

EUROPE / NORTH AMERICA

# MESSEL PIT FOSSIL SITE

GERMANY



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# WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

## MESSEL PIT FOSSIL SITE (GERMANY) - ID N° 720

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### 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Messel Pit Fossil Site is a former area of open cast quarrying for oil shale and is one of the smallest natural World Heritage properties, being 42 hectares in area. The property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995, and is recognised under criterion (viii) in relation to its values for fossils produced from the former quarry area. The evaluation of the property at this time considered it to be of Outstanding Universal Value as the single best site which contributes to the understanding of the Eocene, a time when mammals became firmly established in all principal land ecosystems.

### 2. BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The proposal is to create a buffer zone to the property, comprising an area of 22.5 hectares within the perimeter fence that surrounds the property. The buffer zone of the Messel Pit Fossil Site is clearly defined on its outer side by the fence, whilst its inner boundary adjoins that of the inscribed property.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

As it concerns the creation of a buffer zone, the proposal is considered in relation to the integrity, protection and management of the inscribed property.

The fenced area that comprises the buffer zone prevents illegal trespassing, illegal excavations and other damage that could occur to the inscribed property. The presence of the fence is marked on the 1994 map submitted in support of the nomination, and its presence and role is also noted in the IUCN evaluation report. The 2006 periodic report for Europe concluded that the fence has proven to be a highly effective measure of protection for the values of Messel Pit Fossil Site.

The site itself as well as the proposed buffer zone is under legal protection by the state law protecting historical and palaeontological monuments and sites: The Act on the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Monument Protection Act) of the Land of Hessen of 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1986. [Hessisches Gesetz zum Schutze der Kulturdenkmäler (Denkmalschutzgesetz) in der Fassung vom 5. September 1986]. The proposal was submitted as part of the submission of a new management plan for the property.

IUCN considers that this proposal is straightforward in recognising the narrow but important protected zone around the inscribed property that is already

the de facto buffer zone of the property, and was noted at the time of inscription. The proposal will support continued effective management of this area to provide security to the World Heritage property and assist in its long-term conservation by allowing regulation of access, including in relation to visitor safety considerations. There is also a possible benefit in relation to the protection of the wider geological strata that surround the property. The management plan, dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 2009, has been reviewed by IUCN and appears to provide a positive further step in the conservation and presentation of this property. The plan is comprehensive and describes the management activities and challenges. It will need to be complemented by specific action plans and adequate resources to ensure effective and ongoing implementation.

IUCN notes that the State Party's proposal states that one motivation for the creation of the buffer zone is that under the revised Operational Guidelines a buffer zone is "now required for world heritage sites". IUCN notes that a buffer is not a strict requirement if there are other means of effective protection in place to protect a property from wider threats. However, in this case the area is fully appropriate to be recognised as a buffer zone, considering the functions it performs. IUCN considers the proposal, combined with the equally important achievement of the newly prepared management plan, are to be welcomed.

IUCN considers that the proposal to create a buffer zone meets the requirements for approval as a minor boundary modification to the property.

### 4. OTHER COMMENTS

None.

## 5. RECOMMENDATION

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents **WHC-10/34.COM/8B** and **WHC-10/34.COM/INF 8B2**,
2. Approves the proposed creation of a 22.5 ha buffer zone for the 42 ha **Messel Pit Fossil Site, Germany** in order to strengthen the integrity of the inscribed property and support its effective protection and management;
3. Notes with appreciation the submission of a fully revised management plan for the property, including its buffer zone, and encourages the State Party to fully implement the plan on an ongoing basis.

**Map 1:** Location and boundaries of the property and proposed buffer zone.

