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**ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES
POUR L'EDUCATION, LA SCIENCE ET LA CULTURE**

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

**CONVENTION CONCERNANT LA PROTECTION DU PATRIMOINE
MONDIAL, CULTUREL ET NATUREL**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE / COMITE DU PATRIMOINE MONDIAL

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Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and/or on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Point 7 de l'Ordre du jour provisoire: Etat de conservation de biens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial et/ou sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril

MISSION REPORT / RAPPORT DE MISSION

East Rennell (Solomon Islands) (N 854)

Rennell Est (Îles Salomon) (N 854)

21 – 29 October 2012 / 21 – 29 octobre 2012

This mission report should be read in conjunction with Document:

Ce rapport de mission doit être lu conjointement avec le document suivant:

WHC-13/37.COM/7B

**REPORT ON THE REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION TO EAST
RENNELL, SOLOMON ISLANDS**

21-29 OCTOBER 2012



PAUL R. DINGWALL (IUCN)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 21-29 October 2012 an IUCN monitoring mission visited the East Rennell World Heritage property, Solomon Islands, in accordance with **Decision 36 COM 7B.15** adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th Session in 2012 (*see* Annex 1). Two days were spent in discussion with government and non-governmental representatives in Honiara, and four days on Rennell Island where inspections were made of logging areas in West Rennell, discussions were held with leaders and residents of all four villages in the property and a tour was made of the property (*see* Annex 2). In accordance with its terms of reference (*see* Annex 3), the mission assessed the factors affecting the outstanding universal value of the property, focussing in particular on assessment of the status and impacts of logging operations, the impacts from invasive species and the over-harvesting of marine resources including coconut crab, and the environmental effects of climate change.

Logging of the native forests, conducted by foreign-owned timber companies, began in West Rennell in 2008, and in 2011 applications were lodged for timber rights over concessions that include areas within the World Heritage property. An environmental assessment of logging operations in 2012 reported that habitat destruction with the likely loss of plant and animal species was occurring, and that indirectly the property would suffer from the loss of the island's biodiversity. This is of particular concern as the amount of available forest habitat in the property is considered to be insufficient to ensure long-term survival of the endemic bird population, in particular. The mission team observed the destructive impacts of broad strips of clear-felled forest, and the construction of a network of logging roads, log staging areas, ponds and logging camps. Undesirable social impacts for island residents from logging operations were also noted. Currently, logging operations are being conducted without full legal authority or proper consultation with customary landowners, and there are no legal provisions in force for protection of the property against logging. The State Party has not yet responded to the Committee's request to impose an immediate ban on all logging from the island.

Rats, probably Ship rat (*Rattus rattus*), have been observed recently in the vicinity of log ponds and jetties and adjacent log storage areas, and are thought to have been introduced from logging vessels. Rennell Island is notable in the Pacific region for the absence of rats and there is concern that rats will spread into forest areas, especially via logging roads and clearings, where they will have a severe impact on the native wildlife – insects, birds, and snails in particular. There is also potential for African land snails that have been seen in Honiara to gain access to Rennell Island on shipments of food and other produce, and these aggressive invaders could have a destructive impact on crops and other vegetation and would compete with the 27 species of native land snails. These threats to the property's natural values from introduced alien species in general, and from rats and snails in particular are very high. There has been no assessment of the problem to date and no control measures are in place or planned.

The people of East Rennell harvest crayfish, giant clam, trochus (sea snail) and reef fish for consumption and for sale. Beche-de-mer (sea cucumber) was a key resource for income

generation until a national ban on its export was imposed in 2005, which shifted the pressure to trochus. Coconut crabs, which are important for subsistence use and as a source of cash income, are harvested year-round. Crabs have disappeared from the western part of Rennell Island, and within the property the harvesting success rate is dropping, raising concerns that increased harvesting pressure may lead to localised extinction of the species. Harvesting of marine resources is essentially unregulated and traditional conservation measures have been supplanted by a more commercial approach. For coconut crab there are no community-based controls on target animals or on harvesting levels, times or durations.

Life for the people of East Rennell is highly dependent on Lake Tegano, which supplies vital food and other natural resources and facilitates travel within the property. Increasing water levels and salinity in the lake, induced by sea level rise due to climate change, are adversely affecting plant growth in low-lying areas. Of particular concern is the reduced harvest of taro and coconut, both of which are vital staple foods for the local community. Several houses and tourist lodges have been flooded and abandoned, and the only community high school is frequently closed by flooding. Climate change is also implicated in the increased frequency of damaging cyclones.

East Rennell is owned under a customary tenure system by the local community and is protected and managed through traditional land use practices. Judging from the current state of conservation of the property and the experience of the past 14 years since inscription, it is clear that customary owners do not have the capacity nor the resources to protect and manage the property to World Heritage standards. A small local community that is struggling to survive cannot maintain its environment and natural resources to the highest world standards, as required by the World Heritage Convention. Moreover, it is likely that the people of East Rennell will increasingly turn to commercial exploitation of their natural resources. There is an immediate need for government financial support and injection of substantial rural aid from an international source, particularly to improve transport and communication infrastructure, food security, education and health facilities and to assist the East Rennell community to withstand the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.

The mission concludes that the ongoing logging of forests in West Rennell in the Tehakamagoku Concession Area (12km away from the property), and the proposal to log forests within the property in the Agapogabu Forest Concession represents a clear ascertained and potential danger to the ecological integrity of the property and its Outstanding Universal Value, in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the *Operational Guidelines*. The impacts of ongoing and future logging on OUV include loss of animal and plant species, reduction in biodiversity, introduction of invasive species, soil erosion, as well as social impacts on local communities. The mission considers that inscribing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger and implementing a comprehensive recovery package supported by key national and international stakeholders holds the best prospect for overcoming the current threats and rescuing what was a model property of its kind in the World Heritage network.

Recommendations

1. Logging

The Solomon Islands government should impose an immediate and complete ban on logging operations on Rennell Island.

2. Invasive species

A programme for control and/or eradication of invasive alien species should be introduced as soon as possible on Rennell Island, including assessment of the current status and trend of populations of invasive species, evaluation of the threat to native species of biota especially in the World Heritage property, and establishment of control methods such as poison bait stations installed around log loading and storage sites and logging camps.

3. Over-exploitation of marine resources and coconut crab

Controls on harvesting of marine resources and coconut crabs are urgently required, including restrictions on the number and size of animals harvested, prohibition of taking pregnant females or eggs, and imposition of seasonal limits and no-take zones. A return to traditional conservation measures should be encouraged. This should be accompanied by research, survey and monitoring along with training and awareness-raising in the local community.

4. Effects of climate change

Environmental controls and replanting are required to ameliorate the impacts of lakeshore flooding and increased salination of lake waters that are destroying taro gardens and coconut plantations and causing serious food shortages. Effort is needed to find sources of increased cash income required to meet growing costs of importing food supplies, and restoring damaged housing and other essential community amenities.

5. A rescue plan for East Rennell

In the face of an ascertained and potential danger to the outstanding universal value of the property from the threat of logging and invasive species, consideration should be given to inscribing the East Rennell property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and instigating a rescue plan sufficient to attain World Heritage standards of management of the property and ensure protection of its Outstanding Universal Value.

The proposed rescue plan would include: improved legislation and regulation; sustainable financial support; institutional capacity building; increased technical capacity for management and monitoring of resources; twinning of East Rennell with the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in Australia; prohibition of commercial extraction of resources and prevention of over-exploitation, with an immediate ban on all logging operations on Rennell Island; eco-tourism development; improved infrastructure and services such as airport facilities, more efficient air travel and shipping services, and better phone and internet communication; rural development assistance for responding to effects of climate change and

to provide the necessary food security and health and education requirements; and establishment of stronger links to international agencies especially UNESCO and IUCN.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION

1.1 Inscription history and Committee consideration of threats to the property

East Rennell was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998 as a natural property under criterion N (ii) – revised criterion (ix). It was the first property held and managed under customary tenure to achieve World Heritage status. Immediately following inscription, the New Zealand Government provided financial and technical assistance for eco-tourism and small business development, including the building of lodges, supply of motorised canoes, a vehicle and chainsaw, and commencement of a bakery, restaurant, poultry farm and a bee-keeping/honey production facility. An eco-tourism plan and outline of a resource management plan were also prepared at this time. This donor programme was suspended in 2000, primarily on account of civil unrest and government instability in the Solomon Islands, leaving the projects uncompleted. All projects subsequently were unsuccessful.

In the period after 1998, there was very limited communication from the State Party (SP) regarding the property. The World Heritage Committee, at its 27th session in 2003 and 28th session in 2004, addressed the requirement at the time of inscription for the SP to report within three years on the preparation of national legislation for protection of the World Heritage property and on development of the resource management plan for the property. Additionally, the Committee requested the SP to provide a state of conservation report on the property, and requested IUCN and the World Heritage Centre (WHC) to conduct a joint mission to the property and report on the above matters. In May-June 2004, the WHC funded the Director of the Solomon Islands (SI) National Museum to visit the property, the report of which was presented to the Committee at its 28th session. The joint WHC-IUCN mission took place in the period 25 March-12 April 2005, including seven days spent in the property, and a report of the mission was considered by the Committee at its 29th session in 2005.

