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World Heritage

12 EXT.COM

WHC/17/12 EXT.COM/4

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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

**Twelfth Extraordinary Session
Paris, UNESCO Headquarters, Room XI
15 November 2017, 2.00-3.00 pm**

Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda: International Assistance requests

4. Examination of International Assistance requests

SUMMARY

This Document presents a request for Emergency Assistance which was received by the World Heritage Centre on 18 September 2017. In accordance with paragraph 241 of the *Operational Guidelines*, the approval authority is the World Heritage Committee as the amount of this request is above US\$75,000.

Draft Decision: 12 EXT.COM 4, see Point II.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

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Mixed Properties

N°	Region	State Party – Name of activity	Amount requested (US\$)	Amount recommended for approval (US\$)
1	Asia-Pacific	Palau – Responding to the threat of feral cat introduction to the Rock Island Southern Lagoon World Heritage area	139,505	139,505

Funds available for a possible approval under the Emergency Assistance budget as of 27 October 2017: US\$ 249,975

Total amount submitted for approval by the Committee: US\$ 139,505

Comments of the Secretariat : sufficient funds available.

A summary of this request is presented in the next pages. The full text is available with the Secretariat.

REQUEST N° 1

**Emergency Assistance
Mixed Heritage
Asia-Pacific**

State Party: Palau (*Small Island Developing State*)

Name of activity: Responding to the threat of feral cat introduction to the Rock Island Southern Lagoon World Heritage area

Amount requested: US\$ 139,505

Status of dues to the World Heritage Fund as at 31 December 2016: contributions 2015-2016 unpaid. However, payment of contributions is not required to benefit from Emergency Assistance (see paragraph 237 of the *Operational Guidelines*).

Previous contributions from the World Heritage Fund for this property:

- Conservation & Management Assistance (2015), US\$ 30,000

Background:

Palau's Rock Island Southern Lagoon (RISL) is internationally recognized as one of the world's most biologically rich and diverse island groups in the world, earning an endorsement as a World Heritage site for both its ecological and cultural value. Ngeruktabel Island is the largest and most complex island within the RISL. The intricate coastline of the island contains a multitude of habitats such as inland marine lakes, caves, karstic features, limestone forest and beach strand forest. It provides key habitat for all of Palau's endemic birds, herpetofauna and mammals, as well as the main nesting beaches for the endangered hawksbill sea turtle. The island is managed by the Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement (DCLE).

Feral cats were initially detected by a local naturalist in April 2016 in Ngeremdiu, a popular tourist area on Ngeruktabel. These reports were further confirmed by DCLE Conservation Officers. A two-person team of eradication experts from Island Conservation, an international non-profit organization with expertise in preventing extinctions by removing invasive species from islands, completed a site visit to Ngeremdiu in September 2016. Recommendations following this visit included: 1) Immediate action to assess the extent of the population across Ngeruktabel and 2) Immediate removal of cats from Ngeremdiu. Since that time, an additional cat sighting was reported by a Koror State conservation officer at another tourist activity area on a different part of the island. If action is not taken immediately, the population of cats may become so widespread on Ngeruktabel that an eradication project would require up to several millions of dollars over multiple years, or may not be feasible at all.

Feral cats are listed as one of the world's most damaging invasive alien species and have been the primary extinction driver for dozens of insular endemic vertebrates. The recent introduction of cats to Ngeremdiu poses an imminent threat to the endemic fauna on Ngeruktabel. If left unchecked, the cat population will result in irretrievable loss of populations of endemic birds, and will significantly impact to the herpetofauna of the island.

Currently, the cat population is believed to be limited in distribution and possible to eradicate if action is taken immediately. DCLE is lacking the technical expertise and resources needed to effectively remove the population and assess the extent of feral cats on Ngeruktabel and

requests emergency assistance to hire eradication experts and pay for supplies and travel to complete the project. Action must be taken quickly to protect the island's Outstanding Universal Value.

Objectives:

The main objective of this project is to eradicate feral cats from Ngeruktabel Island and eliminate the threat of reinvasion by establishing a biosecurity programme for the entire RISL. This will prevent the loss of the island's biodiversity values and directly address the threats to its Outstanding Universal Value. With sufficient resources, including the help from international eradication experts, DCLE plans to immediately address the emergency of invasive cats at Ngeremediu and to assess the distribution of cats across the island.

There is an urgent need to initiate this work before the opportunity is missed to obstruct the spread of invasive cats. DCLE is prepared to assess the feasibility of a largescale eradication project and begin operational planning, if the results indicate that this action is necessary. To determine the extent of this emergency, high quality professional camera traps will need to be purchased and deployed as soon as possible. An intensive and ongoing survey for sign of cat presence at all potential habitats will take place in conjunction with the camera trap survey and will require training a dedicated field team, including a boat operator. The oversight of this field team will require management from DCLE as well as contracting international experts in island eradication work; these experts will also oversee the removal of cats at known locations.

