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# Al-Faw (Saudi Arabia) No 1712

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## 1 Basic information

### Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area

### Location

Wadi ad-Dawasir Governorate  
Riyadh Province  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### Brief description

Located between the vast alluvial plain and the Jabal Tuwayq Plateau in southern Saudi Arabia at one of the most important strategic points of the ancient trade routes leading from Najran to central and eastern Arabia, The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area is an organically evolved relict landscape encapsulated by the extremely arid desert environment since its abrupt abandonment around the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Nearly 12,000 archaeological remains have been found spanning from prehistoric times to the Late pre-Islamic era, testifying to the successive occupation of the three different populations and their interaction with and adaptation to the evolving climate conditions and landscape. The archaeological features include the Palaeolithic and Neolithic tools of early people, tapered structures, cairns and circular constructions, the sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah, rock carvings, funerary landscape of tumuli and cairns in the valley, forts/caravanserai, the oasis and its ancient water management system, and the vestiges of the city of Qaryat al-Faw. Together, these diverse elements manifest a multifaceted narrative of the place that was once the home of a prehistoric people, the territory of a transhumant population, and the regional economic and political centre along an important ancient trade route of the Arabian Peninsula.

### Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2023), paragraph 47, it has also been nominated as a cultural landscape.

### Included in the Tentative List

3 January 2022

### Background

This is a new nomination.

### Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

Comments on the natural attributes of this nominated property, and their conservation and management were received from IUCN on 14 November 2023 and have been incorporated into the relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 7 to 12 October 2023.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 4 October 2023 requesting further information about the coordination of management, buffer zone mapping, protection of the wider setting, the conservation approach, the management plan, tourism, visitor management and interpretation, future farming uses, local communities, traditional protection, and the 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid World Heritage site.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 8 November 2023.

An interim report was provided to the State Party on 19 December 2023, summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the interim report on the legal protection in the buffer zone, management, research, and interpretation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 26 February 2024.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

## 2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

### Description and history

The nominated property is located between the vast alluvial plain and the Jabal Tuwayq Plateau in a hyper-arid environment in southern Saudi Arabia, with nearly 12,000 archaeological features testifying to the successive human occupation of the region since the Palaeolithic period.

The rich archaeological remains reflect the multifaceted lives of the occupants, including stone tools, tapered structures, cairns and circular constructions, the sacred

mountain of Khashm Qaryah, rock carvings, the funerary landscape of tumuli and cairns in the valley, forts/caravanserais, the oasis and its ancient water management system, and the vestiges of the city of Qaryat al-Faw.

#### Stone tools

Palaeolithic and Neolithic flint flakes (some with heavy patina) such as scrapers, burins, blades, and arrowheads, together with some dense Neolithic flint scatters, have been found near the escarpment of the Jabal Tuwayq Plateau, indicating the early human occupation of the landscape.

#### Tapered structures

These structures consist of three dry-stone walls forming an empty triangle as the head, attached to which is a long tail of the dry-stone wall varying in length from one up to seventy metres. They are often associated with nearby smaller features, such as heaps of stones and hearths. More than 552 tapered structures have been recorded within the nominated property. Most of them are clustered and concentrated on the plateau at the edge of Jabal Tuwayq, while twenty-two are scattered at the foot of the plateau. Groups of tapered structures are positioned on either side of a central path, forming “avenues”.

#### Cairns and circular constructions

Circular stone structures with funerary purposes are identifiable on the upper plateau, including nineteen watch tower tombs, sixty circular cairns, pendant-shaped cairns, small circular structures, U-shaped structures partially connected to each other, and possibly a small settlement.

#### The sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah

Khashm Qaryah, literally the nose of Qaryah, is a protruding tabular relief on the western edge of Jabal Tuwayq with the shape of a crescent moon ending at each of its edges in two massive rocky walls. This spectacular landmark has been venerated by ancient people as the domain of Kahl, the main deity of the oasis. There are traces of a natural terrace used as an open-air sanctuary at the top of the slope, three areas of concentrated rock engravings and graffiti mid-slope, and a possible altar at the bottom of the slope. The sacredness of the place is confirmed by eight fragments of Ancient South Arabian inscriptions in Sabaic and Old Arabic, other inscriptions, rock art, and rock engravings.

#### Rock carvings

Besides the rock carvings at the Khashm Qaryah, a significant number of petroglyphs and rock inscriptions are found in various parts of the nominated property. The petroglyphs exhibit rock carvings of images of camels, humans, chariots, and wild animals (ibex, oryx, and gazelles), while the ninety-eight recorded rock inscriptions carry Ancient South Arabian inscriptions, Thamudic graffiti, and Arabic inscriptions.

#### Tumuli and cairns in the valley

There are 178 tumuli (or cruciform tombs) and 2,657 cairns at the foot of Jabal Tuwayq, and a second concentration of graves northeast of Khashm Qaryah. The clusters are generally separated by run-off areas from the plateau or from water sources where tombs have either disappeared or were never built. The tombs are thus located on preserved colluvial fans rising between these run-off areas, in general below 750 metres and at the lowest point around 720 metres above sea level. Together with the funerary avenues of tapered structures, they characterise the protohistoric landscape of Al-Faw.

#### Fort/caravanserai area

Between the ancient city and the Jabal Tuwayq at the edge of the eastern part of the white gypsum substratum, two rectangular forts/caravanserais, and two other structures are found in an isolated archaeological sector. The walls were constructed using mudbricks and stones. Located along the track between the mountain and the agricultural area, these probably controlled this strategic passage and the access to the town from the north, as well as the access to water for caravans.

#### The oasis and its ancient water management system

Within an area of 5 by 1.3 kilometres, 7,535 plantation pits, together with at least eleven primary water channels and thirty-three wells, testify to the scale and water management of this vast oasis. The plants include date palm, colocynth, pomegranate, jujube, sesame, olive, grapevine, wheat, purslane, and millet; and there is evidence of camels, cattle, goats, and sheep.

#### The vestiges of Qaryat al-Faw

Located at the centre of the oasis is the ruin of the city of Qaryat. The settlement was organised in a concentric pattern, with the major living and administrative areas located in the centre and a religious and administrative sector situated northeast of the town. A funerary ring of necropolises surrounds the urban and religious sectors and is, in turn, encompassed by the oasis.

The ancient city covers an area of 250 x 150 metres, centred around a large square measuring 40 x 25 metres with a central deep well with basins and pipes carrying water to a small sanctuary featuring a limestone altar dedicated to the deities Kahl and 'Abat dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Several other cultic constructions are found in the city, often with inscriptions. The houses in the city align roughly with the cardinal directions. Tower houses are found in detached areas to the south, west, and north of the city, some of which may have been used for defence purposes.