At its 31st session in 2007, the Committee called upon the international donor community to provide financial and technical support for conservation and management of the property. A management plan for the property was prepared in 2007 with technical assistance from WWF and financial support from the World Heritage Fund. The Australian Government responded to a request from the SI Government to assist in implementing the management plan by commencing in 2008 a project to strengthen the management capacity in East Rennell through the AusAID Pacific Governance Support Programme (PGSP). Among the main outcomes of the PGSP project to date are:

- Establishment of the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association and Committee for management of the property;
- Training workshops and conferences in management planning and action plans (Honiara 2008), heritage management (Cairns 2009), management capacity building and periodic reporting (Cairns 2011) and heritage tourism (Darwin 2012), and assistance with state of conservation reporting;
- Preliminary arrangements for a twinning between East Rennell and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in Australia;

- Placement of volunteer technical advisors in the property in 2009, through Australian Volunteers International, particularly for ranger training, wildlife identification, and monitoring and surveying of species and habitats;
- Drafting of the Rennell-Bellona Province Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance 2009, with assistance from WWF; and
- Engagement of the specialist organisation Live and Learn Environmental Education to begin consideration of heritage-based livelihood activities, such as poultry and pig farms, sustainable fisheries and a cultural handicraft industry.

The Protected Areas Act 2010 was gazetted by the Solomon Islands Government in March 2010, for declaration and management of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve or regulate biological diversity and research. The Act recognises World Heritage protection and covers areas of land and sea, so has potential application to the East Rennell property, but this has not yet occurred. In January 2011 a 3-day visit was made to East Rennell during a mission sponsored by the UNESCO regional office in Apia, Samoa to assist the SP in completing its obligations under the World Heritage periodic reporting process. In August 2011 the lead responsibility for SI World Heritage Focal Point was transferred from the National Commission for UNESCO to the Ministry of Environment, with associated responsibility on cultural matters given to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. A reactive monitoring mission requested by the Committee at its 36th session in 2012 was conducted in October 2012, the report of which is contained herein.

1.2 State Party responses to decisions of the Committee

The World Heritage Committee has considered the state of conservation of the East Rennell property at seven of its sessions since 1998, as recorded specifically in the following decisions: 27COM 7B.12 (2003); 28COM 15B.12 (2004); 29COM 7B.10 (2005); 31COM 7B.21 (2007); 33COM 7B.19 (2009); 34COM &B.17 (2010) and 36COM 7B.15 (2012). The following is a summary of the dates and main topics considered, the requests and recommendations made, and the SP responses.

Request for report on the state of conservation – 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2010 & 2012.

The SP submitted its only state of conservation report in 2012.

Preparation of a (resource) management plan – 2003, 2004, 2005 & 2007.

A management plan for the property was prepared with the support of the World Heritage Fund and submitted for examination by the Committee in 2007. An action plan was subsequently developed with assistance from Australia. The plan has not been fully or effectively implemented. The Committee has raised concerns that the plan has no timeline or budget and that it is inadequate in addressing threats from logging and over-exploitation of marine resources. The plan does not fully provide for use of traditional management under customary laws, or for enforcement of laws and regulations, and lacks institutional capacity for implementation.

Provision of World Heritage protection legislation – 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007 & 2009.

The Protected Areas Act passed into law in 2010. Although it potentially applies to World Heritage, the East Rennell property is not yet recognised or protected under the Act. Other legislation such as the Environment Act 1998 and the Wildlife Management and Protection Act 1998 have provisions relevant to the property, but these are often not effectively enforced at local level, and there is some uncertainty as to the relative powers of national and customary laws in respect of land and resources under customary ownership and traditional management. The provincial Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance 2009, which applies specifically to protection and management of the World Heritage property, is still in draft form.

Effectiveness of customary protection and support for owners – 2004 & 2005.

The AusAID Pacific Governance Support programme and Australian Department of Environment supported customary owners to establish a representative body for management of the property. In partnership with Live and Learn Environmental Education, technical assistance continued through 2012 in governance strengthening, and livelihood support.

Solomon Island's Government support for the property – 2005.

Over the period of 14 years since inscription of the property as World Heritage, the SI Government has not provided any direct material or financial support for the property. Government officials have rarely visited the property.

Increased public awareness through promotion, advocacy and education – 2005.

Australian donor support assisted the East Rennell community to participate in the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts held in the Solomon Islands in July 2012.

Establishment of institutions for administration and management of the property – 2005 & 2007.

With Australian aid, the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association was established in 2008. This body is recognised by the SI Government, but there is no counterpart governmental office to work with the Association, which has no funds and no facilities and equipment for administration and communication.

International donor support – 2007 & 2010.

The Australian Government has funded aid projects to improve the governance and management capacity of the East Rennell community in the period 2008-2010. Whether this support will be of long-term benefit for management of the property is an equivocal matter and remains to be demonstrated.

Recommendation to the SP to apply for International Assistance under the World Heritage Fund – 2007, 2009 & 2010.

The SP has so far not responded to three separate recommendations from the Committee to apply for financial assistance provided by the World Heritage Fund to support improved management of the property.

Threat from commercial logging operations – 2010 & 2012.

The SP conducted an environmental assessment of the logging operation in one forest concession in West Rennell in January 2012. The assessment report acknowledges that logging causes loss of habitat and damage to flora and fauna, but considers that the environmental consequences of logging have no direct impact on the World Heritage area because they are well removed from the property. The report also assesses the logging company's performance as satisfactory and in compliance with the conditions of the timber licence and recommends granting of development consent, as required under the Environment Act 1998.

Over-exploitation of marine resources – 2012.

Technical support provided in 2009 under Australian Government aid for strengthening management capacity in East Rennell included ranger training, wildlife identification and survey and monitoring techniques. Using community-based protocols from elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, village residents were instructed how to collect life-cycle information of marine life, monitor harvested species and use no-take zones for management of seabirds and fisheries. It is not clear that these initiatives have been adopted by the people of East Rennell in an effective way. The SP has planned a marine ecosystem survey in partnership with UNDP under the framework of a World Heritage Fund International Assistance project. This survey was intended to be conducted in November 2012 but the mission has not been supplied with any information on it or its results.

Request for a monitoring mission – 2003, 2004, 2005 & 2012.

A formal reactive monitoring mission was conducted in 2005 and an informal mission occurred in 2011. A further monitoring mission was requested by the Committee in 2012, and this report contains its findings and recommendations.

1.3 The Mission itinerary

The monitoring mission team comprised the IUCN representative Paul Dingwall, from Wellington, New Zealand. The mission began and ended in Honiara, Solomon Islands, during the period 21–29 October 2012. It involved two days spent in Honiara for discussions with government officials, NGO representatives and others, and four days on Rennell Island visiting the East Rennell World Heritage property and inspecting logging area in forests of West Rennell. Travel on Rennell Island was by four-wheel-drive truck, canoe and on foot. Accommodation was provided at tourist lodges. The full itinerary and programme of the mission is at Annex 2.

The mission notes that it unfortunately received limited support from the State Party. The information requested from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster

Management and Meteorology by IUCN prior to the mission was not supplied (this information is detailed in Annex 1). In Honiara, meetings were held with officials of the Department of Tourism (Ministry of Culture and Tourism); the National Commission for UNESCO (Ministry of Education); and the Public Solicitor's Office. A courtesy call was made on the Acting-Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, but no meetings were held with officials of that Ministry or the Ministry of Forestry. No government officials briefed the mission, accompanied the mission during the visit to the property or attended a de-briefing session following the visit.

The visit to Rennell Island and to the property was hosted and facilitated by leaders of the Rennell-Bellona Province and the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association. In the property, meetings were held with the chairman and representatives of the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association, and with leaders, church elders and residents of all four villages. A tour of the property was made to obtain a general overview of the state of conservation and, in particular, to inspect the damaging effects from climate change on the natural environment, built structures and settlements. Discussions were held with the Deputy-Premier of the RenBel Province. A visit was made to two logging areas in West Rennell and discussions were held with the landowners. The team did not meet with representatives of any of the logging companies.

2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Ownership and institutional management of land and resources

The East Rennell World Heritage property covers 37,000 ha of Rennell Island, centred on the 15,000 ha Lake Tegano, and includes the surrounding sea extending 3 nmi offshore. The landward boundary is the administrative border between two wards in the Rennell-Bellona Province. The East Rennell property is not government owned - all areas of land, coastal reef and sea are under customary ownership, while the lake is regarded as common property for the residents of surrounding villages. In custom, land is not owned by a single person but by a line, family or tribe. Any group may also claim exclusive use over an area of beach, coast or sea and can set restrictions on the use of these areas by outsiders. The tenure system recognises primary rights to use and dispose of land and sell products from it, and secondary rights over gardening and collecting resources from the land. Any exploitation of land, sea and resources can take place only with the consent of landowners. Customary ownership is patrilineal, with all major decisions on ownership made by the Paramount Chief, whose role is inherited, and a Council of Chiefs the members of which are nominated by the various clans (or tribes). These leaders collectively have the power to decide on the use and protection of resources in the property. Usually, this would involve consultation with the local management body, which currently is the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA), an elected group of representatives from the community.

2.2 Legal framework for protection and management

At the time of inscription of East Rennell as World Heritage in 1998 there was no adequate national or provincial legislation for protecting the natural and cultural heritage of the

property. Fourteen years later, this situation remains essentially unchanged today. The law with greatest potential for application to the property is the Protected Areas Act 2010. This Act has the principal objective of establishing and managing areas for conservation of biological diversity. It provides powers for: declaring and registering protected areas; appointing advisory and management committees; establishing trust funds; regulating research and biological prospecting; enforcing regulations and handling of offences. The Act covers areas of land, freshwater and sea, and specifically provides for the inclusion of areas meriting protection under the World Heritage Convention. Before an area can be declared as a protected area under the Act it is necessary that the conservation objectives are defined and the practices are sound, the boundaries are accurately identified, the consent of persons with rights or interests is given, and there is an appropriate management plan. All these requirements are in place for the East Rennell World Heritage property, and the committee of the LTWHSA could be appointed as a management committee under the Act - but the property is still not declared as a protected area under the Act.

