



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

# World Heritage

# 43 COM

WHC/19/43.COM/7B.Add

Paris, 7 June 2019

Original: English / French

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC  
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF  
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Forty-third session

Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan  
30 June - 10 July 2019

**Item 7B of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List**

## SUMMARY

This document contains information on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee is requested to review the reports on the state of conservation of properties contained in this document. The full reports of Reactive Monitoring missions requested by the World Heritage Committee are available at the following Web address in their original language: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/43COM/documents>

All previous state of conservation reports are available through the World Heritage State of conservation Information System at the following Web address: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>

**Decision required:** The World Heritage Committee may wish to adopt the draft Decision presented at the end of each state of conservation report.

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## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

### 26. Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California (Mexico) (N 1182ter)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 2005

Criteria (vii)(ix)(x)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger N/A

Previous Committee Decisions see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1182/documents/>

#### International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: USD 0

For details, see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1182/assistance/>

#### UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

N/A

#### Previous monitoring missions

April 2017: joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission; February 2018: joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

#### Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Fishing/collecting aquatic resources
- Illegal activities
- Serious concerns about the imminent extinction of an endemic porpoise species (vaquita) and over the conservation status of a marine fish (totoaba)
- Illegal fishing

Illustrative material see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1182/>

#### Current conservation issues

On 31 January 2019, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property, available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1182/documents>, providing the following information on the implementation of the recommendations made by the 2018 mission:

- The surveillance operation in the Upper Gulf of California, including permanent presence of patrol vessels and surveillance camps on the coast, has continued as a coordinated effort by various governmental agencies;
- Alternative fishing gear is reported to be available to initiate a transition period to gillnet-free fisheries in the Upper Gulf of California, which would require participation of fishermen and relevant governmental agencies. An assessment of the efficiency of developed “suripera” nets for shrimp fishing was undertaken in 2018-2019. Development and testing of alternative gear for corvina fishing is ongoing;
- The Agreement issued by several Secretaries of State, which bans gillnet fishing in the Upper Gulf of California, already represents a legally-binding provision and does not require enactment of an additional law;
- In April 2018, the refuge area for the protection of the vaquita was extended by a Secretarial Agreement;
- Various measures were undertaken to strengthen capacity to prevent, detect and intercept illegal international trafficking of wildlife products by PROFEPA (the Attorney’s General Office), Federal Police and the Mexican Navy;

- The study on the current status of totoaba and vaquita, requested at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) in 2016, has not yet commenced due to financial constraints, as was communicated by the CITES Executive Secretariat to the State Party. A paper was prepared for consideration at CITES COP18, scheduled for May 2019;
- An update is provided on the implementation of other mission recommendations, including further development and implementation of community engagement and compensation programmes and the continuation of the ghost nets retrieval programme. Development of a “Shared Vision of the Gulf of California” is underway, and aims to develop management and legal instruments to strengthen cross-sectorial cooperation;
- The proposed new Biodiversity Law was discussed by the Mexican Congress, but was not approved.

On 24 April 2019, the State Party submitted additional information, including a summary document of the Initiative for the Sustainability in the Northern Gulf of California.

#### *Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN*

The continuation of the surveillance operation in the Upper Gulf of California, involving several governmental agencies, as well as measures aimed to further strengthen law enforcement capacity to prevent and intercept illegal international trafficking of wildlife products should be commended. The reported progress in implementing other key recommendations of the 2018 mission is also noted, particularly the development of alternative fishing gear, which is reported to be available to start transition away from gillnet use. It is important to ensure that the necessary resources and inter-institutional support are available to initiate as a matter of urgency the transition to fishing gear that does not endanger vaquita, with full engagement of local communities.

Unfortunately, these efforts appear not to have significantly reduced the pressures on the property from illegal fishing of totoaba, nor prevented the further decline of the vaquita population. The report of the 11th meeting of the *Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita* (CIRVA) held from 19-21 February 2019 has concluded that an estimated 10 vaquitas remained as of summer 2018 prior to the current fishing season, compared to the previous CIRVA population estimate of 30 animals. The acoustic monitoring programme further indicates that the few remaining vaquitas inhabit a very small area, approximately 24 x 12 km, most of which lies within the Vaquita Refuge. However, CIRVA noted that high levels of illegal fishing for totoaba continue to occur in this area. It should be recalled that the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session in 2018, deciding that it was too early to determine whether the efforts undertaken by the State Party had averted the risk of extinction of the vaquita, postponed its decision on the possible inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger to be able to consider the data from the 2018-2019 season in order to assess if the vaquita decline had been halted. The conclusions of CIRVA and the information at hand makes it clear that despite the continuation of the unprecedented inter-institutional efforts, illegal fishing of totoaba has continued or even escalated in the Upper Gulf of California, causing further decline of the vaquita population and posing a significant threat to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), including the integrity of the property.

