

State of Conservation Report 2025

1. **Executive Summary** of the report [Note: each of the sections described below should be summarized. The maximum length of the executive summary is 1 page.]

There are number of initiatives progressed by various key stakeholders in committing its resources and expertise towards the removal of East Rennell World Heritage site in danger last year 2024. This report captures the progress update about the status of programs and activities that has been implemented in East Rennell in terms of invasive species, supporting sustainable livelihoods and the legal protection of East Rennell World Heritage Site.

Despite the ongoing challenges on ground, the Solomon Islands Government do acknowledge the critical role it must play to ensure such initiatives are supported through continuous partnership and collaboration with key stakeholders in its effort to address issues raised and to effectively assess DSOCR indicators for the removal of the property from the list in danger.

2. **Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee** [Note: The State(s) Party(ies) is/are requested to address the most recent Decision of the World Heritage Committee for this property, paragraph by paragraph.]

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3. Appreciates the State Party's continued efforts towards the implementation of the corrective measures to achieve the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) within the current timeframe, in close cooperation with local communities and provincial, national and international partners,

Measuring progress towards achieving the Desired State of Conservation for the Removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) in East Rennell has further strengthened NTACOM's collaboration with Birdlife International and other key stakeholders for example, Live and Learn.

- Being closely working well with the project consultant in terms of resources, connecting him to relevant partners and stakeholders
- Consultations with Bird Life International and Live and Learn to touch base on the recent progress made in 2024

- Closely monitoring the progress on assessing the DSOCR indicators and planning for the next steps as per the workplan submitted.
 - Challenges in accessing key persons availability for consultations in East Rennell
 - Challenges in differing community's priority and commitments especially during the peak times of travel from November - February
4. Reiterates once again its request to the State Party to adopt, as a matter of urgency, a new Cabinet Paper with the commitments and associated budgets of the respective ministries reflected in the budget allocation for the next fiscal year;
- The previous Cabinet paper submission needs reviewing due to change of new government and new priorities set in mid 2024. There is a need for consultation with key stakeholders and the current government to decide how they will better support this in terms of resource allocation.
5. Welcomes the support provided by international NGOs for the implementation of some corrective measures, notably the carbon financing project led by “Live & Learn Environmental Education” and the IAS/rodent control project led by “BirdLife International”;

1.0 Scoping Study by Kastom Gaden Association and SolAgro and Community Consultation Meetings in East Rennell (May - June 2024)

With support from the UNESCO/Netherlands and UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trusts, a scoping study was undertaken by experts from Kastom Garden Association (KGA) and SolAgro during 29th May and 3rd June 2024, which identified a number of challenges faced by the East Rennell communities in terms of food production, including diseases affecting taro, the staple crop in East Rennell, and other crops and vegetables, which are negatively impacting the food security of the local communities. At the same time, the scoping study identified high potentials for sustainable utilization of rich agrobiodiversity in East Rennell including crops grown in their home gardens to enhance livelihoods of the communities while maintaining World Heritage values.

Based on the findings of the scoping study, community consultation meetings were held in each of the four communities in East Rennell during 5 – 10 June 2024, with collaborative efforts and participation by the Solomon Islands Government (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology), UNESCO, Kastom Garden Association, SolAgro, and BirdLife International. Following the consultations with the communities including women and youth, it was agreed to implement two activities in the framework of the UNESCO Japan Funds-in-Trust project, namely

(1) training and capacity building activities for local communities to strengthen their food security, and (2) income generation activities through developing value-added products using locally available resources using the World Heritage brand, and conducting pilot marketing.



Scoping study by experts of KGA and SolAgro



Community consultation meeting in Hatnua village

2.0 Pilot Model Farm Workshop in East Rennell (December 2024)

With support from the UNESCO Earth Network programme, a pilot model farm workshop was organized by an expert of Kastom Gaden Association/JICA on 16 December 2024 to promote sustainable farming practices in East Rennell, with participation of representatives from each of the four communities in East Rennell. Model Farm Workshops will be organized by KGA in each four communities during 2025 in the framework of the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust project.



Pilot model farm workshop by Kastom Gaden Association

3.0 Live and Learn - Carbon Project Activities Update

East Rennell has also made significant progress in the PA process. A comprehensive consultation was conducted with all 16 tribes that hold land ownership within the World Heritage Site. Of these, 12 tribes agreed to initiate the PA process and participate in the CFFC project. By the end of December 2024, East Rennell had established the PA Management Committee (PAMC) and Carbon Project Working Group and initiated the participatory land use planning and mapping process.

With the Protected Area process, LLSI is currently working closely with the EREPA project from MECDM. PA process is progressing well, and EREPA is taking lead with the support from LLSI and Nakau. For the Carbon project Live and Learn Solomon Islands and Nakau are the key implementing organizations with the support from EREPA and the key line government ministries.

Project updates activities status

- 12 tribal groups consultations about the Project Development Agreement (PDA) have been conducted in East Rennell and Honiara-based tribes
- Signing of the Project Development Agreement with 11 tribes has been completed with only one tribe left.
- The first round of the Land Use Planning workshop has been conducted with 12 tribes in East Rennell and will continue until we produce a current land use map and the future land use map for the carbon project and protected area (PA).