Provincial legislation that is specifically intended to give legal recognition to the World Heritage status of East Rennell is the Rennell-Bellona Province Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance 2009, which is currently still in draft form. The principal objective of the Ordinance is protection and conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems and the environment that support the people of East Rennell, and of the cultural and World Heritage values of East Rennell, particularly Lake Tegano. For the purposes of the Ordinance, the East Rennell World Heritage site is designated as the Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park. Apart from introducing the concept of a heritage park, thereby complicating an already confused situation, the Ordinance has direct application to the World Heritage property – however, three years after it was developed, the legislation remains in draft form and is yet to come into force.

3. FACTORS AFFECTING THE OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF THE PROPERTY

3.1 Logging of forests

Current extent of logging operations

Logging of the native forests on Rennell Island began in 2008 when the foreign-owned Amos Company (SI) Ltd.¹ was granted a logging licence (A10543, 30th July 2008) by the Solomon Islands Commissioner of Forests over the Tehakamagoku Concession Area in West Rennell. The concession covers an area of about 6,950 ha and includes an estimated volume of 139,000 m³ of commercial timber. Infrastructure such as roads, a logging pond, wharf and campsite were constructed and logging operations commenced.

¹ Advice received by the mission indicates that there is one parent logging company – the Malaysian-based Samling Sun Company – which has three subsidiaries operating on the island – Amos, Greenhill and Echo Lumber.

The company claimed to have negotiated a logging agreement on all the blocks of customary land with the traditional landowners and completed the timber rights process. However, the licence had not been subject to the required environmental impact assessment and this led to the Ministry of Environment declaring a stop on logging, which was ignored by the logging company and not enforced. In January 2012 an assessment of the logging operation was conducted under environmental monitoring and auditing procedures of the Environment Act 1998, with the intention of deciding whether to grant development consent to the company. The report of this assessment² notes that the company's performance complies with the licence conditions and the Solomon Islands Code of Logging Practice, but acknowledges that flora and fauna habitat destruction and the likely loss of plant and animal species represent a major environmental impact of the logging. The World Heritage property was not considered to be directly affected by the logging operations because it is located well away (approximately 12 km) from the concession area, but it was accepted that indirectly the property would suffer from loss of the island's biodiversity and from visual impacts for visitors. Nevertheless, the assessment recommended that development consent be granted under the Act.

The mission received advice that there are two other existing or proposed timber concession areas on Rennell Island:

The Magaone and Aga'eha Concession: A Timber Rights hearing was conducted in April 2007 and the licence for this concession, located in West Rennell, was granted to the Solomon Echo Lumber. It has constructed a feeder road to a log staging point at Tanahu on the shores of Lughu Bay, about 4 km from the Tehakatu'u Marine Protected Area, and felling is occurring about 25 km from the boundary of the World Heritage property.

The Namalaga, Temagabai and Agapogabu Forests Concession: The first two forests are in West Rennell and the third is within the East Rennell World Heritage property. The Timber Rights application for this concession was lodged in September 2011 but a hearing (initially scheduled for April 2012) has not yet been held. The application is for removal of 50,000 m³ of timber, with 80% of logs to be extracted. Logged forest would be replanted with commercial forest and palm oil plantations. Infrastructure would be installed and operated by the Interport Trading Company of the Philippines, and a logging pond for the Agapogabu Forest operation would be established in Tuhugago Bay on the south coast, within the World Heritage property.

Further advice was received by the mission that a camp and logging pond are being constructed by the Echo Lumber Co. on the south coast of West Rennell, and the Isles Tropical Logging Co. is planning to create a logging pond at the extreme western end of the island. Reports received by the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, and during the mission,

² Anon. 2012. *Environmental assessment and audit report, Tehakamagoku customary land, West Rennell, Rennell and Bellona Province, 2012*. Ministry of Environment, Honiara. Unpublished Ms.

indicate that more than 60,000 m³ of timber have been removed from the island to-date in at least 17 log shipments by the Amos Company and five shipments by the Greenhill Company.

Impacts of logging on local areas

During the mission an inspection was made of an operating logging area (Line 2) in the Magaone/Aga'eha concession where a log staging and loading area has been established by the Greenhill Company in Lavago (Kagava) Bay. Logs are felled in broad strips within the forest, then dragged to feeder roads and trucked to the log pond, where they are stacked and loaded on to barges for transfer to log ships anchored offshore. Logging roads are better constructed and maintained than the main road on the island, and about 10 km of the latter has been up-graded by the logging company. Areas cleared for roads are invaded by the aggressive vine *Meremia peltata* (sopiatua in the native language), which is colloquially known as the "mile-a-minute" vine because of its rapid growth. Sopiatua can have a major impact on the native forest by impeding emergence of re-growth and the establishment of seedling trees. Although the companies selectively log for pencil cedar, favoured for its tall straight trunk, large areas are essentially clear-felled. The mission received no reports of re-forestation or other plantings and saw no evidence of them. Construction of camps also requires considerable forest clearance. The log staging area has destroyed about 300 m of shoreline and adjacent near-shore bottom and coral reef, and has significantly impacted the scenic beauty of Lavago Bay. Logging operations have also had a negative impact on the local communities by increasing the availability of alcohol and by infringing the freedoms of women. Positive outcomes of logging, apart from cash income, include upgrading of roads, and greater availability of vehicles, machinery and fuel.

Impacts of logging on island biodiversity and habitats

East Rennell is inscribed on the World Heritage List because of its global significance in demonstrating on-going ecological processes and its importance to development of the science of island biogeography.³ Rennell Island has been the subject of eight international scientific expeditions. The island is biogeographically unique as a major transition point in the sequence of decreasing floral diversity eastwards from Papua New Guinea into the tropical Pacific - the unmodified forest vegetation contains floral elements from the rich Melanesian flora to the west and the more impoverished flora of the Pacific Islands to the east. The species composition of the forests is also unique in the Solomons group, probably because of the combined influence of a uniform geological substrate and nutrient-deficient limestone soils, the immaturity of plant colonisation on a relatively young island and the high degree of cyclone disturbance that hinders forest succession. The forest fauna also has significant conservation values. With the exception of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands have a greater diversity of animal species, particularly birds, and higher level of endemism than any other Pacific group. On Rennell Island there are 43 species of breeding

³ Anon. 1997. *Nomination of East Rennell, Solomon Islands for inclusion in the World Heritage List- natural sites*. Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Aviation, Honiara, Solomon Islands. 47pp.

land and water birds, of which four species and nine sub-species are endemics, and the overall proportion of endemic bird taxa (47%) is extremely high. The famous biogeographer and conservation biologist Jared Diamond has used the theory of island biogeography to explain the bird endemism on Rennell Island, and it is used as a textbook example of this phenomenon in biological science.⁴ Other important forest fauna include 11 species of bats (one endemic), and a rich diversity of invertebrates, including 27 species of land snails and 731 species of insects. Of very special conservation importance is the largely undisturbed nature of the native forest ecosystems and the, at least until recently, absence of invasive predators such as rats.

Significantly, little is known of the ecology and habitat preferences, requirements and limitations of most of the animal species on the island. At the time of inscription of the property on the World Heritage List questions arose about confining the property to only a portion of the island.⁵ The amount of available forest habitat in the property is considered to be insufficient to ensure long-term survival of the endemic bird population, in particular. The boundary separating the property from the rest of the island is determined by community and administrative borders, so is not optimal for ecological integrity. The forests of East Rennell are intrinsically linked within a single island-wide forest ecosystem to those of West Rennell. Any disturbance of the island's forest ecosystems through logging in West Rennell is, therefore, likely to have severe adverse impacts on the forest wildlife in the property.

Responses to the logging operations

On 29 February 2012 the IUCN Oceania office wrote to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment requesting information on the Agapogabu Forest timber rights application, offering its assistance, and noting that the proposal to establish palm oil plantations in the logged areas would directly affect the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List and compromise the integrity of the property. The regional director of the IUCN Oceania office had a meeting with senior leaders in the Solomon Islands in April 2012 to discuss these issues. The World Heritage Centre and IUCN have stressed that the construction of wharves, establishment of staging and loading areas, and the increase in activity by logging vessels could all threaten the Outstanding Universal Value of the substantial marine component of the property. On 21 March 2012, the Director of the World Heritage Centre sent a letter to the State Party requesting clarification of the reports regarding the proposed logging within the property, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*. No response has been received to date.

⁴ Diamond J.M. 1984. *The avifauna of Rennell Island*. pp. 127-168, in *The Natural History of Rennell Island, British Solomon Islands*. Vol.8. T. Wolff (ed.), Danish Science Press, Copenhagen.

⁵ IUCN 1998. *World Heritage nomination – IUCN technical evaluation: East Rennell (Solomon Islands)*. IUCN Unpublished Ms.

A delegation of key stakeholders, including non-governmental, and national and provincial government representatives, visited East Rennell in the period 5 – 24 October 2011.⁶ A primary reason for the visit was to raise the awareness of the local communities about forestry, including the impacts and consequences of logging. The programme explained the requirements of the national Code of Logging Practice and the legal basis of logging operations. It was noted that the laws favour the foreign logging companies who, after deducting expenses, receive 60% of total log export earnings, while the government receives 25%, the licensee 10% and the landowner only 5%, which has to be shared within the tribe. Listed among the disruptive consequences of logging were:

- environmental impacts such as soil erosion, and excessive sedimentation in streams and near-shore waters;
- destruction and loss of wildlife habitat and coral reefs;
- disputes within and between tribes about ownership of land and resources, and over royalty payments and revenues; and
- disruption of the social fabric by increasing the availability of alcohol and by infringing the freedoms of women.

The delegation report notes that the Council of Chiefs in East Rennell favours a ban on all logging within the property, and that the majority of villagers are opposed to logging, favour the development of sustainable livelihood enterprises such as ecotourism, support World Heritage, and are concerned about possible de-listing of the property. The report further notes that the provincial government wishes to maintain the World Heritage status of the property and to ban logging because of its deleterious impacts on the environment and the social lives of residents, and will endeavour to have the property adequately recognised in the draft Provincial Ordinance.