The religious and administrative sectors feature a monumental building named “souk”, which might have functioned as a market. It has a square layout with projected corner towers and bastions, as well as thick mudbrick walls six to seven metres above the plain. Within the complex are storage rooms set around an elongated

central courtyard with a large, deep well at its centre. The area is surrounded by an enclosure. Water channels, religious buildings with inscriptions, and tower houses are found in the area or in close proximity.

Outside the urban and religious areas, there is a funerary ring. The burial materials and tomb stela provide valuable information on the origins of the residents of the ancient city, the language they used, the deities they worshipped, and their funerary rituals.

There are several archaeological remains located in the buffer zone, including eighteen tapered structures, thirty-two tombs or cairns, three pendant tombs, one water channel, three wells, one inscription, and one rock art and inscription.

Since Palaeolithic times, the landscape of the nominated property has evolved drastically. In the Palaeolithic period, the climate conditions were significantly wetter than present, with ample rivers and springs, and the area was covered with forests. During the Neolithic and protohistoric periods, rivers and springs dried up, and forests were replaced by grasses. In the Antique period, the surface water completely disappeared, but the underground water level remained high, and the oasis and the city were established and thrived. In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the climate became drier, causing the oasis economy to decline, and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, the area was too dry for the desert community to survive. The city was abandoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and has never been re-inhabited.

Along with the landscape evolution, the successive inhabitants of the area adapted to the natural conditions, developed the most suitable living strategies, and thrived until the environment became too hostile for survival.

The earliest human traces are the stone tools with heavy patina found on the plateau, dating back to the Palaeolithic and early Neolithic periods. This is followed by the presence of a group of flint scatters and other stone tools dating between 100,000 and 10,000 years BP. A large number of tapered structures are dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE and continued into the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. These possibly suggest the presence of transhumance routes radiating in different directions around the proto-oasis.

Around 2000 to 1900 BCE, a large number of cairns and tumuli appeared at the western base of Jabal Tuwayq, testifying to the second major phase of human occupation. The unearthed objects indicate the long-distance connections of the local community with Eastern Arabia and Yemen in the Bronze Age and exhibit their cultural alignment with Dilmunites.

From the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, successive settlements continuously occupied the site until the Late pre-Islamic era. It is suggested that in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the tribes from Gerrha, who controlled the trade route connecting the east and south of the peninsula,

established the city of Al-Faw. Around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, the Minaeans from the kingdom of Ma'in, from Jawf in Yemen, possibly settled on site. Once a small tributary of the kingdom of Saba, Ma'in had taken over the organisation of the caravan trade and dominated it from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. The city featured the co-habitation of multiple tribes, such as the Al-Ahnikat, Minaeans, and Lihyanites. As a result, Al-Faw emerged as a culturally rich city, where various pagan pantheons were worshipped and where artefacts display various cultural influences from Egypt to Graeco-Roman and from Palmyra to South Arabia. From the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, the ancient city became the capital of the kingdom of the Qahtan-Madhij. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE, under Abyssinian pressures in the Hejaz, the city became the capital of the kingdom of Kinda, which reinforced its position as a key milestone for caravans crossing Arabia. Despite the attack from the Saba Kingdom in around 220 CE, the city remained vibrant and was able to mint its own coins, which is rare in the Arabian Peninsula. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, climate change combined with political factors led to the abrupt abandonment of the city.

The city was discovered in 1936. Between 1949 and 1973, several site visits, expeditions, and publications were made. The excavation of the site began in 1972 and lasted until the present, and seven excavation reports were published in 2019.

The nominated property has an area of 4,847.73 ha and a buffer zone of 27,548.33 ha. An extra area, named the Respect Zone, has a regular circular shape centred on Al-Faw with a radius of twenty kilometres and covers some 125,000 ha. It has been proposed to protect the wider setting of the nominated property.

#### **State of conservation**

The desertification of the area and subsequent abandonment in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE have created a harsh and inaccessible condition, which has helped to slow the natural deterioration and prevent the site from human-induced damage.

Past rainfall, although only a very limited amount annually, coupled with wind erosion, temperature fluctuation, and termite attack, has damaged the materials and structures of the nominated property. While stone masonry structures are in relatively good condition, the gypsum and unbaked earthen brick walls, plasters, and other structures have suffered a greater degree of deterioration. Almost all the wooden elements have been consumed by termites. The partial collapse of the cliff and landslides have altered the shape of the historic landscape and buried some sites on the escarpment. These changes occurred very slowly and progressively over the course of millennia, leaving the site in a ruined but stable state.

Excavations since the 1970s have exposed some sites that are susceptible to deterioration. Conservation strategies and interventions are being developed to address this issue. The hundreds of heaps of excavated

material that have been dumped randomly in the area in the past forty years have caused minor visual disturbances to the naturally evolved landscape. Their removal is planned in the next five years.

Two tower tombs have been restored in the past with the construction of a circular dry-stone wall at the foot of the mudbrick cores. These interventions aimed at strengthening the cores and avoiding their collapse but have proven problematic both visually and technically as they risk trapping water on the bases of the mudbrick towers. Corrective measures such as removing the dry-stone wall, consolidating the structure, and filling the lacuna at the bases of the tower tombs are under consideration.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is good.

#### **Factors affecting the nominated property**

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are natural deterioration by rainfall, wind erosion, temperature fluctuation, termite attack, landslide and collapse of the cliff, sandstorms, farming in the buffer zone, traffic-induced pollution, and future tourism facilities.

The nominated property is located in an uninhabitable area with no development pressure. Natural deterioration by rainfall, wind erosion, temperature fluctuation, termite attack, landslide, and collapse of the cliff remains the primary factor affecting the site.

Natural disasters rarely occur, except for sandstorms, which frequently strike the site, causing erosion. Under the already extreme weather conditions, climate change has no obvious impact on the nominated property.

There are modern plantations in the buffer zone and the wider setting in the shape of regular circular patches of one kilometre in diameter with deep wells from which ground water is extracted for irrigation. These disturb the visual quality of the desert environment. In the additional information received in November 2023, the State Party confirmed that this unsustainable way of farming will deplete the groundwater in the next few decades. The State Party is in the process of consulting with the farmers to restructure agricultural practices to decrease the farmed area and water consumption. There will be no new wells drilled in the area, and once the agricultural plots dry out, the area will be left to allow the progressive reinstatement of the desert landscape or the re-introduction of traditional ecological farming systems. No farms will be developed in the nominated property, and no new concessions will be granted in the buffer zone.