Carbon project development activities

- Continue with the Land Use Plan

- Benefit Sharing mapping and planning workshops
- Forest Inventory

4.0 Bird Life International key progress update

The establishment of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle and new invasive plant species exacerbating the risks to biodiversity and local livelihoods. This would have a direct impact to the food security of the ER communities, thus emphasizing the urgent need for enhanced biosecurity measures for the island of Rennell and neighboring Bellona Island. Bird Life aims to tackle biodiversity challenges by showcasing the impact of Black rats on biodiversity indicators.

Key progress update

- The Renbel Biosecurity Consultant (Coordinator) role in place and have led the development of the Renbel Biosecurity Plan, including its implementation, communication, and awareness. A local consultant is now leading on the drafting of the Renbel Biosecurity Plan, a final draft should be available by end of project (April 2025).
- Preliminary findings indicate that damage to indicator crops has decreased in the treatment areas, however there is an increased presence of rats during harvesting season (for crops). Outcomes from bird monitoring reports have been promising, as trail cameras have captured footage of newly discovered nests of the endemic Ghoghoviu (Rennell Shrikebill) in the treated areas. Data recorded from the 5-min point counts within the treatment areas show that the indicator species still exist in good numbers. A full analysis of the data collected throughout the project will be made available by end of project (April 2025).
- Another key output of BirdLife's follow-up project is the biosecurity planning for Renbel Province. In March 2024, stakeholders from MALB (Biosecurity Division, Livestock Division), MECDM, Solomon Airlines, Kokonut Pacific and the Solomon Islands Ports Authority, agreed on the development of a Biosecurity Plan for Renbel (amongst other key outcomes). In November 2024, a similar workshop was held at the Tigoa Provincial Station with representatives from the Rennell and Bellona Wards. Site visits to the log ponds on Rennell confirmed that instilling effective biosecurity protocols on the island would be challenging, mainly due to the lack of resources, infrastructure & remoteness (e.g. lack of a proper jetty/dock; transportation for biosecurity officers to conduct checks, lack of proper procedures & monitoring at airstrip, etc.). Nevertheless, there was strong agreement from Renbel representatives for a Biosecurity Plan to be drafted & submitted to the Renbel Provincial Govt (DPS), and for biosecurity training to be conducted by MALB (Biosecurity Division) to ward

representatives. A local consultant is now leading on the drafting of the Renbel Biosecurity Plan, and with review and input from BirdLife & other technical advisors, a final draft should be available by end of project (April 2025).

- An Environmental Monitoring Plan has been produced and shared with the Rangers, who are now implementing monitoring protocols based on this Plan.
- BirdLife International, in collaboration with Live & Learn Honiara conducted a strategic planning workshop with the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association in March 2024. Members of the LTWHSA Committee agreed to the development of a 3-year Strategic Plan, with 4 strategic goals/priorities – (1) Sustainable Management of the ERWHS, (2) Development of Sustainable Livelihoods for the People of ER, (3) Development of the Capacity of the LTWHSA, and (4) Strengthening Partnerships/Collaboration with Key Partners.
- The draft Strategic Plan (SP) was presented back to communities, and with further input from the LTWHSA Committee members, the SP is being finalized and will be available at EOP (April 2025). It is strongly recommended that the Solomon Islands Govt allocate funding to support the LTWHSA in the implementation of its SP.
- BirdLife is also collaborating with the Climate Change Division of MECDM to conduct an Integrated Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment for East Rennell. In the meantime, a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) has been conducted; this has helped identify climate-related vulnerabilities & community perceptions on on-ground impacts of climate change on coastal & land/agricultural resources, water resources, marine and forest resources. Through the PRA process, communities, some of which include encouraging traditional farming practices, and agroforestry and food preservation, to improve food security, put recommendations forward. All findings and recommendations are being shared with the CCD/MECDM, to ensure the necessary (financial & technical) support is provided to communities at the ERWHS.

5.0 Also welcomes the significant progress made by the State Party towards obtaining consensus from the customary landowners to apply the Protected Areas Act 2010 to the property, and the intention to develop a new Management Plan, and requests the State Party to continue its efforts to obtain full consent from all the customary landowners in East Rennell to ensure legal protection for the entire property including the adjacent area in order to address ongoing and potential threats of mining and commercial logging;

Currently, MECDM has secured funding from GEF through International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which is entitled “Ensuring Resilient Ecosystems and Representative Protected Areas in Solomon Islands (EREPA)” GEF 6 funded project. This project is hosted within MECDM

and its key implementing partners will be MECDM, Ministry of Forestry and Research (MoFR), Ministry of Agriculture, and Livestock (MAL).

The goal is to establish an effective network of protected areas to achieve healthy, productive and restored landscapes in East Rennell and other specific project Sites in Guadalcanal, Malaita, Temotu provinces. The project objective will be achieved through the following interventions as stated in the project document;

- a) To support local communities to fulfil the Protected Areas Act's requirements to formally declare terrestrial protected areas in the four provinces
- b) To promote the adoption of improved livelihoods, including improved agricultural practices, based on the sustainable use of natural resources to compensate for the loss of income resulting from the PA creation (stopping detrimental logging or agriculture encroachment);
- c) To establish an efficient network of protected areas.