An IUCN delegation visited the Solomon Islands in September 2010 for discussions with the government that included issues to do with logging and the unsustainable effects of harvesting timber on the forests and on communities.⁷ It was noted that forestry is one of the most politically volatile issues in the country and that several government ministers of the time had logging interests, which were public knowledge. The forests are a primary source of income for communities and most of the large islands have been logged, some of them repeatedly. The delegation raised the possibility of a political commitment to restoration of degraded forests, catchments, wetlands, freshwater and other ecosystems.

Regrettably, the 2012 mission was unable to speak with any government forestry officials, and received no response to requests from IUCN and the mission for information on the current status of logging operations on Rennell Island. Extensive discussions were held with leaders, church elders, and residents of the four villages in the property, with members of the Lake Tegano World Heritage Association (LTWHA) and with provincial leaders. Although

⁶ Puiahi, Watson and Stennett, Charles 2011. *Lake Tegano World Heritage Site trip report*. Live & Learn Environmental Education, Honiara. Unpublished Ms.

⁷ Jackson Bill; Kami, Taholo; and Nolan, Tim 2010. *Trip report, Solomon Islands*. IUCN unpublished Ms.

the majority of local people are opposed to logging, it is acknowledged that some people in the community would like to invite logging companies to move in. Most of these are motivated by their disappointment over the lack of promised benefits from World Heritage designation of their land, and/or by lack of support from the national government. One community leader in West Rennell who has permitted logging on his land expressed to the mission his view that those who support World Heritage are “dreamers” while those who support logging are “doers”. The LTWHA has voiced its opposition to logging of forests. The current provincial leaders, in principle, do not favour logging on Rennell Island. However, they recognise the customary owners of land need an adequate livelihood and that the lack of material support from government and other sources, including World Heritage, induces them to look elsewhere for revenue, such as to logging companies. They also feel that the impacts of logging have been exaggerated and that logging affects a relatively small proportion of the island’s extensive forests.

The State Party has taken no steps to ban logging on Rennell Island, as requested by the World Heritage Committee, nor has it signalled any intention to do so.

Legal basis of logging operations and heritage protection

The procedure for obtaining the legal right to extract timber from an area of forest involves obtaining a logging licence and timber rights from the Commissioner of Forests and development consent from the Ministry of Environment, which in turn requires that an environmental impact assessment (EIA) be conducted. Logging operations on Rennell Island (and most within the Solomon Islands) are being conducted without development consent (or EIA), so in a strict sense they are illegal. In practice, the Government ignores the need for development consent as enforcement is a problem, and no timber company has been prosecuted for not having proper legal authority to undertake logging activities. Logging licences are granted at the national level and provincial governments and local communities have little say in the matter. Speaking to the mission, the deputy-Premier of the RenBel Province described the forestry legislation as a “bad fella” because of the way it can impose logging on land owned by local communities. In fact, customary landowners have the right to decide whether logging takes place, and public consultation is required in the granting of timber rights, but procedures are rarely followed. In some cases applications for timber rights are lodged independently by individual landowners without consultation or agreement from the wider community. In negotiations by timber companies over access to forests, there are common reports of bribery and promises of cash and other benefits that never eventuate.

The East Rennell World Heritage property is yet to be gazetted under the Protected Areas Act 2010, so has no legal protection under Solomon Islands law. Although this Act does not specifically address logging, such operations would be contrary to a principal objective of the Act for promoting the protection of ecosystems and natural habitats. Thus, the Act could be a vehicle for imposing a ban on logging. Similarly, the draft Rennell-Bellona Province Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance 2009, which is yet to come into force, expressly prohibits the commercial extraction (logging) of timber in the park (equivalent to the World

Heritage property) or within one kilometre of the boundary. The management plan for the property includes policies preventing large-scale timber extraction, but the plan has never been implemented.

3.2 Invasive species

The World Heritage Committee has noted the need to assess the threat and impact from invasive species associated with logging operations. The concern in particular relates to impact on populations of endemic birds and on disturbance to the island's natural forest ecosystems and to the OUV and conditions of integrity of the property. Two invasive species have been singled out for special consideration.

Rats: A prime conservation value that distinguishes the Rennell Island ecosystem is the absence of rats (apart from the Pacific rat *Rattus exulans*, which is well assimilated into the ecosystem), which have decimated faunas of many other islands throughout the Pacific. The mission received advice from residents of Rennell Island that large black rats have been observed recently in the vicinity of log ponds and jetties and adjacent log storage areas. These are likely to be Ship (Black) rats (*Rattus rattus*), and it is thought that they have been introduced from the logging vessels. There is concern that rats will spread into forest areas, especially via logging roads and clearings, where they will have a severe impact on the native wildlife – insects, birds, and snails in particular. Rennell Island has a reported 731 spp. of insects and there are 43 species of breeding birds (4 endemics) on the island, many of which would be particularly vulnerable to predation by Ship rats as they are competent climbers and prey on nestlings and eggs. Also vulnerable to rat predation are the 27 species of land snails on the island.

African land snails: These have been seen in Honiara but it is thought they are not yet on Rennell Island, though there is potential for them to gain access especially on shipments of food and other produce. African land snails are aggressive invaders and are known to be very destructive of crops and other vegetation and they will compete with native land snails, of which there are 27 species on the island (15 families, 7 endemic spp.).

The mission considers that the threats to the property's natural values from introduced alien species in general, or rats and snails in particular, are very high. No information was provided indicating that there are any assessments of the problem or control measures in place or planned. There is an urgent need to establish a trapping program to verify the presence of rats, assess the size of the population and plan for instituting eradication or control measures and long-term surveillance and monitoring.

3.3 Over-exploitation of marine resources and Coconut Crab

3.3.1 Marine resources

Rennell Island is entirely oceanic in origin and the sea has a fundamental influence in shaping the landscape and biota, and the culture of the people. The island is the world's largest raised

atoll. It is built on an anticline in the Earth's crustal plate that, since Pleistocene times, has experienced five episodes of uplift, raising the atoll to about 200 m above sea level. All elements of the former atoll and lagoon are evident in the landscape – outer reef slope, rim, inner lagoon beaches and old lagoon floor now occupied by Lake Tegano. Today, the rim of the old atoll falls precipitously around the coast and is flanked by a narrow fringing coral reef.

The World Heritage property includes a considerable marine area. The boundary of East Rennell includes the reefs and extends 3 nmi offshore, all of which is in customary marine tenure. Apart from recording the presence of 39 species of marine fish at Rennell Island, the nomination document is silent on the marine resources and values, about which little is known. The marine area is not claimed as having Outstanding Universal Value and is essentially intended to form a buffer zone that helps maintain the integrity of the property.

The people of East Rennell harvest several marine species for consumption and for sale - crayfish, giant clam, trochus (sea snail) and reef fish - and there is some opportunistic hunting of turtles, sharks and dolphins. Beche-de-mer (sea cucumber) was a key resource for income generation until a national ban on its export was imposed in 2005, and this shifted the pressure to trochus which is also collected for sale. The World Heritage Committee has expressed its concern that overharvesting of crayfish, trochus, beche-de-mer and clamshells is a serious threat to the marine resources and that an impact assessment should be conducted to establish appropriate conservation measures.

The management plan for the property notes that coastal and marine area are an important food source, and includes the sustainable management of marine resources among its objectives. Included among the actions specified for management of marine resources are: establishment of marine protected areas, or areas where a ban or restrictions on harvest are imposed; introduction of community-based monitoring and enforcement programs supervised by rangers; increased awareness of regulations and sustainable harvesting methods; use of by-laws to discourage destructive fishing methods; and survey and inventory of reef resources. While the plan is well-directed in principle, it has never been implemented and there is no evidence that resources will be provided for this to occur.

The draft Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance 2009 applies to a yet to be established park whose boundaries remain unspecified. However, the park is intended to have a marine component including, but not exceeding, the marine territory of Rennell-Bellona Province. Provision is made for specific areas or species to be protected and that exploitation of natural resources is effectively regulated in conformity with traditional practices. Coastal waters constituting the maritime area of the park are considered to be common heritage and managed for the benefit of the local community. The Ordinance is yet to be approved and brought into force. The long title of the Protected Areas Act 2010 points to a focus on conservation of biological diversity and defines biodiversity as including marine species and areas as including land and water. But the legislation makes no provision specifically for establishment and management of marine protected areas.

East Rennell was included in the 2010 Marine World Heritage Site Survey⁸ on account of the marine component in the site. The survey highlighted the following issues:

- Major threats are presented by climate change effects, including flooding of coconut plantations and taro gardens by saline water, and increase in storm surges causing beach erosion and damage to coastal settlements.
- Loss of species and habitats from abandonment of traditional practices, increased poaching and unsustainable harvesting especially for commercial purposes.
- Lack of community awareness and support for conservation and sustainable resource use.
- Absence of effective and enforceable laws and regulations – regulations under the Fisheries Act 1972 set size limits for crayfish, trochus shell and coconut crab but are not enforced at Rennell Island.
- Inadequate management planning – the 2007 management plan was approved and presented to 31st session of World Heritage Committee but has never been implemented because of lack of human and financial resources.
- Insufficient staffing and institutional support, facilities and equipment.
- No proper inventory of species and habitats and no systematic or regular survey and assessment of stocks: a volunteer-based program in 2008-09 was short-term and incomplete.
- Lack of adequate funding.

