltration and allow water finding its way into the core to drain out.

The E-dub-lal-mah temple is located in the south-east corner of the sacred precinct of the ziggurat, was excavated by Leonard Woolley in the 1920s, and restored using concrete, including the addition of a concrete roof. Some conservation work was undertaken during the 1960s which involved exposing the walls of the temple and its paved limestone floor, and rebuilding the stairs leading to the 'holy of holies'. The cella's internal and external walls were also restored.

Today the E-dub-lal-mah building is in a deplorable state of conservation, with deep cracks due in large part to the heavy concrete roof and because of long periods of

neglect and exposure to the elements without any maintenance work. The building has been documented recently by an Iraqi-Italian mission and a conservation proposal with related specifications and bill of quantities was prepared in 2014.

The Nin-mah temple is situated inside the sacred *temenos* to the east of the E-dub-lal-mah temple. The building was cleaned by the Iraqi Mission in the 1960's, when its architectural features were exposed but the building was not restored nor consolidated. It was subsequently left to disintegrate totally, as a result of exposure to the elements, neglect, and uncontrolled access.

The Lower Temple of Nannar is situated right opposite the ziggurat. The Iraqi mission took charge of clearing the site of the temple from debris and exposing the structure of the building. Like the other monuments, it was then left to disintegrate due to the absence of a conservation and maintenance programme.

The same conditions characterize the Nin-Kal temple and Kiki bar-ku temple whereby exposure to the elements and the lack of maintenance and conservation have almost completely obliterated the traces of these ancient buildings.

The E-nun-mah temple, located to the east of the E-dub-lal-mah, was subjected to some cleaning and consolidation during the 1960's mission, but this has not stopped the heavy decay of its remains. Today, little is visible of the original plan.

Nanna's temple, located to the north of the ziggurat, also suffered from neglect and erosion and ICOMOS considers that proper re-excavation and consolidation will be needed in order for it to be interpreted. The same can be said of Nanna's courtyard, located to the east of the ziggurat, the Gig-par-ku of Amar-Sin, the E-hor-sag of Ur-Nammu and Shulgi, located to the south and south-east of the ziggurat, and the mausoleum of Shulgi and Amar-Sin.

The Royal Cemetery of the Third Dynasty consists of a number of subterranean structures built with fired bricks. During the 1960s mission, the various structures were consolidated and partly rebuilt using fired bricks laid with cement. Lack of maintenance has caused erosion, brick-displacement and cracks in several walls and ceilings. Modern graffiti (mainly in ink) are visible on the surface of the walls. These structures are being documented by the Iraqi-Italian mission and a detailed conservation proposal is being developed.

There are a number of other structures located outside of the sacred precinct but they, too, are in a poor state of conservation due to neglect, erosion, and material decay. These include the so-called House of Abraham, the Harbour temple, the Larsa-period quarter, and the Parthian period buildings. While the House of Abraham was reconstructed by Woolley, the other structures were

only partly excavated and have almost completely collapsed or been buried. The House of Abraham received further conservation work in the early 2000s, when walls were consolidated using fired bricks, and capped with layers of cement.

Eridu

Major archaeological excavations were conducted in Eridu between 1946 and 1949. Since then, no further excavation, survey, or conservation and maintenance work has been conducted at the site, resulting in the progressive reburial of all excavated structures, with the exception of the ziggurat and other nearby structures.

The ziggurat is heavily eroded due to its exposure to the elements for over 70 years, especially in its northwest and southwest sides, and ICOMOS considers that an accurate condition assessment and a detailed conservation plan will be needed in order to consolidate and preserve what remains. Significant damage resulting from particularly heavy rains, have caused landslides and the formation of holes in the ground.

All other structures, such as the Enki Temple and other temples, the Ubaid tombs and the Uruk period buildings, identified and published after the excavation campaigns of 1946-1949, are presently reburied under the sand and their state of conservation is unknown.

The landscape setting of the site is in an excellent state of preservation.

Uruk

The German team working on the site backfilled several old excavation trenches and structures in order to protect them from the harsh weathering conditions. This is why most of the Uruk period buildings are covered with earth today. As only a few layers of mud bricks had survived, these would have deteriorated quickly without such protection.

However, the backfills consist of softer material than the surrounding natural deposits with an absence of drainage for rain water. These two factors (the soft composition and the absence of drainage) resulted in the deterioration of the backfilled material, which then gets washed by heavy rain, creating deep gullies.

