

LATIN AMERICA / CARIBBEAN

ISLANDS AND PROTECTED AREAS OF THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA

MEXICO

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

ISLANDS AND PROTECTED AREAS OF THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA (MEXICO) – ID No.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The existing natural World Heritage property comprises 244 islands, islets and coastal areas that are located in the Gulf of California in north-eastern Mexico. The serial property is of striking natural beauty and provides a dramatic setting due to the rugged forms of the islands, with high cliffs and sandy beaches contrasting with the brilliant reflection from the desert and the surrounding turquoise waters. The diversity of terrestrial and marine life is extraordinary and constitutes a unique ecoregion of high priority for biodiversity conservation. This serial property was inscribed in 2005 under natural criteria (vii), (ix) and (x) and extended in 2007. The original Committee Decision in 2005 (29 COM 8B.9) recommended to create and propose marine reserves around the inscribed islands as extensions of the property.

2. BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The proposal is to include the terrestrial area “Balandra Zone of Ecological Conservation and Community Interest” of 1,197 ha as a twelfth serial component of the serial property. Balandra is located in the State Baja California Sur within the Bay of La Paz, north of and in close proximity to the capital city La Paz. Balandra is a municipal protected area by decree of the municipality of La Paz since 2008 and has clear demarcated boundaries.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

As it concerns the inclusion of land into the existing World Heritage property, the proposal is considered in its relation to the criteria under which the current World Heritage property is inscribed, and its contribution to the integrity, protection and management of its values.

The proposed extension of the property strengthens the integrity of the inscribed World Heritage site in relation to all three criteria under which the Gulf of California has been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Balandra is located within Marine Priority No. 10, known as “Complejo Insular de Baja California Sur”, as part of the Priority Regions for Conservation established by the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO, 2006). The mangrove forest, extending over 22.5 ha and thus the largest within the bay of La Paz, underwent a large reforestation effort, starting 12 years ago, based on the reintroduction of *Avicennia germinans*

in certain areas that had been affected by illegal logging. The area functions as a nursery for juveniles of a number of important fish species, some of them of economic importance for local communities. The close proximity of the mangrove areas to sea grass communities and coral and rocky reefs, such as the grass beds of Gaviota Island and the reefs located in Balandra itself, facilitates the transfer of nutrients between these different habitats for fish and invertebrates. Balandra is also a nesting site for endangered resident and migratory bird populations. It has been classified as an Important Bird Area for Conservation. This strengthens the integrity of the property by providing valuable breeding grounds for the high marine productivity and biodiversity richness of the area and by establishing connectivity with the other parts of this serial property.

Balandra Zone of Ecological Conservation and Community Interest is a protected area established by the National Commission for Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP) that has granted management rights and authority to the municipal government. In light of threats of tourism development and real estate projects, further layers of legal protection should be established and implemented as soon as possible. In supplementary information provided on the legal protection of the site, the State Party confirms that it is preparing to establish the area as a protected area at federal level and that the technical studies, community consultations and impact assessments have already taken place. The effective management of the area also requires the finalization and implementation of the management plan as soon as possible. The State Party has informed IUCN that the final version of the management plan will be analyzed by the Municipality of La Paz end of July 2011. At the moment, there are five staff members working in the area with an additional annual budget of ca. 80,000 USD. Conservation of Balandra is supported by the local community, which values this place for recreation and aesthetic and spiritual values. It is an emblematic place of great interest for the population of La Paz. Given its accessibility and importance for local population, many education outreach programmes by schools, the government and different civil society organizations are carried out in the region.

IUCN considers that the proposal to include “Balandra Zone of Ecological Conservation and Community Interests” meets the requirements for approval as a minor boundary modification of the property.

4. OTHER COMMENTS

None.

5. RECOMMENDATION

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

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-11/35.COM/8B and WHC-11/35.COM/INF.8B2, and recalling its previous decision 29COM 8B.9, which recommended the State Party consider further extensions to this serial property;

2. Approves the minor boundary modification of the **Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California, (Mexico)** to include the “Balandra Zone of Ecological Conservation and Community Interest” (1,197 ha) as a

new component part of the existing serial property, in order to strengthen the integrity of the inscribed property, provide connectivity and support its effective protection and management;

3. Requests the State Party, in close collaboration with the relevant local communities to complete the management plan for this component of the property and to submit this to the World Heritage Centre before the 36th Session of the World Heritage Committee in 2012, and to ensure continued attention to the measures to manage tourism development and fisheries within and associated with the new component;

5. Notes with appreciation the restoration of the mangroves within Balandra and encourages consideration of similar approaches to reestablish additional mangrove areas and new marine protected areas in the Sea of Cortez.

Map 1: Nominated property location