Methodology: all available methods are being considered for removing cats from the island, including trapping, camera detection, and hunting. Hunting with spotlights is considered to be a primary removal method, particularly on beaches, however the geography of Ngeruktabel is incredibly complex and treacherous terrain and will make hunting extremely difficult or impossible at night on much of the interior of the island.

Biosecurity is of utmost importance to the long-term success of this project and the protection of the entire RISL. It is imperative that once cats are removed from Ngeruktabel proper protocols are in place to prevent reintroduction and respond to an incursion rapidly should one occur. The cats present on Ngeruktabel were likely intentionally released by people, therefore a large component of the biosecurity plan will focus on education and outreach. The development and implementation of biosecurity protocols is an objective in the Rock Island Southern Lagoon Area Management Plan; the authorities are currently working on the development of the biosecurity plan.

This project will build Palau's in-country capacity to manage invasive species through training and hands-on experience of local staff in invasive species management, eradication and biosecurity. The strategies developed for Ngeruktabel can be applied the rest of the RISL immediately, allowing for the strategic monitoring and response to incursions across the entire World Heritage property.

Duration of the project:

Estimated to 12 months

Expected results:

<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Means of verification</i>
Result 1: Recruitment and training of a specialized eradication team.	Successful recruitment of team with tools and resources needed to complete objectives	Oversight by international experts and DCLE. Progress reports.
Result 2: Determine the number and distribution of cats on Ngeruktabel.	Survey and detection work completed	Field report
Result 3: a) If localized in distribution, cats removed from Ngeruktabel. b) If widespread and abundant, the completion of a feasibility assessment for removing cats from Ngeruktabel (optional phase depending on findings).	a) Eradication program complete b) Survey and detection work completed. Draft feasibility assessment report.	a) Absence of cats confirmed by camera traps data and ongoing monitoring by conservation officers b) Feasibility assessment report. Explicit recommendations for the operational plan.
Result 4: Biosecurity	Biosecurity plan completed. Education and outreach programme completed.	Biosecurity protocols are enforced by DCLE and practiced by all island users.

Budget:

Total activity budget (in US\$):	190,305
National or other contributions (in US\$): Koror State Government (staff time and in kind services)	50,800
Amount requested from the World Heritage Fund (in US\$):	139,505
1. Organization Office expenses (telephone calls fees)	500 500
2. Personnel / consultancy services (fees)	58,013
<u>International experts</u>	
Project manager	23,865
Island restoration specialist	15,668
Programme Manager	7,489
Programme Director	4,991
<u>National experts</u>	
DCLE Staff and Palau-based staff (3 people)	3,000
<u>Other</u>	
Temporary field crew (6 people)	3,000

3. Travel	30,000
International travel cost	30,000
4. Accommodation & meals	13,950
Accommodation	3,850
Hotel in Koror	3,150
Meals	5,600
Groceries in the field	1,350
5. Equipment	31,000
Camera traps (25 units)	16,000
Field supplies (gloves, machetes, waterproof SD card case, pencils, notebooks, bait)	1,000
Eradication supplies (traps, spotlight, GPS, air rifles, and other cat eradication supplies)	12,000
Shipping for field supplies	2,000
6. Evaluation & reporting	5,142
Reporting	5,142
7. Miscellaneous	900
Green fee and departure fee x 3 participants x 6 trips	900

Comments of the Secretariat:

A first version of this request was submitted last June, but IUCN made a number of recommendations aimed to strengthen the intervention proposed and improve its chances of success. The revised version of the request was received mid-September and deemed fine by IUCN (see below).

The Secretariat supports the approval of this Emergency Assistance Request and agrees that this work is essential to safeguard the OUV of the property and should be carried out as soon as possible.

Comments of the Advisory Bodies:

IUCN, 29 September 2017

IUCN is satisfied with the additional information provided in the revised request, and considers that the proposed project is well designed to take into account different scenarios where feral cats are either still localized in distribution, or more widespread across the island. The project engages appropriate expertise to eradicate cats, and to assess the feasibility of island-wide cat eradication if cats are found to be widespread. Development of a biosecurity programme is clearly included in the project's objectives.

The revised request adequately addressed IUCN's previous comments, including in relation to eradication methodologies and budget foreseen for eradication materials.

In conclusion, IUCN recommends the approval of this request, noting the urgency of the situation. As noted in the request, if immediate action is not taken, the risk of feral cats becoming well-established on the island is a significant threat to its OUV, and would generate much higher costs for subsequent eradication efforts. IUCN recommends that

careful monitoring of project success should be ensured for at least 12 months following completion of the project, in order to confirm that feral cats have been completely eradicated from Ngeruktabel Island, and to inform additional eradication measures if required.

II. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 12 EXT.COM 4

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC/17/12 EXT.COM/4,*
2. *Decides to approve the International Assistance request from Palau entitled “Responding to the threat of feral cat introduction to the Rock Island Southern Lagoon World Heritage area”, for an amount of US\$ 139,505 under the Emergency Assistance budget.*