The remains of the Gareus Temple and the associated bath are still well preserved. As they were built without a foundation on a layer of mashed loam, this has caused subsidence, erosion, and rising damp, and they urgently need restoration and consolidation measures.

On the inner side of fortification wall II, bathing facilities were constructed in the Parthian period. The walls of the baths were partly reconstructed during the 28th campaign (1970). The new reconstructed structures are currently in bad condition. They need conservation measures using suitable materials.

Overall the lack of conservation and maintenance activities at the sites has resulted in the progressive deterioration and collapse of many ancient features. Some of the most endangered structures are those that received substantial conservation in the past, such as the White Temple in Uruk, the E-dub-lal-mah Temple and the Royal Tombs in Ur. In Eridu, most excavated areas are now reburied and it is not possible to have an idea of their previous state of conservation until renewed excavations bring them to light again.

Ur

As mentioned above, the Iraqi-Italian project currently financed by the Italian Cooperation is addressing documentation and the preparation of conservation plans for three structures at Ur: the E-dub-lal-mah, the Royal Cemetery, and the ziggurat.

Currently, plans for the conservation of the E-dub-lal-mah temple and the Mausolea of Ur III are completed and can be implemented either through the resources of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) or in collaboration with missions active in Ur and other donors. The Dhi Qar Governorate approved the budget for this project as part of its 2013 budget allocation, but the funds have not yet been committed, largely due to the deteriorating security situation. These projects constitute the first two phases of the conservation study funded by the Italian Cooperation and led scientifically by La Sapienza - University of Rome; the third phase involves the conservation and maintenance of the ziggurat. Projects for the Royal Tombs and the ziggurat are in preparation in addition to a study for developing signage and interpretive panels to be installed on site.

As well as the conservation projects planned with the Italian mission, there is an investigation project aiming at the study of the core of the ziggurat. Within the framework of this project a training component for the management team and for other archaeologists will also be implemented. Furthermore, the Stony Brook University, New York, plans a survey and an excavations project in the south part of the Royal Tombs. The framework agreement organizing this work has been recently signed with the SBAH.

Eridu

In early 2014 the SBAH granted the Italian Mission the permission to conduct archaeological investigations at the site. Work so far has consisted in undertaking preliminary surface surveys and re-mapping of the site.

After the excavation and re-excavation of some of the structures, a conservation plan will be developed.

Uruk

The German Archaeological Institute is planning a return to the site once the security situation improves in the country. The German team proposes an excavation of the still preserved city wall either side of the street leading into the site in order to present this important element of the town to the public. Activities in the

meantime have concentrated on the publication of older excavations, exhibitions and 3D digital reconstructions of excavated structures. The future research will start with a survey of the suburbs of Uruk (3 km radius) which will add to an older survey of the Uruk countryside.

ICOMOS considers that it is important that these various proposals are detailed and submitted for review until such time as an overall Conservation Plan can be prepared for the sites which sets out parameters for interventions. Such a plan will also need to consider ways of consolidating the fragile remains, as well as how they might be interpreted.

ICOMOS considers that the lack of maintenance and active conservation means that the state of conservation of some individual excavated areas has deteriorated to such an extent that vital evidence has been or will soon be eroded; and that the three sites are now in danger of losing authenticity and integrity. Although ICOMOS acknowledges that some survey and conservation work is now being planned, it considers that there is an urgent need to establish an overall approach to surveys, documentation and consolidation in advance of conservation work commencing. ICOMOS recommends that an overall Conservation Plan be prepared for the three nominated sites which sets out parameters for interventions and consider ways of consolidating the fragile remains, as well as how they might be interpreted.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

In 2013, an inter-ministerial National World Heritage Committee was created. This will play a role in the direct management and protection of the properties, once activated.

There is no specific over-arching management for this series nor local management structures at each of the sites.

At the State level, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is the main authority responsible for the conservation of the three sites.

A World Heritage Site Section exists within the SBAH in Baghdad, which has been involved in the preparation of the new Management Plans for these sites.

At the governorate level, Antiquity and Heritage Directorates (AHDs) are directly responsible for the conservation, management and monitoring of archaeological sites inside their respective jurisdiction. The Dhi Qar AHD has jurisdiction over Ur and Eridu, whereas the Muthanna AHD has jurisdiction over Uruk.

AHDs are assisted by the Antiquity and Heritage Police, created in 2007 for monitoring archaeological sites. The

Antiquity and Heritage Police maintains a permanent presence at Uruk and Ur and regularly patrol the site of Eridu.