A major national road is located in the buffer zone, with a small service area providing food, accommodation, and

other basic services, which cause minor air, light, and sound pollution. A bypass of the road away from the buffer zone is envisaged to reduce pollution.

Currently, the nominated property is not open to visitation. However, according to the national and regional tourism strategies, the site will be open to the public in the future. While visitation is seen as a positive factor for the nominated property to act as a driver of social, cultural, and economic development, if not well designed and managed, this change may have adverse impacts.

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ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is good and that factors affecting the nominated property are under control.

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### **3 Proposed justification for inscription**

#### **Proposed justification**

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The nominated property is an extremely well-preserved relict landscape.
- It exhibits a succession of human occupations from the Palaeolithic to the Late pre-Islamic period.
- The two successive cultures of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods showed a geographical and cultural proximity, as well as a direct relationship with water resources, which is unique in Arabia.
- The remains of the city and the oasis testify to the interchange of human values through international trade and multiple facets of human lives and cultures.
- The numerous artefacts extracted from archaeological excavations make it possible to date its history and contribute to the understanding of global settlement, trade, and climate change adaptation patterns.

Based on the nomination dossier, the key attributes of the nominated property are: the sites of Palaeolithic and Neolithic stone tools; the protohistoric stone structures and necropolises; the remains of the ancient oasis with its ancient water management system and the caravan city; the rock art and palaeography; rich artefacts obtained from the archaeological excavations; and the natural and desert setting, which form a part of this landscape, testifying to the interaction between humans and nature from the Palaeolithic period to the Late pre-Islamic era.

#### **Comparative analysis**

The comparative analysis has been developed around the following parameters: historic caravan cities dating from antiquity; desert environments with limited water resources; remarkable natural and cultural features that constitute archetypal cultural landscapes; and diverse ensembles of necropolises that reflect three main civilisations from the protohistoric to the Late pre-Islamic periods. The State Party has examined properties within

the country, region, and world, inscribed on the World Heritage List, included in the Tentative Lists of States Parties, and other sites.

In the first part, fourteen World Heritage sites in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and the Sahel Region, Central Asia, and other parts of the world, as well as one Tentative List site and an archaeological site in Saudi Arabia, are compared. It has been concluded that while sharing similarities in terms of its function as a caravan city and as a colony hosting the same ancient regional civilisations such as the Minaeans, Lihyanites, and Nabataeans, the nominated property is distinct for three main reasons: it is located in a remote area away from the control of major regional powers, the human presence is much shorter than most of the comparators, and the role held by the dramatic desert landscape in its origins, evolution, and, likely, final collapse. The analysis further emphasises that the nominated property stands out for its exceptional succession of historic phases.

In the second part, six World Heritage sites in the region have been compared. It has been concluded that the nominated property can contribute to the existing corpus of the ancient archaeological cities, while bringing new elements such as: a city born for trade; a remote regional centre that attracted multiple sedentary and semi-nomadic peoples and where different deities and languages used to coexist; a city intimately connected to a unique desert natural setting; and an ensemble of archaeological vestiges – still partially unknown – that span millennia and bridged between nomadic traditions and early settlements, boasting impressive alleys of stone structures, more than one thousand tumuli and cairns, and rock art panels all set in an outstanding desert environment.

In the third part, five World Heritage cultural landscapes in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa have been compared. It has been concluded that the nominated property demonstrates the evolution of the natural environment and the corresponding changes in human occupation patterns.

The final part is the comparison of the necropolises and tombs of six sites, of which four World Heritage sites are located in the region, one World Heritage site in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and one tentative list site from Saudi Arabia. It is concluded that the large number of tombs on the nominated property is a proof of a long-lasting and intense human presence in the area throughout the millennia. They present a specific relationship with both the Al-Faw natural landscape and ancient springs (protohistoric “avenues” and circular tumuli) and the later urban areas of the ancient city.

ICOMOS considers that the methodology adopted for the comparative analysis, while framed too specifically in some respects, is overall sound and that the logic and scope of the selected comparators are adequate. The comparative analysis has demonstrated that the nominated property is a rarely well-preserved cultural

landscape that possesses a complete record of human occupation and settlement from the Palaeolithic to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The diversified archaeological evidence exhibits the multifaceted human activities, including the ways of life, technology of water management, oasis economy adapted to the natural conditions, trade, belief systems and religion, funereal traditions, and political role it exerted in the region.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

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#### **Criteria under which inscription is proposed**

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v).

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property has been the meeting place of different groups of peoples since the Neolithic period until the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, when the settlements were abandoned. From the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, the caravan city of Qaryat al-Faw was built through the influences and cultural exchanges between the tribes of the desert and the trading groups that occupied and resided in the area over time. The city bears witness to the exchange of human values across the vast space of inner Arabia and beyond, from the south (Red Sea and Yemen), the north (Northwest of Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, and the Mediterranean world), and the east (Gulf region, Mesopotamia, and Persia). A very rich collection of archaeological findings and inscriptions underlines these cultural exchanges.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is an exceptional testimony to the interchange of human values over a span of time, and that this criterion is justified.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that at the junction of a sandy desert and a dry rocky plateau, successive human communities at Al-Faw developed different approaches to the occupation of space in specific contexts and times. The tangible heritage of the oldest periods consists of two successive types of stone structures and necropolises that form an exceptionally well-preserved protohistoric relict landscape. The vestiges of the city represent a rich and highly developed caravan society in the heart of Arabia, with a complete set of monumental, urban, and rural creations: dwellings, administrative and religious buildings, caravanserai and the merchant quarter, the city necropolises, and a vast agricultural area with a sophisticated water management system.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis has demonstrated that there are a significant number of archaeological sites in the region that bear witness either to early human occupations or later sedentary or semi-sedentary communities in an arid environment with sophisticated urban planning, advanced technologies in construction, water management and agriculture, and multifaceted social, political, economic, cultural, religious, military, and funereal traditions. Although the nominated property has been occupied by successive civilisations from the Palaeolithic to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, individually or collectively, none of the remains of these civilisations demonstrates in an outstanding way types of buildings, architectural or technological ensembles, or landscapes that illustrate a significant stage in human history.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is not justified.

*Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the physical remains of the different human communities that lived in the nominated property reflect the ability of these groups to adapt and thrive in an unfavourable and evolving natural environment. The rock carvings and petroglyphs portray the evolution of local fauna and their relationships with human groups through hunting and domestication. The ecological evolution experienced by human communities since prehistoric times is reflected in successive human cultures that have lasted for millennia in this area, showing both the ability of human beings to adapt and evolve in the face of drastic and changing natural conditions and their sustainability over the centuries.