The project for Strengthening Management Capacity in the East Rennell World Heritage Area, conducted by the Australian Government under its Pacific Governance Support Programme, included ranger training, wildlife identification and survey and monitoring techniques.⁹ In 2009, using community-based monitoring protocols from elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, village residents were instructed how to collect life-cycle information of marine life and monitor harvested species. That year also, an Australian-based workshop gave East Rennell representatives lessons in monitoring of seabird-breeding islands, and the use of no-take zones for management of seabirds and fisheries. There is no evidence that these valuable initiatives have been adopted in any effective way in East Rennell.

The SP did not supply to the mission, as requested, a report on the marine ecosystem survey being conducted under the framework of the World Heritage Fund International Assistance project (IAR nr. 2413: Survey of the Condition of the Marine Ecosystem within the East Rennell World Heritage Area).

3.3.2 Coconut Crab

Within the property, coconut crabs *Birgus latro* (locally known as kassu) are found on the lake shore and in forest habitats, especially from April to August, and during the September to January period they travel overland to the coast for breeding in shallow salt-water

⁸ UNESCO 2010. *Marine World Heritage Site Survey*. UNESCO Honolulu, Hawaii, 1-3 December, 2010.

⁹ McMahon, Kate 2013. *DSEWPac World Heritage Activities for East Rennell*. Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra, Australia, Unpublished Ms. 9pp.

environments. Crabs are harvested at night by torchlight, using traps baited with dried coconut flesh. Currently, they are harvested year-round, including during November and December when the females are carrying eggs.

The management plan for the property reports that coconut crabs are harvested for subsistence use and they are also an important source of cash income for the local people. Villagers in Hutuna and Tegano, who follow the Seventh Day Adventist religious faith, do not eat crabs but will sell them. The mission was advised that coconut crabs are a food delicacy, especially the roe, and that some people eat crab every day, others 2-3 times per week. Locally, crabs are sold to officials, tourists (especially Japanese) and loggers and they are also sold in Honiara. A crab can sell for up to \$200 depending on its size.

There is increasing harvesting pressure on the crab population due to dwindling supplies of other foods. Concern is expressed that this may lead to localised extinction of the species. Already, crabs have disappeared from the western part of Rennell Island. Care is needed in harvesting because the crabs mature very slowly, reaching a harvesting size of 2 kg after some 30 years. Within the World Heritage property the harvesting success rate is dropping, and many smaller crabs (less than 1 kg) are taken while larger ones (2-3 kg) are becoming scarce.

Currently, (apart from the unenforced Fisheries Act regulations) there are no community-based controls on target animals or on harvesting levels, times or durations. Some residents believe that there should be a ban on harvesting during the December-January breeding season, and that taking of crabs should be limited to two or three months of the year, around June to August. Other control measures advocated are a ban on the taking of pregnant females or eggs; limits on the size and number of individuals taken; establishing no-take zones for crabs; and limiting harvesting to alternate years. The draft Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance (yet to come into force) includes provision for prohibiting the removal or harvesting for sale or other commercial purpose of any undersized or egg-bearing kasusu (undersized limit yet to be defined). Any control program would require effective surveillance capacity and enforcement measures. Also, a crab research and monitoring program is needed to define the condition and trend of the crab population and determine the impact of current harvest practices. This should be accompanied by an appropriate training and awareness-raising programme among the local communities.

3.4 Effects of climate change

Increasing water levels and salinity in Lake Tegano, induced by sea level rise due to climate change, are adversely affecting plant growth in low-lying areas. Of particular concern is the reduced harvest of taro and coconut, both of which are vital staple foods for the local community. Life in East Rennell is highly dependent on the lake, which supplies vital food and other natural resources and facilitates travel within the property.

Lake Tegano occupies some 20% of the entire Rennell Island and dominates the East Rennell property. The lake is a former lagoon and is mostly less than 40 m deep. The water is brackish (about 10% the salinity of sea water) as the lake is connected to the ocean through a

subterranean duct system. This also maintains the lake water level at about sea level. There is strong evidence that climate-induced rise in sea level has impacted on the body of the lake and the littoral area. The water level in the lake is now estimated by long-time residents in the property to be 0.8 m higher than it was 10 years ago. After prolonged rain storms the lake water level can temporarily rise 1.5 m. This means that a large and increasing extent of lakeshore is inundated by standing water and periodic flooding. There is also anecdotal evidence that the salinity and temperature of the lake are also rising.

Evidence of the effects of higher lake level includes the conspicuous and widespread die-back of coconut trees in low-lying areas. Affected trees have stunted growth and yellowing leaves and are not bearing fruit. Coconut is vitally important to the community as a source of food, liquid, fibre and house-building material and any prolonged shortage will progressively cause hardship for the people of East Rennell. Village gardens that take advantage of the few patches of soil are flooded and it is no longer possible to grow swamp taro. Wild taro and potatoes have been planted but the former is not as productive as domestic varieties, and yield of the latter has only reached cherry size. The health and productivity of the taro crop is also affected by an increased incidence of disease and insect damage causing leaf blight – which might also be a consequence of climate change. Ironically, East Rennell was formerly well-known for the quality of its taro, but today little is grown there and vital supplies of this staple food must be imported from West Rennell or at considerable expense from Honiara. Also rice has become more important as a replacement food but it, too, must be imported. Not only has this added greatly to the cost of food in East Rennell, it also contributes to food shortages as imports of bulk food depend upon an infrequent (once every 2-3 months) and unreliable shipping service.

Other plants are almost certainly being impacted by climate change effects but the full extent of this is unknown. One plant known to be dying is that known locally as sangage, a small-leaved plant endemic to Rennell Island which, according to Japanese herbalists, has cancer treatment properties.

Higher lake levels have also detrimentally affected living conditions in East Rennell. Several houses and tourist lodges have been flooded and abandoned. The Henua Community High School in Niupani Village, which has 34 students and is the only secondary school in East Rennell, has been closed for several months in each of the past two years because of flooding. The estimated cost of \$US10,000 to re-locate the school (originally constructed with EU funding) is currently beyond the financial resources of the community.

Weather patterns over the past two decades suggest that climate change may also be affecting cyclonic activity. Rennell Island is situated in a cyclone zone and damaging cyclones that occur at relatively frequent intervals are a major force influencing the forests, fauna and lifestyle of the people. A major cyclone (Nina) in 1993 caused extensive damage of villages and forests and huge mortality of birds and bats in particular. A cyclone risk analysis¹⁰ shows that Rennell Island experienced six cyclones over the 30-year period from 1966, or

¹⁰ Anon. 1997. *op. cit.* p. 12.

about one every five years. There is some evidence that cyclone frequency is increasing, judging by the pattern of cyclonic activity in the last 15 years. Past cyclones that have destroyed building such as houses, lodges, schools and medical clinics, and damaged taro gardens and coconuts trees, have led to shortages of housing, food and medical supplies.

Programs of environmental controls and of replanting are required to ameliorate these serious impacts to food supplies for a people who already have insufficient food resources.

3.5 Management plan review

The management plan for the East Rennell property was prepared in 2007 by the Solomon Islands National Commission for UNESCO in co-operation with the provincial authority and the local community, and with the assistance of the World Heritage Fund.¹¹ It provides a framework for management of natural resources and includes an action plan as a starting point for management activities. The need for the management plan was first noted by the World Heritage Committee in 1998, and some initial resource management guidelines were established but no further progress was made until an IUCN/UNESCO mission in 2005 prompted development of the plan. The plan establishes a vision and objectives, addresses some of the threats to natural values and outlines management actions for the land, forests, lake and marine environments. Although it purports to be based largely on traditional, community-based management practices, in fact there is little attempt to prescribe such practices. The Action Plan does identify traditional approaches to matters such as harvest of tilapia, coconut crab, crayfish and trochus, but these are not proposed as the preferred management option and are subordinate to modern measures and methods. Furthermore, there is no indication as to how or when control measures would be enforced and no attention is given to how the necessary financial resources or technical capacity would be obtained for implementation of management actions.

Of particular concern to the World Heritage Committee is the lack of attention in the plan given to commercial logging issues. The plan recognises that logging can have detrimental impact on forests, that degraded forests have a lower capacity to support the subsistence lifestyles of local communities, and that some people are trying to attract logging. It calls for prevention of large-scale commercial extraction of forests without actually imposing a ban on all logging operations. The mission received no advice that either the local community or other relevant provincial and national authorities have yet made any attempt to review and strengthen the provisions of the management plan in addressing the threats of potential logging operations in East Rennell.

3.6 Sustaining the livelihood of the East Rennell community

¹¹ Anon. 2007. *East Rennell World Heritage site management plan*. East Rennell World Heritage Trust Board, Solomon Islands, Honiara.

Unlike the majority of properties in the World Heritage network, East Rennell is owned under a customary tenure system by the local community and is protected and managed under traditional land use practices. Judging from the current state of conservation of the property and the experience of the past 14 years since inscription, it is clear that customary owners, if left to deal with it unassisted, do not have the necessary resources and capacity to protect and manage the property to World Heritage standards. Nor have they yet received in full the potential benefits of its World Heritage status. The people require immediate and long-term assistance both from in-country and international sources. Above all, they need support to sustain their livelihoods and traditional lifestyles. The resident population in the property is steadily declining and experiencing significant demographic change. Today there are about 350 people residing in the property, a high proportion of which are women, older men and children. Approximately 800 others from the community, mostly young adults and working-age men, have moved away to Honiara and elsewhere for education and employment. A small local community that is struggling to survive cannot be expected to maintain its environment and natural resources to the highest world standards, as required by the World Heritage Convention. Moreover, it is likely that the people of East Rennell will increasingly turn to commercial exploitation of their natural resources, which is unsustainable, damaging to the environment and contrary to protection of the outstanding universal value of the property. There is an immediate need for an injection of substantial rural aid from an international source particularly to improve transport and communication infrastructure, food security, education and health facilities and to assist the East Rennell community to withstand the impacts of climate change and natural hazards, especially cyclones.