There are three site guards in Ur (living on site with their families), one in Uruk (also on site with his family), and one in Eridu (conducting daily inspections from Nasiriyah).

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The nomination dossier said that a Strategic Action Plan was being developed and a copy was provided to the mission expert. The Plan sets out a strategy for the property based on an overall vision for the management of the property. The Strategy will address the effective coordination and cooperation between all parties involved in the management; the involvement of all key stakeholders; coordination with the international community on; adequate staffing and financial resources; national responses to threats facing the property; and overall coordination of human resources.

This Strategy will cover both its natural and cultural components. An Action Plan is being developed and the mission was told that two of its actions have been implemented: the establishment and activation of the national committee for the World Heritage and the establishment of the management units for the sites of Ur, Eridu and Uruk.

Individual plans have been prepared for each of the component sites; only those for the natural sites were attached with the dossier. A plan for the three archaeological sites was submitted by the State Party in November 2015. This acknowledges that *“no regular monitoring is presently being carried”*, that *“the lack of conservation and maintenance activities at the sites is resulting in the progressive deterioration and collapse of many ancient features”* and the *“absence of local management structures at the site”*.

It emphasises that it is essential for the NCWH to be activated, in order to monitor the implementation of the management plan of the proposed property.

The Plan sets out a structure for management and lists the approaches for conservation documentation, interpretation and tourism that all need to be developed as a matter of urgency, together with a preliminary timeframe. This outlines an ambitious undertaking which will need substantial resources and coordination, as well as detailed agreement as to how the extremely difficult conservation condition of many part of the three sites will be approached.

Involvement of the local communities

In Iraq, the chieftain system and the clan system is a key feature of people’s daily lives. Most of the civil incidents

are resolved on the clan level and do not reach the courts. This system is run by the elders of the clans.

The clan elders in the region of the three archaeological sites, are much concerned by the sites and their state of preservation especially in regards to illicit excavations and looting. They consider that the sites are the legacy of their clans and consequently it is their duty to preserve them for the future generations.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that although a management system has been set up it has not had chance to become fully operational and it remains to be seen how it can address the far-reaching and fundamental issues facing the sites, through acting on and amplifying the objectives of the management plan.

6 Monitoring

Monitoring indicators have been set out but these are currently related to percentage of buildings needing repairs, rate of encroachments, stability of buildings and relative humidity. These are a good but limited start. Given the dire state of conservation of the three urban sites, the main need is for a monitoring system with an established baseline that can provide an accurate record of changes to the overall fabric over time.

ICOMOS considers that there is an urgency in establishing such a baseline and an agreed monitoring system using the best available equipment, including remote sensing.

ICOMOS considers that the current monitoring system does not adequately address the challenges to the sites and as a matter of urgency a detailed monitoring system needs to be put in place, based on an established baseline, and addressing all the key attributes of the sites.

7 Conclusions

From a procedural point of view, the nominated series of seven components present conceptual difficulties in terms of the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines* for serial properties. The series of seven component sites does not meet the requirements of paragraph 137b) that all component sites of a series must contribute to the overall Outstanding Universal Value of the series, and thus each component must contribute to each criteria. Currently, the three archaeological component sites of Ur, Uruk and Tell Eridu do not contribute to the proposed justification for the natural criteria, while the four wetland marsh areas do not contribute to the proposed justification for the cultural criteria. Nor does the series meet paragraph 137a) that component parts should reflect cultural, social or functional links over time. The symbolic links proposed

between the ancient cities and the wetland marshes are links that are perceived today.

Although ICOMOS strongly supports the idea that the Sumerian cities that arose along the Euphrates River had a highly productive symbiotic relationship with their surrounding marshes through the way that they provided water for irrigation and transport, and reeds for fodder, fuel and building materials, and also sacred associations, the ancient marshes that were the lifeblood of these cities have now dried out and are not those being nominated.

The four wetland marshes that are part of the nominated series are between 60 and 150 kilometres away from the cities with whom only modern symbolic links have so far been demonstrated. Although some archaeological sites have been identified in the wetland marshes, these have not been shown to be linked historically to the growth and development of the three cities or to have cultural attributes that relate to the potential cultural criteria.

For the reasons set out below, ICOMOS considers that further detailed discussions are needed with the State Party and with IUCN to consider how the seven sites might relate to the requirements of the World Heritage Convention, whether as one mixed property, or as two properties, one cultural and one mixed, or through some other variation, and that time is needed for these discussions.