ICOMOS considers that the large quantity and the diversity of archaeological remains provide valuable information that demonstrates the variety of ways in which humans interacted with the environment for millennia, taking advantage of the natural conditions at different times. The nominated property contributes significantly to the knowledge of human history in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era.

ICOMOS notes that the historic conditions of the nominated property were significantly different from the present, which is one of the harshest places in the world for human habitation. It was the favourable climate conditions before the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE that attracted successive populations to settle and thrive, hence the creation of the oasis and city. In the face of climate change and subsequent desertification, human beings were not able to adapt to the environment and retreated from the area. ICOMOS considers that the nominated property vividly illustrates the vulnerability of human settlement and land use under the impact of irreversible change.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (v) is justified.

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ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets cultural criteria (ii) and (v), but that criterion (iv) has not been demonstrated.

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### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

The integrity of the nominated property is based on whether all the attributes necessary to convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value are included in the property boundaries. Integrity is also a measure of the intactness of the attributes and the way major pressures on them are managed. In addition, relationships and dynamic functions present in the cultural landscape that are essential to their distinctive character should also be maintained.

The vast area of the nominated property includes all the archaeological remains, such as the Palaeolithic and Neolithic stone tools, the tapered structure, cairns and circular constructions; the rock inscriptions, paintings, and engravings on the cliff of the sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah and other parts of the nominated property; the huge number of tumuli and cairns in the valley; the forts/caravanserais; the oasis and its water management system; and the ruins of the City of Qaryat. These archaeological remains, together with the landscape in the nominated property area, testify to the multifaceted cultures and belief systems of the three populations that once occupied the site, their interaction with both the environment and with other parts of the world through trade, political, and military activities. Preserved by the desert environment since the site was abandoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, the archaeological resources have remained intact.

While there are few factors affecting the nominated property, such as the natural deterioration of the exposed archaeological remains and farming in the buffer zone, with preventive interventions and legal provisions in place, these factors are under control.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the nominated property has been demonstrated.

#### **Authenticity**

The authenticity of the nominated property is based on the degree to which information sources about the value may be understood as credible or truthful. Encapsulated by the desert environment, the nominated property has remained as it was since its abandonment in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, except for the slow natural deterioration. The natural setting and the landscape of the nominated property have undergone a certain degree of natural evolution, such as the collapse of some parts of the cliff, which buried some tumuli and cairns in the escarpment. Considering that the natural deterioration of the archaeological remains and the natural evolution of the landscape are also part of the authentic process in the

history of the nominated property, overall, the level of authenticity is high.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the nominated property has been demonstrated.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met.

#### **Boundaries**

There are no permanent residents in the nominated property. A family of five individuals resides in the buffer zone. In addition, around thirty-one to thirty-seven individuals work temporarily or seasonally in the buffer zone.

The rationale behind the delineation of the boundaries is to include all the attributes conveying the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, with pragmatic considerations of the requirements for legal protection, site management, and archaeological potential. In addition to including all the archaeological remains, a landscape approach has been adopted for delineating the boundaries so that the geomorphological features testifying to the historic environment in which humans interacted with nature are understood and protected. With this approach, the visual quality of the nominated property is effectively protected. The boundary lines of both the nominated property and buffer zone are drawn, taking into consideration the existing geographic features.

The buffer zone encompasses a significant stretch of the cliff, escarpment, and desert, providing an additional layer of protection to the nominated property. The wider setting, referred to by the State Party as the Respect Zone, protects the nominated property from future encroachment by farming and other types of development.

The Respect Zone is demarcated in a circular shape with a radius of twenty kilometres from the centre of the nominated property to protect the visual quality of the property from afar and to control the development near the buffer zone. This simplified approach provides an additional layer of protection but might need adjustment in the future to better fit in the administrative system.

Additional information provided by the State Party in November 2023 indicates that the part of the nominated property above the escarpment and part of the buffer zone are within the World Heritage property and buffer zone of the 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid World Heritage site (Saudi Arabia, 2023, criteria (vii) and (ix)). The overlapping of these boundaries and buffer zones provides the nominated property with stronger protection of natural features and cultural landscape values.

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#### **Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription**

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the nominated property for the World Heritage List and that criteria (ii) and (v) are justified. The conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met. The delineation of the boundaries is logical and justified, and the overall area and buffer zone of the nominated property provide adequate legal protection. Furthermore, the Respect Zone effectively protects the wider setting of the nominated property.

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## **4 Conservation measures and monitoring**

#### **Documentation**

The documentation of the nominated property has been conducted by the King Saud University (KSU) archaeological missions. The archive of the excavations contains hundreds of excavation notebooks, plans, stratigraphic sections, unit sheets, and a large number of drawings, lists of finds, and photographic documentation. High-quality 3D scanning of the rock art and inscriptions is used as the baseline information for monitoring. Monitoring data will be deposited at the offices of the Site Management Unit.

ICOMOS considers that the past decades of archaeological research have established a solid foundation for the understanding of the values of the nominated property. ICOMOS also notes that new technologies used in recent years have improved the surveying, documentation, and recording of archaeological remains, leading to significant archaeological discoveries in the nominated property and buffer zone. Considering the great archaeological potential of the site to be explored and the numerous gaps in knowledge that remain to be filled, ICOMOS considers that, in addition to the research already undertaken in the past by the KSU and the Heritage Commission, a long-term research strategy should be envisaged for the future. ICOMOS raised this question to the State Party in its interim report in December 2023. The State Party responded that a Preliminary Research Strategy has been prepared. Fields of research include human activities in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods in the area, environmental evolution of the Al-Faw area, chronological data collection, land use in protohistoric time, long-range connectivity with other peoples, the birth and evolution of the settlement, ethnicity, and long-distance contacts based on epigraphy and the circulation of artefacts. The strategy is planned to be implemented in two phases: short-term (2024-2025) and long-term (2025-2029). The implementation is overseen by the Scientific Committee, which comprises professionals, academics, and researchers from different fields, and is executed by the Research Team and Conservation Teams. The places where the research is to be conducted have been determined.

### Conservation measures

The archaeological sector is protected by two concentric fences with a single access controlled by site guards. An extension of the present external fence to the north and south to enclose the entire nominated property has been approved and will be completed in 2024. These fences, together with staff patrols, prevent illegal excavations in the nominated property and four-wheel-drives from entering the site, and control of visitor flows.

Pilot studies of condition assessment, conservation strategies, restoration methods, and conservation materials have been undertaken. Preliminary conservation interventions such as consolidation, stabilisation, desalination, and active filling of exposed structures to prevent further deterioration have been undertaken at some excavated sites following internationally accepted conservation principles. Proposals for further treatments of the exposed structures have been made and will be assessed based on the evaluation of the results from these field experiments. Anastylis may be considered at representative structures such as the royal tomb and the small oratory in the city to improve the legibility of these elements.