The community receives no financial support from the national budget of the Solomon Islands government, and only a small annual subvention from the province. Essentially, it relies for its funding on the World Heritage Fund and on other external sources, especially donor funding from government and non-government organisations. This funding is not sustainable, it is short-term only and comes in pulses, and it is tagged to specific programmes and projects. The East Rennell community feels disenfranchised and not adequately consulted over the priorities for such funding or its use. The people also need a reliable source of cash, required to purchase food, fuel, medicines and educational resources and for payment of school fees. There is an urgent need to develop strategies and means of sourcing and managing long-term financial resources. Establishment of sustainable small-scale businesses based on local skills and use of local resources should be attempted. They failed in the past mainly because of lack of transport infrastructure and marketing support, and insufficient instruction and training. New initiatives of this kind should take care to avoid repeating these deficiencies. The Protected Areas Act 2010 makes provision for the establishment of trust funds and this avenue should also be pursued as soon as East Rennell becomes subject to that Act.

Eco-tourism development presents many potential opportunities and benefits for the East Rennell people. Several attempts, some of them well-intentioned but misguided, have been made previously but all ended in complete failure. Few tourists visit the property today. A

preliminary tourism development plan for Rennell–Bellona Province¹² has been developed but no real attempt has been made to implement it. Future efforts should be led by the Solomon Islands government and should be part of the national tourism development strategy. They should also extend beyond the World Heritage property to include the whole of Rennell Island and should focus on the importance of developing vital transport and accommodation infrastructure, and include promotion and marketing strategies. The level of tourism development should be kept modest. East Rennell has only a limited visitor carrying capacity, and a balance must be struck between sustainable visitor numbers and excessive development that will damage or destroy the natural and cultural essence of the place. Moreover, relatively small numbers of visitors will be sufficient to meet existing facilities and the needs of income generation. Discussions with home-stay and lodge owners suggest that up to 1,000 bed-nights per lodge per year (there are five eco-lodges) is an appropriate long-term target.

For further development of tourism it is vital that proper transport infrastructure be provided. The currently available travel options are time-consuming and uncomfortable, and this makes it extremely difficult for tourists to access the property and deters them from coming. Travel to East Rennell from Honiara occupies a full day, commencing with a one-hour flight in a light aircraft to a grass landing strip in West Rennell that has very basic passenger services and facilities, followed by an uncomfortable 50 km-journey by 4-wheel-drive truck (the only available tourist vehicle on the island) on a rough bush track, that can take from four to eight hours to traverse depending on the weather, track conditions and the number of vehicle breakdowns. Finally, a canoe journey on the lake gives access to the tourist lodges. Up-grading of the road is of utmost importance and some residents would like to see the road extended to connect the four main villages. The Provincial authorities informed the mission that they have been trying unsuccessfully for many years to obtain national government support to improve the airport and road on the island. Ironically, the best roads on the island are those constructed by the logging companies in West Rennell.

Communication facilities also need urgent up-grading. Currently there are no phone or internet services in the property and the people of East Rennell are essentially cut off from the rest of the world. The lack of communication severely limits the possibilities for effective promotion and marketing of tourist enterprises and other activities. There is also a need for improved sources of energy, especially for cooking, and lighting for the community. There are no electricity generators or solar power sources, for example.

Food security is a key issue for the people of East Rennell. Food shortages are common and the bulk supply of staple foodstuffs, such as rice, is dependent upon infrequent visits (2-3 month intervals) by cargo ships from Honiara. Local harvesting of taro, the most basic food source, is affected by climate-induced rise in lake levels, higher temperatures, insect damage and disease, and taro must now be imported at considerable cost. Coconut trees are exhibiting die-back and are not fruiting in wetter areas on lake margins. Shortage of food is contributing

¹² Anon. 2007a. *RenBel Province tourism development plan 2007 to 2012*. Tourism Department, Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Unpublished Monograph.

to increasing abandonment of traditional harvesting practices and the over-exploitation of terrestrial, freshwater and marine resources. Programmes of environmental controls and of replanting are required, and there is a need to provide bulk storage facilities on the island to avoid food shortages at times between ship visits and following the frequent occurrence of damaging cyclones.

Vital medical supplies and education materials are meagre and often completely lacking. Currently, there is only one medical clinic that has no medicines available, and three nursing staff, serving a population of some 350 people with a high proportion of babies and children. There are several schools, some of which are church-supported, but they are often closed because of a general lack of qualified teaching staff and supplies of educational materials. The only high school, with 34 students, is frequently closed by flooding from elevated lake water levels. These are matters requiring urgent attention from the national government and other relevant agencies and organisations.

4. A RESCUE PLAN FOR EAST RENNELL

Analysis of the state of conservation of the East Rennell World Heritage property reveals that the property has not been protected and managed to World Heritage standards. The serious threats from current logging of forests on Rennell Island and proposed logging within the property constitute an ascertained danger to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. A rescue plan is required, as follows:

1. Improved legislation and regulation for protection and management

The East Rennell property should be gazetted under the Protected Areas Act 2010, and the draft provincial Lake Tegano Heritage Park Ordinance 2009 should be approved and come into force as soon as possible. The provisions of both these legal instruments should be properly administered and fully implemented in respect of the World Heritage property by the Ministry of Environment and the provincial Premier's Office. Legislation should also give legal effect to the property management plan, and customary owners should be given the opportunity to enter into a full and effective partnership with the provincial and national authorities.

2. Sustainable financial support, including from SI Government, international donors and the World Heritage Fund

Long-term sustainable funding is required to assist the customary owners of East Rennell to manage the property to World Heritage standards. The local community also needs a source of cash income to purchase essential supplies and services, and could benefit from development of appropriate well-resourced and -operated small business enterprises.

3. Institutional capacity building for administration and management of the property

The community needs a full-time officer as a focal point within Rennell-Bellona Province to advocate on behalf of the people and the World Heritage requirements of the property, with strong links to a counterpart position in the Ministry of Environment and to the LTWHS in the property.

4. Building of technical capacity for management and monitoring of resources, values and attributes

Knowledge of the natural ecosystems, species and habitats is insufficient and needs further survey and assessment, especially in the marine areas. Cultural resources and values are also not well known and there is a need for systematic cataloguing and documentation of cultural values and traditional resource use and conservation practices.

5. Twinning of East Rennell with the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in Australia

The process of twinning of the East Rennell and Wet Tropics properties begun in 2009 is still not completed. A twinning arrangement would provide an invaluable source of information, expert advice, technical competence and assistance for management capacity-building in East Rennell. It is important to finalise the terms of reference and get the twinning arrangement authorised and operative as soon as possible.

6. Prohibition of commercial extraction of resources and prevention of over-exploitation

There should be an immediate ban on all logging operations on Rennell Island. Survey and assessment of marine resources, in particular, should be accompanied by monitoring and strict regulation of harvesting according to traditional sustainable practices.

7. Tourism development – promotion, marketing, managing, and facilities development

Eco-tourism development could potentially provide a range of benefits to the people of East Rennell. Lessons from past failures should be heeded and new initiatives taken in partnership with government and the business community. Tourism operations in the property must be adequately supported by much improved transport infrastructure, travel and accommodation facilities and communication services, and accompanied by effective promotion and marketing campaigns. Tourism at East Rennell should also be an integral component of the national tourism development strategies and plans.

8. Development of infrastructure and services

Up-grading of the road should take precedence among the projects required to improve the transport and communications infrastructure on Rennell Island. These should also address provision of improved airport facilities, more efficient air travel and shipping services and better phone and internet communication. Such infrastructure development is fundamentally important for advancing tourism and other business enterprises on the island and for ensuring the necessary supplies of food and other resources needed to sustain and grow the social and economic welfare of the East Rennell community.

9. Rural development assistance for responding to climate change effects, and providing food security, health and education requirements

Higher lake levels due to climate-induced sea level rise have inundated taro gardens and coconut plantations, causing reduction in harvest of staple food crops and contributing to food shortages and financial hardship for the people of East Rennell. Environmental management including replanting programmes is required to overcome these problems. Food security is now a major issue for the community and there is also a need for financial aid to provide basic health supplies and medicines and educational materials for schools. Without this assistance, the customary owners face insurmountable challenges in protection and management of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

10. Establishment of stronger links to UNESCO, IUCN and other international agencies

The customary owners charged with protection of the East Rennell property need on-going professional advice and technical support to achieve World Heritage targets. A closer working relationship with UNESCO, IUCN and other conservation agencies would contribute significantly to meeting this need.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

East Rennell was inscribed under criterion (ix) due to its unique ecology and its importance as a stepping stone in the migration and evolution of species in the western Pacific and for speciation processes, particularly with respect to birds. In its 1998 Evaluation, IUCN noted that the forests of East Rennell are intrinsically linked to those of West Rennell and that *“...the forest in East Rennell is not sufficiently large to ensure long-term survival of the endemic birds. Certainly previous proposals for mining and forest clearance on West Rennell would have some serious conservation consequences ...”*

The mission concludes that the ongoing logging of forests in West Rennell in the Tehakamagoku Concession Area (12km away from the property), and the proposal to log forests within the property in the Agapogabu Forest Concession represents a clear ascertained and potential danger to the ecological integrity of the property and its Outstanding Universal Value, in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the *Operational Guidelines*. The impacts of ongoing and future logging on OUV include loss of critical habitat for animal and plant species and particularly birds, reduction in biodiversity, introduction of invasive species, soil erosion, as well as social impacts on local communities.