It is clear that the longer-term protection of the property’s OUV will not be possible without both significantly increasing efforts to tackle international trafficking of wildlife products, which underpins illegal fishing in the Upper Gulf of California, and by developing solutions for sustainable livelihoods for local communities. In this respect, it is regrettable that the study on the current status of the totoaba and vaquita, and information on illegal trade and markets in totoaba requested by the CITES Standing Committee, could not yet be undertaken due to financial constraints. However, in the short-term, it will be crucial to ensure that surveillance and enforcement measures are further strengthened in the Vaquita Refuge area, where the remaining individuals are most likely concentrated, to ensure that this area remains completely gillnet-free. In this regard, it will be also important to continue the illegal net retrieval programmes.

Given the evidence above and sense of urgency, and in conformity with Paragraph 180 of the *Operational Guidelines*, it is therefore recommended that the Committee inscribe the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger and request the State Party to develop, in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, a set of corrective measures, a timeframe for their implementation and a proposal for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR), focused on the measures needed to address the issue of illegal fishing and to enable the necessary regulatory and operational reforms for legal fisheries to ensure that they

are sustainable and do not cause bycatch of marine mammals, sharks and turtles, in order to guarantee the long-term protection of the OUV of the property.

**Draft Decision: 43 COM 7B.26**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/19/43.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decision **42 COM 7B.86**, adopted at its 42nd session (Manama, 2018),
3. Welcomes the ongoing surveillance efforts by the State Party undertaken in the Upper Gulf of California, as well as measures to prevent illegal international trafficking of totoaba products, but expresses its utmost concern that despite the significant efforts, illegal fishing of totoaba has continued and even escalated in the Upper Gulf of California resulting in a threat of imminent extinction of the vaquita population, specifically recognized as part of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and endemic to the Gulf of California, and considers therefore that illegal fishing represents an ascertained danger to the OUV and integrity of the property, in line with Paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines;
4. **Decides to inscribe the Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California (Mexico) on the List of World Heritage in Danger;**
5. Takes note of the reported progress made with the development of alternative fishing gear and urges the State Party to ensure that the necessary resources and inter-institutional support be available to start without further delay the transition to fishing gear that does not endanger vaquita and other non-target marine mammals, turtles and sharks, with full engagement of local communities;
6. Taking into account the recommendations of the Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita (CIRVA) to avoid the imminent extinction of the vaquita, also urges the State Party to further strengthen its enforcement and surveillance activities to ensure that the area where the last remaining individuals of vaquita are concentrated remains completely gillnet-free and to ensure that illegal net retrieval programmes are continued;
7. Reiterates its calls to the States Parties that are transit and destination countries for illegal trade in totoaba swim bladder to support the State Party of Mexico to halt this illegal trade, in particular through the implementation of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
8. Also takes note that the study requested by the CITES Standing Committee on the current status of totoaba and vaquita, and on the illegal trade and markets, has not been undertaken yet, and also reiterates that, once available, this study will be key in mapping trafficking routes and in identifying appropriate strategies to combat illegal trade in totoaba products, which will require a concerted effort between the States Parties of Mexico, China and the United States of America;
9. Requests the State Party to develop, in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, a set of corrective measures, a timeframe for their implementation and a proposal for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR), for examination by the Committee at its 44th session in 2020;

10. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2020**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020.

## **28. Coiba National Park and its Special Zone of Marine Protection (Panama) (N 1138rev)**

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 2005

Criteria (ix)(x)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger N/A

Previous Committee Decisions see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1138/documents/>

### International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: USD 0

For details, see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1138/assistance/>

### UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

Total amount granted: USD 350,000 (for management planning, installation of mooring buoys for diving boats, working with local communities, capacity building, public use planning and improved stakeholder understanding of legal protection measures)

### Previous monitoring missions

January 2014: Joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission; December 2016: IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

### Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Livestock farming/grazing of domesticated animals
- Management systems/ management plan (delayed implementation of the Management Plan)
- Marine transport infrastructure (planned construction of a naval base)
- Legal framework (absence of clear regulations)
- Fishing/collecting aquatic resources
- Human resources (insufficient management capacity)
- Impacts of tourism / visitors / recreation