Considering that anastylis is an interpretative intervention aimed at restoring the original appearance of a building by assembling the collapsed parts of the architectural elements, at the risk of losing the authentic state of the construction before the intervention, and that it depends in part on the understanding and interpretation of the person in charge of the work, ICOMOS, in October 2023, requested the State Party to provide additional information on this project. The State Party responded in November 2023 that anastylis will only be considered where there is direct photographic or archaeological evidence from the excavation records showing stones that were previously in place, or if there is a clear continuity between stones that are *in situ* and those lying next to the structure. It will not be necessary to add substantial new elements to reinstate the stones lying next to the structure. ICOMOS considers that, while this cautious approach is commendable, detailed documentation should be compiled prior to any intervention in order to record information on the state of conservation of the buildings before the anastylis is commenced.

Artefacts retrieved from the excavations have received initial treatment on site by a specialised restoration team and were subsequently transferred to the KSU Museum in Riyadh for further treatment, storage, and display.

### Monitoring

The monitoring system is being developed, with forty-three key indicators grouped into seven categories, including those on climate and environment, conservation, planning and development, visitors and tourism, management, community involvement, and research. The periodic reports on monitoring will be produced by the Heritage Commission of the Saudi Ministry of Culture (MOC) and submitted to the World Heritage Centre. The

Site Management Unit is the main body for implementing the monitoring system, including data collection, liaising with other regional and national stakeholders, and preparing the annual monitoring report. The monitoring report will be verified, finalised, and approved by the Heritage Commission Headquarters and shared with the other regional and national offices for information. The monitoring result will serve as the basis for the continuous revision of the management system and sustainable development strategy, as well as for timely conservation interventions.

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ICOMOS considers that the level of documentation is adequate and that the proposed monitoring system is comprehensive, which should serve informed decision-making and improve the efficiency of resource allocation and adjustments to conservation, management, and development strategies. ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that the monitoring system is adapted for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire. ICOMOS recommends that priority should be given to developing and implementing the proposed monitoring system.

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## 5 Protection and management

### Legal protection

The entire nominated property is owned by the state. Most of the buffer zone is owned by the state, including the mountains, deserts, roads, and utilities such as the water pumping station, police station, and communication tower. Some agricultural parcels, the area of the gas station, and the Al-Faw small farm, which are in the buffer zone and Respect Zone, are privately owned.

Vision 2030, approved by the Council of Ministries in April 2016 and supervised by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince, is currently the top legislative document for the protection of cultural heritage. In this document, under the Quality of Life programme, the preservation of the Kingdom's Islamic, Arab, and national heritage is a key objective. Vision 2030 also fostered the establishment of the Saudi Ministry of Culture (MOC) in 2018 and the Heritage Commission in 2020. On the environmental front, Vision 2030 places sustainability at the heart of development policy, which strengthens natural protection.

At the national level, the nominated property and buffer zone are protected by the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage, the Protected Areas Law, and the General Environment Law. The entire nominated property, both above and below the escarpment, was registered as a National Heritage Site in 2014 and is protected by the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage. It has been registered as an archaeological site by Administrative Decision No. 507, dated 8/04/1438 AH - 9/10/2016 and by the map extending the protection to the nominated property perimeter dated 4 January 2023, and is protected by the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage. The escarpment and the plateau, being



a part of the 'Uruq Bani Mu'arid Protected Area (UBM, designated in 1996), are also protected by the Protected Areas Law and the General Environment Law.

The institution responsible for implementing the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage is the Heritage Commission of the MOC, while the National Centre for Wildlife (NCW) is the national-level institution for implementing the Protected Areas Law and the General Environment Law.

The local communities are Bedouin groups of the Dawasir tribe. Bedouin, meaning desert dwellers, used to be nomadic but settled in the nearby cities of Wadi ad-Dawasir and As-Sulayyil and in the smaller villages located in the larger surroundings of the nominated property. In November 2023, ICOMOS requested additional information on how the Bedouin tribal laws provide an additional layer of protection for the nominated property. In its response in November 2023, the State Party indicated that the tribal traditional law of not corrupting the land helps to preserve the nominated property. This traditional law is still followed by the local communities. The State Party further expressed that the management of the nominated property takes the tribal law into account as it constitutes an additional protection layer, which has been instrumental in preserving many of the petroglyphs still visible today in the Arabian deserts. Therefore, the management system ensures the participation of the local community in the management of the nominated property, where their tribal law is respected and integrated into the protection arrangements for the nominated property, its buffer zone and the Respect Zone.

ICOMOS considers that recent research has demonstrated that the buffer zone has strong archaeological potential. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that it is important to ensure robust legal protection for archaeological remains in the buffer zone. While the landscape of the buffer zone can be effectively protected by the regulation to control and limit the drilling of new wells of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA), the legal provision for protecting the archaeological remains seems unclear. In its interim report ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide detailed information on how the archaeological remains located in the buffer zone are protected by legal, regulatory, contractual, and customary means. The State Party responded in February 2024 that the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage has provisions for the protection of archaeological or heritage sites in the buffer zone. This is achieved through demarcating the protected zone, which is the buffer zone for the nominated property. The controls and conditions of the protection are determined by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MOMRA), which approved the controls and conditions of the buffer zone of the nominated property at the time of submission of the nomination dossier. The boundaries were communicated to all the ministries to notify them as to the perimeter of the site. The Heritage Commission is responsible for the approval of any development plans in these areas, in coordination with the MOMRA. The

Heritage Commission requires that any proposed development be preceded by preventive archaeological surveys and Heritage Impact Assessments. If new sites are discovered, they will be registered on the Antiquities Record and will therefore benefit from full protection under the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage. Furthermore, the MOMRA and the MEWA must coordinate and receive an approval from the Heritage Commission prior to granting development licences in *"predetermined archaeological and urban heritage areas and areas adjacent thereto"*.

### **Management system**

The management structure of the nomination property is composed of two parallel top-down administrative lines, one for cultural heritage conservation and the other for nature conservation. A coordination mechanism is being established to integrate the two lines into a harmonious management system.

The Heritage Commission of the MOC includes the World Heritage Department and the Regional Branches in each of the thirteen provinces of the kingdom. These oversee the listing, protection, maintenance, and restoration of cultural properties in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The World Heritage Department reports directly to the CEO of the Heritage Commission and is responsible for managing the overall relationship with UNESCO, coordinating the UNESCO-listed tangible and intangible cultural assets of Saudi Arabia, managing the UNESCO nomination processes, and implementing and monitoring the compliance of UNESCO conventions ratified by Saudi Arabia. The Department is in charge of managing World Heritage properties. Within the Heritage Commission, the Regional Branches oversee, support, and coordinate the work of the Heritage Commission located in the provinces of the kingdom.