The mission considers that inscribing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger and implementing a comprehensive recovery package supported by key national and international stakeholders holds the best prospect for overcoming the current threats and rescuing what was a model property of its kind in the World Heritage network

The mission emphasizes the cumulative nature of the threats affecting the property over the last 14 years. Rising sea level from climate change and the consequential flooding from increased lake levels has destroyed gardens and plantations, leading to food shortages and loss of housing and other key community amenities. This in turn has encouraged a shift to commercial exploitation of natural resources and abandonment of traditional use and conservation practices. Over-exploitation of marine resources and logging of forests are extreme manifestations of this process.

East Rennell is notable as the very first World Heritage property to be inscribed where the resources of the land and sea are under custom ownerships and managed using traditional practices. However, without support from in-country and international sources it is likely that the trend toward a diminishing community and loss of natural resources and values will continue and accelerate.

5.1.1 Logging

Logging of the native forests on Rennell Island, which began in 2008, now includes two concessions within West Rennell, outside the World Heritage property, and a proposed larger concession that would extend logging into the property.

Existing and proposed logging operations could have serious consequences for the Outstanding Universal Value of East Rennell because its forests are intrinsically linked within a single island-wide forest ecosystem to those of West Rennell and are insufficient on their own to ensure long-term survival of endemic birds, in particular.

Environmental impact assessment of logging operations has acknowledged the potential loss of plant and animal species and the damaging consequences to the property from reduction in biodiversity on the island.

Timber extraction and the construction of roads, log storage and loading areas and camps have already destroyed large areas of forest and some coastal and coral reef environments. Cleared areas are invaded by a rapidly growing, smothering vine that impedes forest re-growth. No restoration or replanting is occurring. The introduction of logging is also having serious social consequences for the island communities.

The provincial government, and the community leaders and people of East Rennell who are the customary owners of the land, are opposed to logging but under current laws are essentially powerless to prevent it. Although there is existing and draft protection legislation at national and provincial levels, the World Heritage property remains without legal protection. The management plan for the property includes policies that would prevent large-scale timber extraction, but the plan has never been fully implemented.

The government of the Solomon Islands, as State Party to the World Heritage Convention, has not taken steps to date to ban logging on Rennell Island as requested by the World Heritage Committee, nor has it signalled any intention to do so.

5.1.2 Invasive species

Large black rats, thought to be Ship (Black) rats (*Rattus rattus*), have been observed on Rennell Island in the vicinity of log ponds and jetties and adjacent log storage areas, and may have been introduced from logging vessels. Rats, which have decimated the fauna of many other islands throughout the Pacific, have been absent on Rennell Island so its fauna including seven species of endemic birds, 731 species of insects and 27 species of land snails, is extremely vulnerable to rat predation.

The potential for introduction of African land snails, on shipments of produce from known snail populations in Honiara, is also of great concern as they are aggressive invaders that are destructive of crops and other vegetation and compete with native land snails.

The serious threats to the natural values of the World heritage property from introduced alien species in general, and rats and snails in particular, do not appear to be recognised by the State Party, and no attempts are being made to assess the problem or put control measures in place.

5.1.3 Over-exploitation of marine resources and coconut crab

Little is known of the large customary-owned marine component of the East Rennell property that extends 3 nmi offshore. It acts as a buffer zone with no specified claim to Outstanding Universal Value, but is a vital source of food for the local community.

A UNESCO marine site survey in 2010 revealed significant threats from climate-induced sea level rise and increased storm frequency; decreasing populations of target species due to abandonment of traditional harvesting practices, increased harvesting for commercial purposes and illegal poaching; and the lack of effective and enforceable laws and regulations. The management plan, despite lacking the necessary resources and technical capacity for implementation, does not advocate the use of traditional harvest practices over modern methods. All this has raised concern about the serious decline in stocks of crayfish, giant clam, beche-de-mer (sea cucumber) and trochus (sea snail), in particular.

Coconut crab populations are steadily declining under increasing harvesting pressure due to dwindling supplies of other foods and to increased commercial exploitation. Concern is expressed that this may lead to localised extinction of the species. There are no community-controlled limits on harvesting levels, times or durations.

Assistance has been given to the community in conservation and management of marine resources, including ranger training, and habitat and species survey and monitoring, but there is no evidence that it has been adopted in any effective way.

5.1.4 Effects of climate change

Life in East Rennell is highly dependent on Lake Tegano for food and for travel within the property. Increasing water levels and salinity, induced by sea level rise due to climate change, are adversely affecting the harvest of taro and coconut, which are vital staple foods. Taro is also affected by disease and insect damage and is no longer grown in the property. Some medicinal plants are also affected by flooding, as are houses, tourist lodges, medical clinics and schools. The increased incidence of cyclones, also due to climate change, has added significantly to the level of damage and loss.

5.1.5 Sustaining the livelihoods of the East Rennell community

The customary owners of East Rennell are incapable of protecting and managing the property to World Heritage standards, and have not yet received the full potential benefits of its World Heritage status. The communities need substantial support to sustain their livelihoods and traditional lifestyles, and a reliable source of cash to purchase food, fuel, medicines, and educational resources and for payment of school fees. Without this support they will turn increasingly to commercial exploitation of their natural resources.

In the absence of financial assistance from the Solomon Islands government, there is an immediate need for an injection of substantial rural aid from international sources, especially to improve transport and communication infrastructure, food security, education and medical facilities, and to assist the East Rennell community to withstand the impacts of climate change and natural hazards, especially cyclones.

5.1.6 A rescue plan

A 10-point rescue plan is proposed to secure long-term security and sustainability of the people, and integrity of the environment, and to ensure on-going protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the East Rennell World Heritage property.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Logging

The Solomon Islands government should impose an immediate and complete ban on logging operations on Rennell Island.

5.2.2 Invasive species

A programme for control and/or eradication of invasive alien species should be introduced as soon as possible on Rennell Island, including assessment of the current status and trend of populations of invasive species, evaluation of the threat to native species of biota especially in the World Heritage property, and establishment of control methods such as poison bait stations installed around log loading and storage sites and logging camps.

5.2.3 Over-exploitation of marine resources and coconut crab

Controls on harvesting of marine resources and coconut crabs are urgently required, including restrictions on the number and size of animals harvested, prohibition of taking pregnant females or eggs, and imposition of seasonal limits and no-take zones. A return to traditional conservation measures should be encouraged. This should be accompanied by research, survey and monitoring along with training and awareness-raising in the local community.

5.2.4 Effects of climate change

Environmental controls and replanting are required to ameliorate the impacts of lakeshore flooding and salination of lake waters that are destroying taro gardens and coconut plantations and causing serious food shortages. Effort is needed to find sources of increased cash income required to meet growing costs of importing food supplies, and restoring damaged housing and other essential community amenities.

5.2.5 A rescue plan for East Rennell

In the face of an ascertained danger from the threat of logging, consideration should be given to inscribing the East Rennell property on the World Heritage in Danger List, and instigating a rescue plan sufficient to attain World Heritage standards of management of the property and ensure protection of its Outstanding Universal Value.

ANNEX 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE MISSION

IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission, East Rennell - Solomon Islands

At its 36th session, the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party of Solomon Islands to invite a reactive monitoring mission to East Rennell World Heritage Site, to be conducted by IUCN (Decision **36 COM 7B.15**). The objective of the monitoring mission is to assess the current state of conservation of the property, in particular related to the threat of logging operations on Rennell Island (including on West Rennell, outside the property), the associated threat of invasive species, and the over-exploitation of coconut crab and marine resources, as well as other relevant conservation issues. The mission will be led by Paul Dingwall, representing IUCN.

In particular, the mission should address the following key issues:

1. Assess the threat and impact of logging operations on Rennell Island, both outside and within the property. This should include an assessment of impacts from logging associated infrastructure on the biodiversity of Rennell Island as a whole, and on the Outstanding Universal Value and conditions of integrity of the property specifically. It should also include a survey of any logging concession applications currently being considered to determine if and how the property may be affected by future logging. The impact from the construction of wharves, staging and loading areas, and the increase of activity of logging vessels on the marine component of the property should also be assessed. Finally, the impacts from logging operations on local communities should also be assessed;
2. Assess the threat and impact from invasive species, associated or not with logging operations on the island, including rats and African land snail. This should include an assessment of the impact from invasive species on the populations of endemic birds in particular, as well as the impact from the associated disturbance of the Island's forest ecosystem on the Outstanding Universal Value and conditions of integrity of the property;
3. Review progress in the assessment of coconut crab and commercially exploited marine resources (including crayfish, trochus, beche-de-mer and clamshells) to determine the impact of current harvesting practices. This should include a review of current conservation measures to address this threat to marine resources (see also point 4 below). The review should take account of the progress of the survey being conducted under the framework of the International Assistance project (IAR nr. 2413: Survey of the Condition of the Marine Ecosystem within the East Rennell World Heritage Area);

4. Review the Management Plan, particularly provisions therein to address threats from logging and from over-exploitation of coconut crab and marine resources;
5. In line with paragraph 173 of the *Operational Guidelines*, assess any other relevant conservation issues that may negatively impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including the conditions of integrity and protection and management;
6. Based on the above assessments and reviews, the mission will **make a recommendation regarding the possible inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger**.

The mission should be assisted to conduct the necessary field visits to key locations, including the Tehakamagoku, Magaone and Aga'eha concession areas in West Rennell, the Agapogabu forest in East Rennell, and relevant locations to assess the impact from shipping and related infrastructure. In order to enable preparation for the mission, it would be appreciated if the following items could be provided to the World Heritage Centre (copied to IUCN) as soon as possible, and preferably no later than the end September:

- a) The proceedings of the hearing on timber rights for the Agapogabu forest which was scheduled to take place in April 2012;
- b) Any available data on the impacts from invasive species, ideally including time-series data on the populations of invasive species and comparable time-series data on the populations of key (endemic) bird species;
- c) A progress report on the survey of the condition of the marine ecosystem within the property for which International Assistance was granted, including any preliminary results of this survey;
- d) The most recent version of the management plan;
- e) A copy of the Protected Areas Act 2010 and of the (draft) Rennell-Bellona Province Lake Tegano Natural Heritage Park Ordinance.