Illustrative material see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1138/>

### Current conservation issues

On 28 January 2019, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property, available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1138/documents/>, providing the following information:

- Measures aimed at removing feral livestock from Coiba Island were continued in 2018. Absence of cows and horses could be confirmed and the remaining population of buffaloes is reported to be very low. It is expected that it will be possible to declare the property free of livestock by 2019;
- A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will be developed for the property. The terms of reference have been approved and note that it will need to consider potential coastal development in the area opposite the property, fishing and visitation. It is expected that the SEA will outline preferred options for sustainable economic development in the property and ensure the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Decisions to implement any infrastructure proposals included in the property's Public Use Plan (PUP) are expected to depend on the outcome of the SEA;

- Terms of reference were issued for development of “Guidelines for the Management of Visitor Flow for the Coiba National Park”, which is expected to serve as a baseline for a participative tourism monitoring programme in the framework of strengthening low-impact and ecotourism initiatives. A Visitation Monitoring Programme is also included in the framework of the PUP. The development of a biosafety plan is envisaged to prevent introduction of invasive species by visitors;
- For 2019-2020, rehabilitation projects are expected to be undertaken to improve access roads to natural attractions, the visitor center and the signalling and interpretation in all trails as part of the Inter-American Development Bank loan;
- Regulations for fishing activities in the Special Zone of Marine Protection of the property (SZMP) were approved in January 2018. The SZMP was subdivided into three sub-zones: Hannibal Bank Habitat Protection Zone, Montuosa Island Marine Reserve and the Resource Management Zone, the latter covering the majority of the SZMP. Fishing is completely prohibited only within the Montuosa Island Marine Reserve. Commercial fishing is allowed in the two other sub-zones;
- Further specific regulations outlined include seasonal bans on fishing of certain species (snapper and dorado), and restrictions on fishing gear and size of boats. A comparison of existing fishing regulations between the Coiba National Park and the SZMP is provided;
- Existing fishing monitoring and enforcement programmes in the Coiba National Park are reported on, as well as the intention to expand such programmes to the SZMP with the support from the Coiba Fund and a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Prior to the state of conservation report, on 28 August 2018 the State Party submitted to the World Heritage Centre a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) for the rehabilitation of the Central Camp Landing Strip on Coiba Island. In response to comments provided by IUCN on the HIA, the State Party provided further clarifications on 25 October 2018, confirming that in June 2018 a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was developed for the project, which aims to ensure the necessary safety requirements for the landing strip used mainly by staff involved in monitoring and patrolling the property, and does not foresee any modifications to the frequency of flights to the island.

On 3 May 2019, the State Party submitted complementary information on the state of conservation report, and included several technical reports on conservation of specific corals, marine turtles and fish species, among other annexes.

#### *Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN*

The confirmation that removal of feral livestock from Coiba Island has continued and nearly been completed is welcomed. The intention of the State Party to undertake an SEA for the property is also welcomed, and it is recommended that the World Heritage Committee request the State Party to develop it as a matter of priority, ensuring that it fully considers any potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of possible infrastructure or other development initiatives on the OUV of the property, and not to approve any such projects within the property, including those contained in the PUP, until the SEA has been completed and submitted to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN.

Further clarifications provided by the State Party regarding the rehabilitation of the Central Camp Landing Strip, and the confirmation that the project would only involve upgrading of the facilities to meet safety requirements and would not result in any modifications to flight frequency, are noted. However, it is recommended that this project also be considered by the above-mentioned SEA, as per the above procedure.

Concerning the regulations of fishing within the property, the 2014 and 2016 Reactive Monitoring missions both concluded that development and implementation of adequate fishing regulations for the SZMP was crucial for the long-term conservation of the OUV of the property. While some recommendations of the missions were reflected in the regulations adopted in January 2018, such as designation of the Montuosa Island Marine Reserve as a no-take zone and establishment of seasonal closures for dorado and snapper, the regulations appear to be significantly weaker than those in place in Coiba National Park, particularly since they allow commercial fishing in almost 98% of the SZMP, including in the Hannibal Bank Habitat Protection Zone considered as one of the priority conservation areas by the 2014 mission. Therefore, in order to prevent the decline of populations of critical species that sustain the OUV of the property, it will be essential to further revise the regulations for the SZMP in line with the recommendations of the 2016 and 2014 missions. Such revisions should include re-consideration of the approach to commercial fishing within the SZMP, in line with the regulations in place for the Coiba National Park, and declaration of additional no-take zones, including the Hannibal Bank,