The Riyadh Region Branch of the Heritage Commission is the regional-level institution responsible for the conservation and management of the nominated property. It has seven local offices, among which the Wadi ad-Dawasir Office is the local-level management body supervising the guards in charge of the site.

The NCW is a governmental institution established by Cabinet Decision No. 417 dated 26 March 2019. It is responsible for managing the part of the nominated property located in the UBM Protected Area through the local UBM rangers.

Considering that the nominated property is managed by these two government institutions with different mandates, a joint management framework is envisaged. The joint framework will be supported by three committees: the Higher Committee, the Scientific Committee, and the Local Committee. The Higher Committee, chaired by the CEO of the Heritage Commission with representatives of all concerned ministries and agencies as members, is responsible for reviewing the implementation of the national-level plans for the site and verifying the effective coordination among national ministries in the protection

and development of the nominated property. The Scientific Committee, comprising national and international experts, provides technical advice to the Heritage Commission. The Local Committee, co-chaired by the the Governor of Wadi ad-Dawasir, and the Head of the World Heritage Unit of the Heritage Commission, with local representatives of government branches, the community, businessmen, and the Site Management Unit, oversees the coordination and management of the nominated property at the local level.

ICOMOS considers that while the joint management framework has been well designed, its establishment is crucial for the nominated property to be effectively managed. Furthermore, within this framework, a coordination mechanism between the two sectors in the decision-making process is essential for effective and efficient site management. In the additional information received in November 2023, the State Party indicated that a working group was established in December 2022 by the Heritage Commission and the NCW. It meets every two weeks to develop the joint management and governance framework for the nominated property and its buffer zone. A Memorandum of Understanding was co-signed by the two organisations, declaring their willingness to cooperate in the future management of the nominated property. The framework will be established through the Management Charter, which will act as a legally binding arrangement for the effective management of the shared areas of the two sites. The Management Charter and the three supporting committees will be established in 2024.

While the nominated property has been designated as a National Heritage Site and the legal protection is the responsibility of the Heritage Commission, ICOMOS notes that the NCW is responsible for the management of the part of the nominated property above the escarpment. The primary function of the NCW is to protect natural heritage. This arrangement leaves the cultural heritage above the escarpment unattended by the institutions responsible for cultural heritage conservation. In its interim report, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide further clarification on the responsibilities of the various institutions in relation to the cultural heritage situated above the escarpment. The State Party replied in February 2024 that, under the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage, responsibility for protecting archaeological sites lies with the Heritage Commission, which may request the assistance of any government entity to fulfil this mandate. The Heritage Commission is also responsible for managing the cultural heritage situated above the escarpment. The Heritage Commission and the NCW have co-signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the objective (among several others) to facilitate the full access and complete oversight over all target cultural components lying within the boundaries of the UBM Protected Area to the Heritage Commission. A joint working group was established to coordinate the activation of the MoU and the implementation of its joint executive programmes. With this arrangement, the Heritage Commission not only

has full access to the cultural heritage situated above the escarpment for monitoring, documentation, and conservation interventions but also has support from the UBM staff. In addition, a joint management framework will be established between the two institutions, whose work will be guided by the Management Charter once it is finalised and approved. The State Party reiterated that both the joint management framework and the Management Charter will be established by June 2024. Furthermore, the MOC, represented by the Heritage Commission, is the responsible entity in Saudi Arabia for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Therefore, all natural, cultural, and mixed sites are monitored by the Heritage Commission.

The management activities are guided by the management plan, which was drafted by the Heritage Commission and accepted in January 2023. It is a contractual agreement and a collective commitment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the MOC, the Heritage Commission, the NCW, and the local authorities concerned. It is a guiding document for the medium- and long-term protection, conservation, management, and monitoring of the nominated property. The management plan introduces the management system, including the stakeholders, management organisation, legal protection conferred on the nominated property and buffer zone, and means of implementing the protection measures. The current state of conservation is assessed, factors affecting the nominated property are analysed, and conservation programmes are proposed. The plan includes risk preparedness, capacity building, traffic reduction, and a road bypassing plan. It outlines a scientific programme, plans for interpretation and visitor management, and the monitoring indicators and monitoring programme. A detailed action plan is provided.

There is currently no risk preparedness plan for the nominated property and its buffer zone. The management plan provides for the Risk Management Plan to be developed by the Heritage Commission as a mid-term action.

The staff has received training on Heritage Impact Assessment, and new visitor facilities will be subject to a Heritage Impact Assessment before they are commenced, suggesting that Heritage Impact Assessment mechanisms have been incorporated into the decision-making process.

The number of staff at the site is limited; however, a steady increase has occurred recently, and more personnel will be deployed in the future. The funding is adequate. Capacity building for the staff remains a top priority over a long period of time in the future.

ICOMOS considers that although the current site management is acceptable and the management plan is comprehensive, it is crucial for the proposed joint management framework to be established.

### **Visitor management**

Visitor management and site presentation and interpretation are at an incipient stage. Currently, the nominated property is not officially open to the public. It is envisaged that in the near future, the existing research centre located in the buffer zone will be retrofitted and three containers will be added to host research and conservation personnel and tourists. A reversible temporary visitor centre will be installed near the entrance of the fenced site and will be removed once the conservation works are launched and a new Al-Faw Research / Visitor Center is constructed in the buffer zone. The space occupied by the service area (gas station, restaurant, etc.) and a portion of the road will be redesigned to host the research facilities and visitors. These plans will be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for approval if the nominated property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. Within the nominated property, a limited number of pathways and low platforms will be installed to serve visitors.

ICOMOS understands that these long-term plans will result in the development of tourism in this remote area, which is currently not very visited. In its additional information letter of October 2023, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide details on the readiness of the nominated property and its managers for such changes, as well as the adequacy of the tourism planning frameworks. The State Party indicated in November 2023 that the nominated property was indeed not ready to receive tourists at this stage. The Heritage Commission is currently working to improve scientific knowledge of the Al-Faw archaeological zone, to ensure the most appropriate conservation of the site, and to develop an interpretation strategy and interpretation material with a view to reopening the site to limited visitor numbers by 2024 or 2025.