The mission should also hold consultations with the Solomon Island authorities at national and provincial levels, in particular representatives of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Meteorology, the Ministry of Forestry, Environment and Conservation, the Provincial Government, and the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association. In addition, the mission should hold consultation with a range of relevant stakeholders, including i) researchers; ii) NGOs (including the World Wide Fund for Nature and Live and Learn Environmental Education); iii) representatives of key local communities; and iv) representatives of the logging sector.

Based on the results of the above-mentioned assessments and discussions with the State Party representatives and stakeholders, the mission will develop recommendations to the

Government of Solomon Islands and the World Heritage Committee to conserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and improve its conservation and management. It should be noted that recommendations are made within the mission report (see below), and not while the mission is still on-going.

The mission will prepare a concise mission report on the findings and recommendations of this reactive monitoring mission by mid-December 2012, following the standard format.

ANNEX 2

ITINERARY AND DAILY PROGRAMMES OF THE MISSION

21 October: Travel Wellington, New Zealand to Honiara, Solomon Islands via Brisbane, Australia. [Overnight in King Solomon Hotel, Honiara.]

22 October: Purchased air ticket for return travel to Rennell Island. Visited office of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology; met with Josef Hurutarau, Environment & Conservation Division, and courtesy call on Channel Iroi, Acting Permanent Secretary. Visited Ministry of Education (National Commission for UNESCO) for discussions with Aseri Yalangono, Deputy-Secretary of Education and former World Heritage focal point representative for Solomon Islands. Visited Ministry of Culture and Tourism for discussions with Savita Nandan, Deputy-Director of Tourism. Visited Public Solicitor's Office for discussions with Stephanie Price, legal volunteer. Visited headquarters of Live and Learn Environmental Education for discussions with Johnson Fangalasuu and Gwen Tovosia. Note that a meeting with the Ministry of Forests was missed. Made final arrangements for flight and programme on Rennell Island. [Overnight in Mendana Hotel, Honiara.]

23 October: Flight from Honiara to West Rennell. Met with Timothy Johnston Peseika, Deputy-Premier of RenBel Province, Lence Tago, Provincial Minister of Health and a tourist resort operator, and Felix Tahua, Chairman of the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association. Travel by 4-wheel truck to East Rennell. [Overnight at Kia Koe Resort, Lake Tegano.]

24 October: Canoe tour of lake to view impacts of rising water levels on coconut and other native forest vegetation, taro gardens and housing re-location. Held discussion sessions on climate change issues, over-harvesting of coconut crab and other marine resources, tourism development and socio-economic problems in the local community.[Overnight Kia Koe Resort.]

25 October: Visits to Hutuna, Tegano and Niupani villages for discussions with leaders, church elders and community representatives. [Overnight at Kia Koe Resort.]

26 October: Visit to Tebataitahe Village for discussions. Travel by 4-wheel drive truck to West Rennell. Final discussions and de-briefing with representatives of Provincial Government and Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association. [Overnight Nukuma'anu Lodge, West Rennell]

27 October: Flight from W. Rennell to Honiara. Scheduled meeting with Josef Hurutarau was not held. [Overnight at Mendana Hotel.]

28 October: De-briefing discussions with Gwen Tovosia (LLEE). Flight from Honiara to Brisbane. [Overnight at airport hotel.]

29 October: Flight Brisbane to Wellington.

ANNEX 3

HISTORY OF DECISIONS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

22nd Session 1998

The Committee inscribed East Rennell on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion N (ii) – new criterion (ix). This was the first time a property protected by customary law was accorded World Heritage status. The Committee recommended that the State Party (SP) should proceed with preparation of the resource management plan and the draft World Heritage Protection Bill, and that a mission be undertaken in three years to assess the progress made.

27th Session 2003

The Committee requested the World Heritage Centre (WHC) to assess the state of conservation of the property and if necessary to organise a joint IUCN-UNESCO mission to the property, and subsequently that a state of conservation report be presented to the next session of the Committee. The Committee also requested the WHC and IUCN to determine the state of preparation of the resource management plan and the draft World Heritage Protection Bill.

28th Session 2004

The Committee thanked the Solomon Islands (SI) National Commission for UNESCO for providing up-to-date information and for conducting a site visit to assess the state of conservation of the property. The Committee requested IUCN and the WHC to organise a joint mission to the property, to assess and report on the state of conservation, determine the preparedness of the resource management plan and the draft World Heritage Protection Bill, and document and assess the effectiveness of customary protection of the property.

29th Session 2005

The Committee:

- Thanked the SI National Commission for UNESCO for co-ordinating and supporting the visit by the IUCN-WHC mission to assess the state of conservation of the property;
- Commended the local communities for conserving the property during the civil unrest in the country;
- Expressed its concern regarding the lack of Government support for the property;
- Requested the SP to complete the draft World Heritage Protection Bill and enact it as soon as possible, prepare a management plan for the property as soon as possible, support the customary owners in management and conservation of the property, and increase public awareness of the property through appropriate promotional, advocacy and educational opportunities;

- Encouraged the SP to establish a single representative body within the community for overseeing the management plan and assisting in co-ordinating projects or other related actions;
- Requested the SP to ensure endorsement and support of the management plan, establish a World Heritage sub-Commission in the National Commission for UNESCO to oversee implementation of the management plan and associated projects; and
- Requested the SP to submit a report to the WHC on progress made in implementing the above recommendations by 1 February 2007, for reporting to the next session of the Committee.

31st Session 2007

The Committee:

- Welcomed that the SP had produced a management plan and established a community organisation with responsibility for administration and management of the property;
- Noted with concern that the draft World Heritage Protection Bill has not yet been passed into legislation, and that additional financial and technical capacity are needed;
- Requested the SP to approve the World Heritage Protection Bill as soon as possible, and develop the management plan further by including more specific policies addressing threats such as mining, logging, over-exploitation of coconut crab and marine resources, and invasive species, and providing a budget and timeline for completion;
- Called upon the international donor community to provide further financial and technical support for conservation and management of the property;
- Recommended that the SP consider requesting international assistance from the World Heritage Fund to implement the above-mentioned actions; and
- Requested the SP to submit to the WHC by 1 February 2009 a report on the state of conservation of the property and on progress in implementing the recommendations of the 2005 mission, including the timeline and budget for the management plan and a copy of the World Heritage Protection Bill for examination by the Committee at its 33rd session in 2009.

33rd Session 2009

The Committee:

- Expressed regret that the SP did not submit a report on the state of conservation as requested by the Committee at its 31st session;
- Noted the establishment of a single management association for the property, but expressed its concern that there is no confirmation about the finalisation of the World Heritage Protection Bill, or up-to-date information on the other issues facing the property;

- Reiterated its recommendation that the SP seeks international assistance from the World Heritage Fund for establishment of more effective protection and management system for the property; and
- Requested that the SP submit to the WHC by 1 February 2010 a detailed report on the state of conservation of the property, together with information on the status of the World Heritage Protection Bill and previous requests of the Committee for examination by the Committee at its 34th session in 2010.

34th Session 2010

The Committee:

- Expressed regret that the SP did not submit a report on the state of conservation of the property as requested by the Committee at its 33rd session;
- Welcomed the report that the Australian Government, through the Australian Aid Agency AusAid, is supporting a heritage and governance capacity-building project, which may contribute to improving the management of the property;
- Noted with concern reports that logging may be threatening the property and adjacent areas in West Rennell;
- Reiterated its recommendation that the SP seeks international assistance from the World Heritage Fund for establishment of a more effective protection and management system for the property; and
- Requested the SP to submit to the WHC by 1 February 2012 a detailed report on the state of conservation of the property, together with information on the status of the World Heritage Protection Bill for examination by the Committee at its 36th session in 2012.

36th Session 2012

The Committee:

- Commended the SP for its work to rectify the deficiencies in the protection legislation, management planning and administration of the property that have been the subject of Committee concerns since 2003;
- Expressed its serious concern that applications for commercial logging rights within the property are being considered by the SP, which if granted would represent an ascertained danger of the property in line with paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines, and also over the impacts on the property of large scale commercial logging operations in West Rennell;
- Requested the SP to immediately ban all commercial logging from Rennell Island to avoid loss of integrity and the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, and to assess the possible associated introduction of rats and invasive land snails and institute the necessary control measures, and also called upon the companies applying for licences which could impact the property to not proceed further with these applications;

- Urged the SP to make an immediate assessment of the over-exploitation of coconut crab and other marine resources;
- Requested the SP to invite an IUCN reactive monitoring mission to the property, to assess the current state of conservation, particularly in relation to the threat of logging operations on Rennell Island, the associated threat of invasive species, and the over-exploitation of coconut crab and marine resources, as well as other relevant conservation issues; and

Requested the SP to submit to the WHC by 1 February 2013 an updated report on the state of conservation of the property, including a report on the outcome of an assessment of over-exploitation of resources and the possible introduction of invasive species, and on the imposition of a ban on logging operations on Rennell Island that might impact the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, for examination by the Committee at its 37th session in 2013.

ANNEX 4 - Photographs



Photo 1. Clear-felled log area (W. Rennell)



Photo 2. Coconut Crab (E. Rennell)



Photo 3. Log storage (W. Rennell)



Photo 4. Logging operations (W. Rennell)



Photo 5. Dying Coconut Trees without fruit



Photo 6. Smothering vines invading cleared logging areas (W. Rennell)



Photo 7. Lake Tegano (E. Rennell)



Photo 8. Meeting with villagers (E. Rennell)



Photo 9. Levago Bay



Photo 10. House abandoned due to rising lake level