

EUROPE / NORTH AMERICA

FRENCH AUSTRAL LANDS AND SEAS

FRANCE

WORLD HERITAGE MINOR BOUNDARY MODIFICATION PROPOSAL – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

FRENCH AUSTRAL LANDS AND SEAS (FRANCE) – ID No. 1603bis

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The “French Austral Lands and Seas” World Heritage property was inscribed on the World Heritage List under criteria (vii), (ix) and (x) in 2019 (Committee Decision 43 COM 8B.6). In its inscription decision, the Committee requested the State Party, *inter alia*, “to maintain, and strengthen if necessary, the measures which are in place to strictly regulate commercial fishing within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)”.

IUCN’s previous evaluation can be found in document WHC-21/43.COM/INF.8B2, which contain relevant analyses. The relevant documentation is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1603/documents/>.

2. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED BOUNDARY MODIFICATION.

The minor boundary modification proposed by the State Party consists of an extension to all three component parts of the property: Crozet, Kerguelen and Saint-Paul et Amsterdam. All three component parts, as currently inscribed, total a terrestrial and marine area of 67,296,900 hectares (ha), making the property the largest inscribed on the World Heritage List. The extension would add 98,970,200 ha to the property resulting in a total area of 166,267,100 ha. The component part of Crozet would be extended from 25,578,400 ha to 57,519,300 ha, the component part of Kerguelen from 39,708,000 ha to 57,500,200 ha; and Saint-Paul et Amsterdam would be enlarged from 2,010,500 ha to 51,247,600 ha.

The minor boundary modification proposal is intended to align the boundaries of the property with the new, extended boundaries of the Nature Reserve. The areas proposed for extension would consist solely of marine areas. The revised property would cover the entire EEZ encircling the property’s three archipelagos.

3. IMPACT ON OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The minor boundary modification proposal presents the extension would, firstly, improve the representation of the property’s attributes of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and, secondly, enhance the property’s integrity under criterion (ix). Various scientific studies completed following inscription of the property suggest that the extended boundaries would more comprehensively cover the property’s attributes. The extended area would increase the overlap with Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) identified in IUCN’s 2020 report on the Fourth IMMA Workshop. The extension of

the boundaries of Saint-Paul et Amsterdam would also more closely align with the respective marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (mIBA) and increase geographic range coverage of three Endangered Albatross species (Amsterdam Albatross, *Diomedea amsterdamensis*; Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, *Thalassarche carteri*; Sooty Albatross, *Phoebastria fusca*, all EN) and the Northern Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes moseleyi*, EN). Furthermore, a spatial analysis of the ecological importance of the pelagic and benthic zones indicates that the areas of ecological importance exceed the area currently inscribed.

These findings underpin Decree No. 2022-157 of 10 February 2022 extending and modifying the regulations of the Nature Reserve. The proposed minor boundary modification would align the boundaries of the property with the enlarged Nature Reserve, subjecting them to the same protection and management regime. IUCN notes that this Decree has also strengthened the protection regime of the property as it further reduces and controls human activity, including fishing, in the entire EEZ.

Based on the above research and the reinforced protection and management regime, IUCN considers that the extension of the property would, firstly, reinforce the protection of areas of high conservation value representing the same, yet more, of the habitats for avifauna, marine mammals, and pelagic and benthic species; and secondly, it would include important sections of migration corridors. The extension would thus not negatively affect the OUV of the property, but enhance the property’s integrity and protection of its biodiversity.

Given the large areas of the proposed extension, the State Party has also discussed in detail whether this proposal would represent a minor or a significant modification of the boundaries. The analysis concludes that a significant boundary modification would apply only on the basis of percentage increase in area, whereas all considerations in regard to the property’s OUV, latest science and the protection and management regime would be satisfied under a minor boundary modification.

As the attributes of OUV remain exactly the same, IUCN considers that the property’s OUV would not be affected. Whilst the change in surface area is considerable, the revised boundaries would cover the same bathymetry and the same type of low-use marine area, which already constitutes the vast majority of the property’s inscribed area. The modification would not add any new terrestrial area. Therefore, given the exceptional nature of the uninhabited low use marine

areas and considering that the attributes of the OUV remain exactly the same, IUCN concludes that this boundary modification proposal can be accepted as a minor one, in line with paragraph 163 of the *Operational Guidelines*. Furthermore, IUCN's very recent evaluation mission in 2019 – the most extended evaluation mission in IUCN's history – has obtained a full understanding of the property's values and wider marine areas as well as the property's protection and management system. IUCN thus considers that a new mission within the procedure of a significant boundary modification proposal would in all likelihood not provide any further insights in addition to those of the 2019 mission.

In addition, IUCN would like to commend the State Party of France for having considerably enhanced the protection and management of the property within a very short timeframe since its inscription in 2019 and in line with Committee Decision 43 COM 8B.6. The property itself and the present extension proposal

represents a tremendously important milestone for marine conservation globally.

4. RECOMMENDATION

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined documents WHC/22/45.COM/8B.ADD and WHC/22/45.COM/INF.8B2.ADD,
2. Recalling Decision **43 COM 8B.6**, adopted at its 43rd (Baku, 2019) session,
3. Approves the proposed minor boundary modification for the **French Austral Lands and Seas (France)**.

Map 1: World Heritage property and proposed minor boundary modification