Interpretation of the values of the property is currently limited. The artefacts obtained from excavations are exhibited at the National Museum and the King Saud University (KSU) Museum in Riyadh. International touring exhibitions have raised awareness of the importance of this site at a global level. Several publications are available on the research and archaeological excavations of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that the opening the nominated property to visitors is a positive step in communicating its value to a wider audience. The current tourism strategy and cautious approach to developing tourism facilities without damaging the landscape or archaeological remains are commendable. ICOMOS considers that, while the physical infrastructure constitutes a part of the presentation and interpretation of the values of the nominated property, the narratives are equally important. In its interim report, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide more information on whether a holistic interpretation and presentation plan has been envisaged, whether the narratives have placed the nominated property within the political, economic, and religious contexts of the region, and whether the history of the cities,

oases, tribes, kingdoms, and trade hubs in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond has been integrated into the narratives used in interpretation of the nominated property. The State Party replied in February 2024 that a short-term interpretation plan is to be completed by mid-2024 and will be used during the temporary opening of the site, and that a long-term interpretation plan is planned to be completed by late 2025. Both plans will be developed in partnership with the Research and Conservation Teams and approved by the Scientific Committee. The following areas will be covered by both plans: the historical periods of Al-Faw, agriculture and water management, trade route connections, Al-Faw within the regional context, kingdoms and tribal history, natural attributes, local intangible heritage, research history, conservation challenges and current efforts. The plans place leisure visitors, education visitors, and outreach such as local communities, young people, and disabled people as the targets. The development of these plans is complemented by ongoing projects such as the oral history project, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory, and the digitisation of Al-Faw archives.

### **Community involvement**

The local community has been involved in the nomination process. The local leaders have been involved in the identification of the nominated property and its boundaries. Information sessions were held to ensure a local understanding of World Heritage and the values of the nominated property. The local community has expressed a willingness to contribute to the future preservation of the nominated property.

Local Bedouin communities still raise camels that roam and graze in the lower lands below the escarpment, feeding on the scarce vegetation they can find and on water and fodder grown in the intensive agricultural plantations of the wadi. Local tribesmen have been involved in the protection of the nominated property as employees of the Heritage Commission and rangers of the UBM Protected Area.

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### **Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property**

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection is adequate. The current site management is temporary, and the process of establishing the proposed joint management framework should be moved forward as a priority. Visitor management and the presentation and interpretation of the values of the nominated property should be enhanced. Community involvement is adequate but could be improved in the future.

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## 6 Conclusion

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area is an organically evolved relict cultural landscape that testifies to three successive human occupations since prehistoric times until the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The nearly 12,000 archaeological remains, including the Palaeolithic and Neolithic tools of early people, tapered structures, cairns and circular constructions, the sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah, rock carvings, the funerary landscape of tumuli and cairns in the valley, the forts/caravanserais, the oasis and its ancient water management system, and the vestiges of the city of Qaryat al-Faw, form one of the most important narratives on human interaction with the evolving climate and environment in the Arabian Peninsula, and the ways of life from the Palaeolithic to the Late pre-Islamic era, which contribute significantly to the current body of knowledge of human history in this part of the world.

The comparative analysis justifies consideration of the property for the World Heritage List. Criteria (ii) and (v) have been demonstrated, and the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met. The site is in a good state of conservation, with all threats well under control. The legal protection is adequate. A Heritage Impact Assessment mechanism is in place.

A joint management framework for the site is being established between the cultural and natural conservation sectors. The willingness to cooperate has been demonstrated, and steady progress has been made. The *in situ* management capacity has been enhanced recently. A well-designed monitoring system is in place, but its effective implementation relies heavily on the establishment of the proposed joint management framework. The tourism management strategy is cautious to ensure that the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property is not negatively impacted by tourism activities. The presentation and interpretation of the values of the nominated property need to be improved, with particular emphasis on the contexts in which the narratives of the site are told.

## 7 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area, Saudi Arabia, be inscribed, as a cultural landscape, on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (v)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area is located at the junction of the Empty Quarter Desert and the Wajid sandstone outcrops of the Jabal Tuwayq Plateau and escarpment in the south of Saudi Arabia. It is

an exceptional physical testimony to the successive human occupations from the Palaeolithic to the Late pre-Islamic era, showing how different peoples adapted to the evolving natural environment in the inland region of Arabia, which experienced a much wetter climate, before becoming a drier region, and finally one of the driest deserts in the world.

The vast relict cultural landscape encapsulates extremely rich archaeological remains, including the flint tools of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods; a huge number of funerary “avenues” of stone structures dating from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium to the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE and radiating out from the oasis; and numerous tumuli at the foothills of Jabal Tuwayq dating from 2000-1900 BCE. These are associated with a group of nomads linked to the Gulf and the Mesopotamian civilisation. The remains of the antique caravan city of Qaryat al-Faw and its oasis, which appeared in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE and lasted almost a millennium until the irreversible depletion of water resources led to its abandonment in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, exhibit a rich urban and architectural legacy, with a vast irrigation network and a large area of ancient plantation pits to sustain the oasis economy. As an important caravan relay on the route leading from Najran to central and eastern Arabia, the forts/caravanserais, commercial quarters, residential areas, and necropolises bear witness to a thriving and cosmopolitan caravan city and the capital of the kingdom of Kinda, a federal organisation of Arabian desert tribes. The presence of various groups is manifested by the linguistic diversity of inscriptions and rock carvings found at the sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah and in the residential areas and necropolises.

**Criterion (ii):** The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area exhibits an important interchange of human values, from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE to the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, between the southern Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea, and Yemen, as well as the Northwest of Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, and the Mediterranean world, and finally the Gulf region, Mesopotamia, and Persia in the east. The rich collection of archaeological findings and inscriptions is a tangible manifestation of the role of the site as an important meeting place for different groups of people who built the caravan city of Qaryat al-Faw and the influences and cultural exchanges between the tribes of the desert and the trading groups that occupied and resided in the area over time.

**Criterion (v):** The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area is an outstanding example of traditional human settlement and land use over millennia. The large quantity and diversity of archaeological remains provide valuable information that demonstrates the variety of ways in which humans have interacted with the environment for millennia, taking advantage of the natural conditions at different times. It also illustrates the vulnerability of human settlement and land use under the impact of irreversible climate change.

## Integrity

The vast property area includes all the archaeological remains, such as the Palaeolithic and Neolithic stone tools; the tapered structure; cairns and circular constructions; the rock inscriptions, paintings, and engravings on the cliff of the sacred mountain of Khashm Qaryah and other parts of the property; the huge number of tumuli and cairns in the valley; the forts/caravanserais; the oasis and its water management system; and the ruin of the City of Qaryat. These archaeological remains, together with the landscape in the property area, testify to the multifaceted cultures and belief systems of the populations that once occupied the site, their interaction with both the environment and with other parts of the world through trade, political, and military activities. Preserved by the desert environment since the site was abandoned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, the archaeological resources have remained intact. While a few factors affect the property, such as the natural deterioration of the exposed archaeological remains and farming in the buffer zone, these factors are under control thanks to preventive interventions and legal provisions.