Tribal consultations were undertaken and all the people agreed to proceed with the process to create Protected Area in East Rennell.

Already 12 tribes were submitted their Expression of Interest (EOI) namely, 1. Tuhunui, 2. Agavilage 3. Teava, 4. Kagivi, 5. Tehakagava, 6. Tepisinga, 7. Giumata, 8. Vagitakugu, 9. Hangagoa, 10. Tekungahenua, 11. Teàgima, 12. Tehakatu.

The other four tribes with still yet to decide, namely, 1. Nepegi, 2. Kapeiatu, 3. Teàtugau and 4. Vaigau.

Progress of the 12 steps activities to gain our Protected Area status in East Rennell.	
Step 1. Develop the protected area proposal and consult community leaders.	Completed
Step 2. Prepare for the protected area landowner consultation meeting	Completed
Step 3. Hold the landowner consultation Meeting.	Completed
Step 4. Hold the first Management Committee meeting.	Completed
Step 5. Prepare the map	Completed
Step 6. Meeting with province and line ministries	Next step (17 th – 18 th Feb 2025)
Step 7. Meet with Neighbouring Tribes to confirm the Customary Land Boundaries and get support for the proposal	Completed
Step 8. Prepare the management plan	Draft
Step 9. Prepare the budget	Not yet
Step 10. Complete the application form	Not yet
Step 11. Submit the application	Not yet

Step 12. Work with the Ministry of Environment	Not yet
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Step 9 – 12 are administration work.

6.0 Regrets that no information was provided by the State Party concerning the previously reported bauxite mining exploration proposal, recalling its position that mining, including exploration, is considered incompatible with World Heritage status, reiterates its request to the State Party to clarify the status of the mining proposal;

- A mining lease was issued for two companies specifically for West Rennell Tenament areas. However, there are some outstanding issues that needs to be solved before any operation can take place.

7.0 Expresses its utmost concern that the flying fox species which are recognized as an attribute of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), appear to have become locally extinct in the property according to a recent investigation following a 2021 mass mortality event, also requests the State Party to clarify further the results of the surveys by submitting information for each species of flying fox, and further investigate the cause and the reported possible sightings in West Rennell to determine the potential for natural restoration of the population across the Island;

- There was no submission by MECCDM regarding this.

8.0 Also expresses its utmost concern that the environmental damages and socio-economic impacts on local communities caused by the grounding of the barge SAPOR 2302 in 2021 persist, and that no compensation has been made to date, also reiterates its request to the responsible company and licensee of SAPOR 2302 to adhere to the conclusions and recommendations of the assessment conducted in 2021, with regards to compensation of the ecological, cultural and socio-economic impacts of the grounding and urges the State Party to support the communities in their claims for compensation;

- Currently the Government is pursuing the case along with landowners for the company to comply with the recommendations from the damage assessment report conducted in 2021.

9.0 Further welcomes the State Party's continued efforts to develop livelihood activities for East Rennell communities with support of the UNESCO/Netherlands and UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust as well as to accelerate the implementation of the DSOCR through applying to the

International Assistance;

Refer to point no. 5

10. Calls upon the international community to continue providing the State Party necessary support, both financially and technically, to meet the current timeframe to achieve the DSOCR by 2025, as well as climate change funding to conduct an integrated vulnerability assessment of the property;

There are few challenges that are imminent when implementing the project:

The allocation of Solomon Islands government's limited financial resources to fully support as SI NATCOM and effectively carry out assessments on the DSOCR indicators is quite inadequate for this to be achieved in the given time frame- mid 2025. Therefore, SI NATCOM is requesting your office to consider extending Solomon Islands due date to 2026.

If the property is inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger Please also provide detailed information on the following:

- a) Progress achieved in implementing the corrective measures adopted by the World Heritage Committee [Note: please address each corrective measure individually, providing factual information, including exact dates, figures, etc.] If needed, please describe the success factors or difficulties in implementing each of the corrective measures identified

- Refer to Bird Life key progress point 5.

- b) Is the timeframe for implementing the corrective measures suitable? If not, please propose an alternative timeframe and an explanation why this alternative timeframe is required.

- Refer to point 10

- c) Progress achieved towards the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR)

- Refer to Point 5

- 10.0 Other current conservation issues identified by the State(s) Party(ies)** which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value [Note: this includes conservation issues which are not mentioned in the Decision of the World Heritage Committee or in any information request from the World Heritage Centre]

- There are no emerging issues at the moment.

11.0 In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, **describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas**, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity.

- No development at the moment

12.0 Public access to the state of conservation report [Note: this report will be uploaded for public access on the World Heritage Centre's State of conservation Information System (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>). Should your State Party request that the full report should not be uploaded, only the 1-page executive summary provided in point (1.) above will be uploaded for public access].

- Indicating SOC report 2025 be accessible to the public

13.0 Signature of the Authority

Franco Rodie

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Education Human Resources Development