The three Sumerian urban sites have great potential to contribute to the World Heritage List but much more detailed information needs to be provided on the selection of sites, what they contain, their relationship with their now relict marshlands and their states of conservation. And a clearer rationale needs to be provided for the selection of sites to show how the cities relate to other Sumerian cities in southern Mesopotamia, and might be seen to reflect the whole network of these cities.

Furthermore, more extensive details need to be provided to allow a full understanding of how they reflect the complexity, power and economic basis of these city states through what has been excavated and what remains. Currently in terms of documentation there is more of a focus on the ziggurats than on the overall urban forms and their supporting infrastructures. The nomination does not provide sufficient information to explain what survives of these great cities and what needs managing to ensure they may continue to reflect fully their intricate and complex histories.

Of great concern is the state of conservation of the three urban sites as a result of lack of maintenance and conservation until the very recent past. The highly eroded nature of the sites impacts adversely on authenticity and integrity, making it difficult to understand the extensive layers of evidence that were uncovered by excavations. The surveys that have been initiated to set out a baseline for the current state of the remains need

to be extended for the whole of the three sites in order that conservation plans can be developed that may set out clearly the various options for intervention and fully justify what approach is to be followed in developing the urgently needed conservation measures.

The desertified former marshland landscapes beyond the boundaries of the cities are now beginning to reveal patterns of canals and fields, and satellite settlements from non-invasive surveys. It is ICOMOS's view that some of these areas need to be included within the nominated boundaries in order to reflect the way the use of the marshes underpinned the prosperity of the cities. The precise delineation of these extended areas would need to be considered in relation to the detailed output of the various surveys – which so far have not been provided.

The four nominated wetland marshland areas are being put forward mainly for their natural values, rather than for how they reflect cultural resources related to the Sumerian cities. Information has been provided that forty-five small tells were investigated when the marshes were drained – some within the boundaries and some outside – but no details have been given as to their precise location, or what the investigations revealed, nor any links with the Sumerian cities. Neither has information been provided on the association between the marshes and the Marsh Arabs, who inhabited the areas from the 9th century AD. The only links presented between the wetland marshes and the ancient cities are symbolic rather than historical.

At the end of February 2016, the State Party submitted supplementary information in response to ICOMOS's interim report. This emphasised that the inclusion of the wetland marshes with the three cities could emphasise the link, on the one hand, between the demise of the cities and environmental change related to the unstable delta, and, on the other hand, between the wetland marshes and the cities and the severe environmental and cultural threats that they are respectively facing. As this approach was not mentioned specifically in the original nomination dossier, it has not been considered by the ICOMOS Panel. Nevertheless, ICOMOS would like to observe that such an approach would need to set out clearly the cultural and natural attributes that would be managed (and whether these relate to degradation and irreversible change) and would need to be justified by an augmented comparative analysis.

ICOMOS considers that more time is needed to develop this nomination in order to allow the cities to reflect their symbiotic relationships with their surrounding marshlands and to put in place a structured approach for archaeological conservation in order to begin to allow a full understanding of the multi-layered remains.

ICOMOS suggests if the cities were inscribed on the basis of the current dossier, and in their highly unstable and potentially dangerous conservation condition, that

this would not provide the basis for a sustainable way forward.

ICOMOS appreciates the dialogue that has already been undertaken with the State Party during the evaluation process and would welcome a continuation of this dialogue in order to address in more detail the structure of this nomination and the fundamental conservation challenges that the three archaeological sites are facing.

8 Recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision, noting that this will be harmonised as appropriate with the recommendations of IUCN regarding their evaluation of this mixed site nomination under the natural criteria and included in the working document WHC/16/40.COM/8B.