## Authenticity

Encapsulated by the desert environment, the property remained as it was after its abrupt abandonment in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. With all the archaeological structures and remains undisturbed by human activities, only slow natural deterioration occurred over time. The natural setting and the landscape in the property have undergone a certain degree of natural evolution, such as the collapse of some parts of the cliff, which buried some tumuli and cairns at the escarpment. While considering that the natural deterioration of the archaeological remains and the natural evolution of the landscape are also part of the authentic process of the history of the site, the source of information preserved at the property is credible.

## Protection and management requirements

The property is registered as a National Heritage Site and is protected under the Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage. The escarpment and the plateau are also protected under the Protected Areas Law as part of the 'Uruq Bani Mu'arid Protected Area. Tribal law helps to protect the landscape from disturbance. The property is entirely state-owned. The vast buffer zone encompasses a significant stretch of the cliff, escarpment, and desert and is mostly composed of public lands. It provides an additional layer of protection to the cultural landscape, while the Respect Zone adds another layer of protection to the visual quality of the landscape, preventing the property from future encroachment by farming and other types of development.

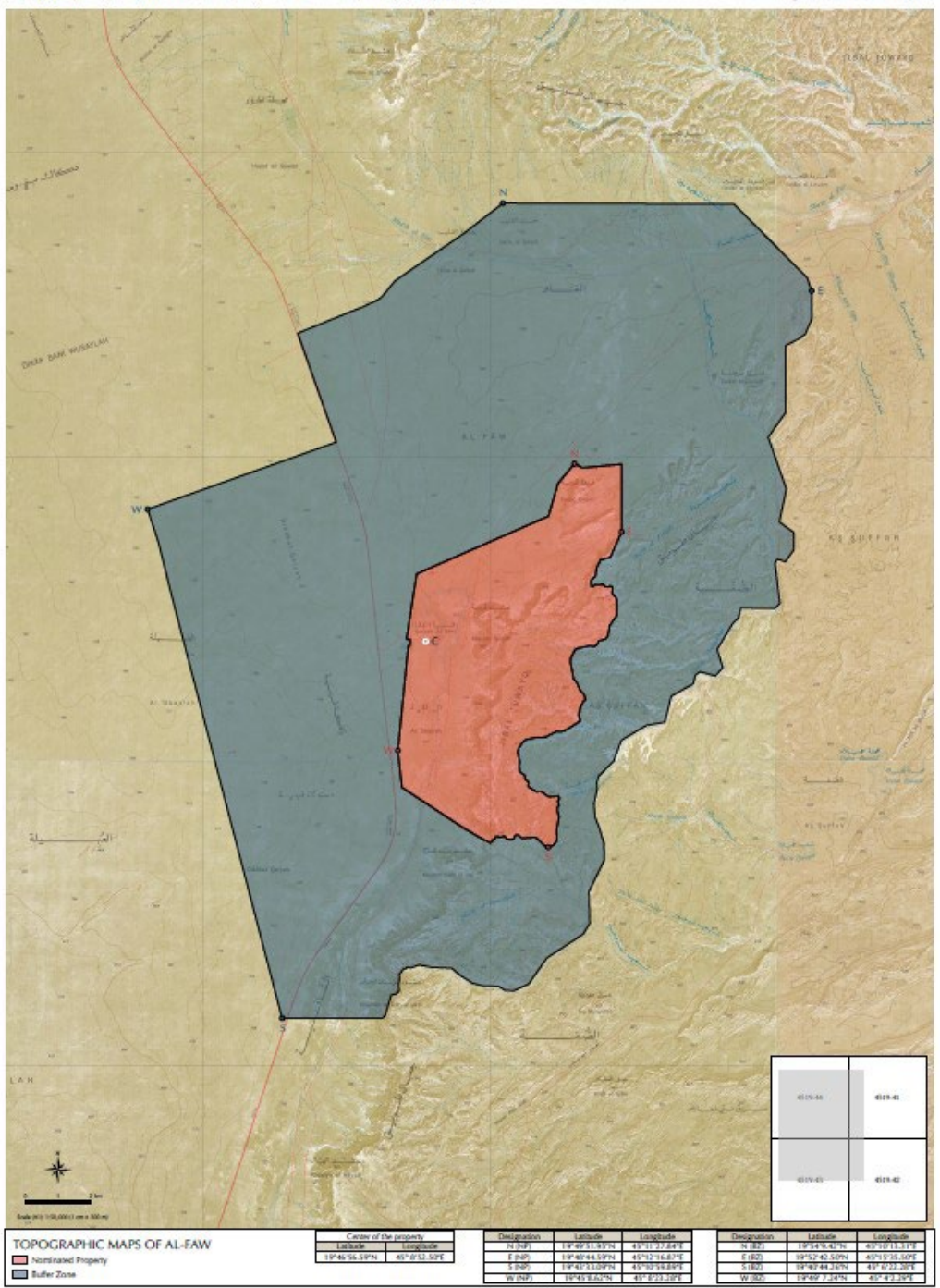
Responsibility for managing the property is shared between the Heritage Commission of the Saudi Ministry of Culture and the National Centre for Wildlife. A joint management framework is being established to coordinate the efforts of the cultural and natural conservation sectors. This framework is guided by the

Management Charter and is supported by the Higher Committee, the Scientific Committee, and the Local Committee. The management plan is a contractual agreement and a collective commitment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Culture, the Heritage Commission, the National Centre for Wildlife, and the local authorities concerned. It is a guiding document for the medium- and long-term protection, conservation, management, and monitoring of the property. The Heritage Impact Assessment mechanism has been embedded in the management system, and the decision-making process is accessible to the local communities. Future research is planned on both the archaeology of the property and the artefacts retrieved during the excavations. Tourism management is at an incipient stage, and the presentation and interpretation of the values of the site should be improved by placing the narratives in the regional context.

## Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Completing as a priority the establishment of the proposed joint management framework integrating the cultural and natural sectors, guided by the Management Charter, and reinforcing community participation mechanisms,
- b) Prioritising capacity building for the site staff,
- c) Implementing the road bypass plan to reduce the impact of traffic on the property,
- d) Continuing research and experiments on conservation interventions for the exposed structures,
- e) Developing a long-term research strategy to fill the gaps in knowledge about the site,
- f) Completing the visitor management and interpretation plans, including strengthened education and involvement of youth in the interpretation of the heritage values,
- g) Improving the presentation and interpretation of the values of the property by placing the narratives within the regional context.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property