Recommendations with respect to inscription

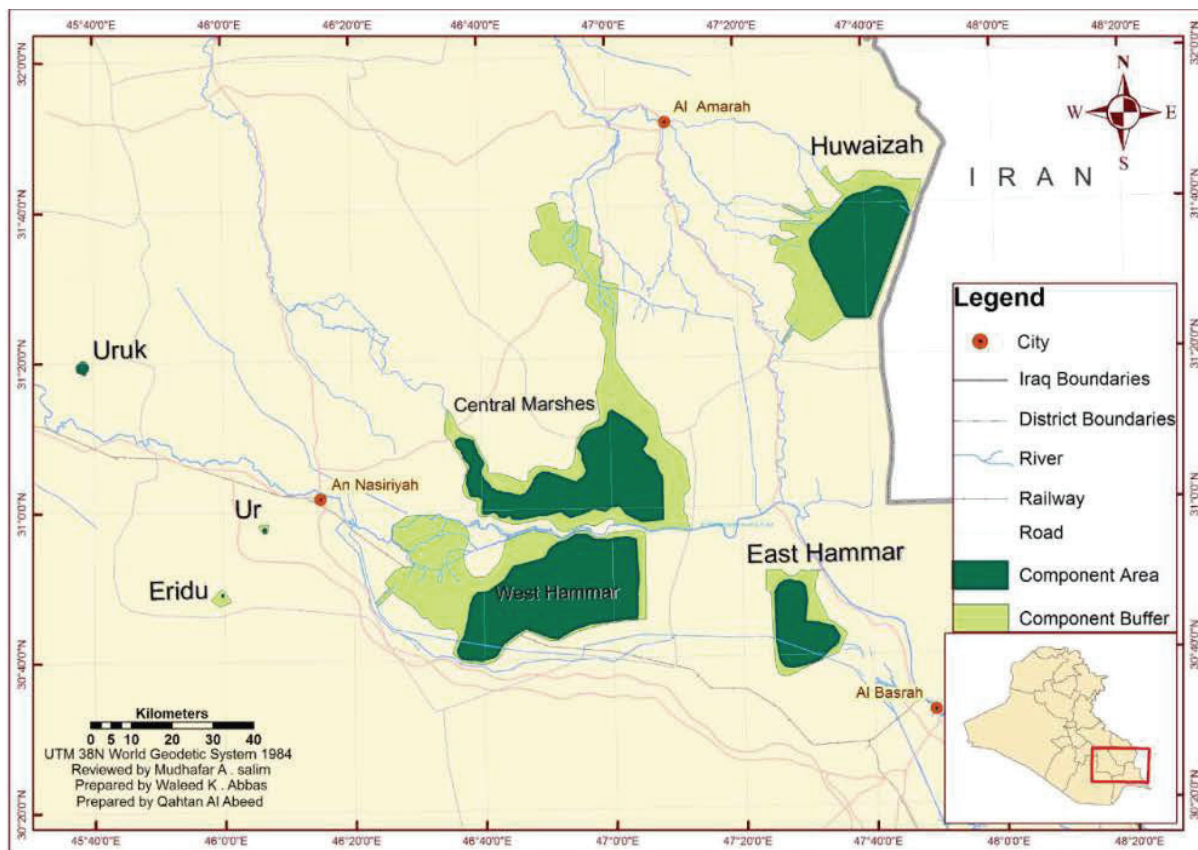
ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the nomination of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and the Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities, Republic of Iraq, to the World Heritage List be **deferred** in order to allow the State Party, with the advice of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, if requested, to:

- Undertake discussions with both Advisory Bodies to consider how the seven sites might relate to the requirements of the World Heritage Convention, whether as one mixed property, or as two properties, one cultural and one mixed, or through some other variation, in order to re-structure the nomination;
- Provide, in the context of a revised nomination or nominations:
 - A clear rationale for the selection of urban sites to show how the cities might be seen to reflect the whole network of cities in southern Mesopotamia, and provide details of the final shape of the series;
 - Augmented details for the three cities to allow a full understanding of what remains that reflect their complexity, power and economic basis, and to allow a clear basis for conservation to ensure the evidence they contain is sustained;
 - Enlarged boundaries around the three cities in order to encompass archaeological aspects of the relict marshland landscapes surrounding them;
 - In order to begin to address the highly unstable conservation conditions of the archaeological sites, a programme of surveys to create a base-line delineation of the current state of conservation of the sites;

- A programme of conservation plans for all three cities on the basis of the surveys that set out clearly the various options for intervention, and justify which approach is to be followed in developing conservation measures;
- A detailed master plan/road map that sets out how and when the conservation of the sites will be put on a sustainable basis.
- Produce a detailed management plan for the overall property that sets out its governance systems and how it relates to management plans for individual component sites.

ICOMOS considers that any revised nomination would need to be considered by an expert mission to the property.

ICOMOS appreciates the dialogue that has already been undertaken with the State Party during the evaluation process, and would be ready and willing to continue this dialogue, in the spirit of the Upstream processes, in order to address in more detail the structure of this serial nomination and the fundamental conservation challenges that the three archaeological sites are facing.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated properties



The Eanna District and the Inanna Ziggurat, Uruk



The main entrance of the E-dub-lal-mah in Ur



The Ur Ziggurat



The Eridu Ziggurat