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PRESS KIT

DECREE FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF NEW CALEDONIA

Adoption of three decrees relating to the protection and development
of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea



© Francesca Benzoni, IRD

During its weekly meeting of Tuesday, 14 August, the government of New Caledonia adopted three decrees relating to the Natural Park of the Coral Sea. These important enactments, which were the subject of a public consultation that took place between 28 June and 12 July, mark a new phase for the future of the Park.

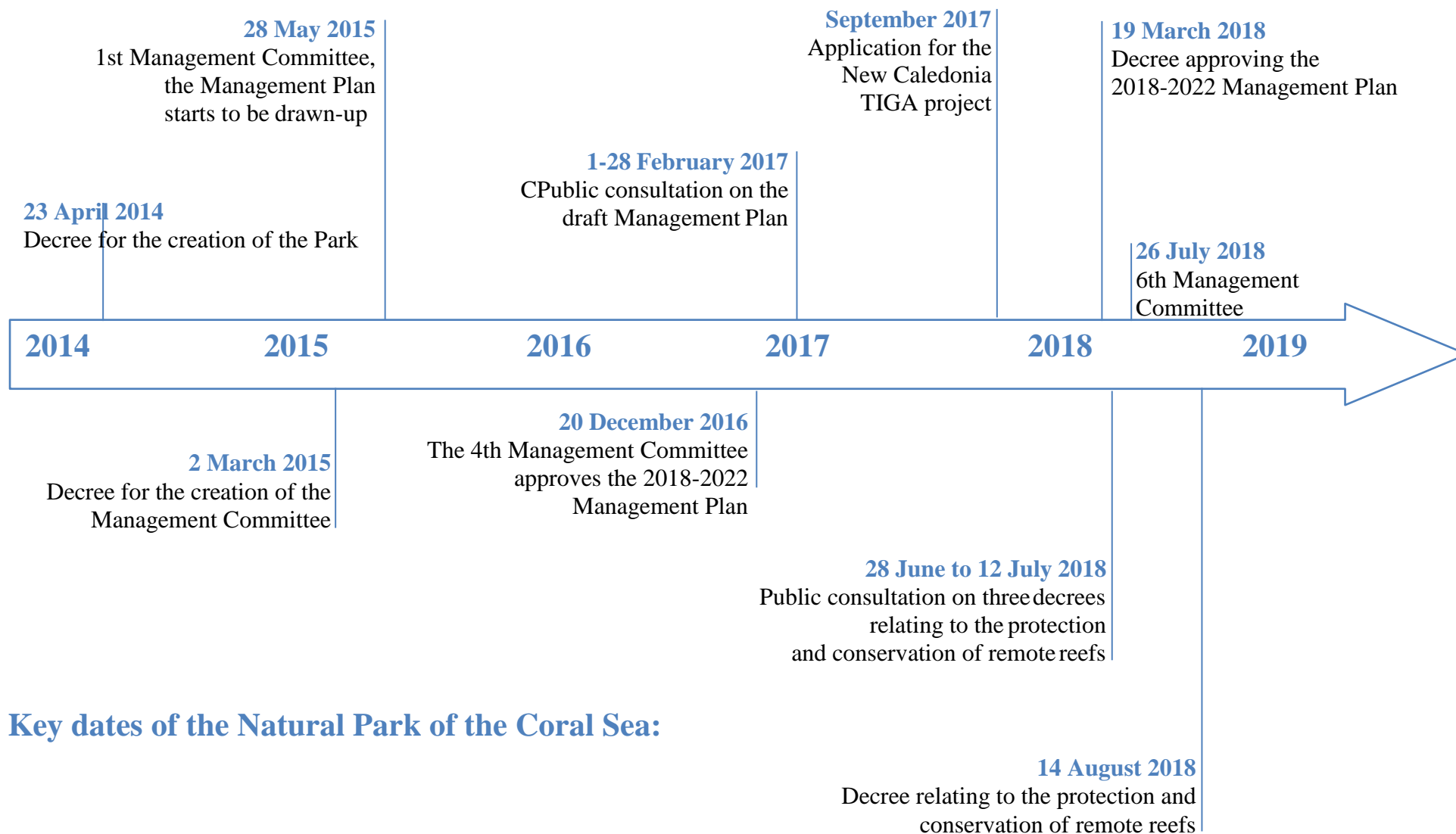
They will allow :

- Placement of all of the Park's most valuable reefs under the highest level of protection by creating 7,000 km² of wilderness areas and 21,000 km² of nature reserves;
- Supervision of professional tourism, which will only be allowed under certain conditions and outside of the wilderness areas;
- Implementation of the Entrecasteaux plan over five years with the aim of maintaining the exceptional nature of the site that lead to it being listed with UNESCO 10 years ago.

The adoption of these three decrees is also part of New Caledonia's application for the Investment for the Future Programme (Programme d'investissements d'avenir) on the theme of "Territories of Highly Ambitious Innovation" (Territoires d'innovation de grande ambition - TIGA). The Caledonian project, entitled *The Natural Park of the Coral Sea, or how to make the preservation of biodiversity an engine for growth in the Pacific* (*Le Parc naturel de la mer de Corail, ou comment faire de la préservation de la biodiversité un moteur de croissance dans le Pacifique*), aims to make the Park:

- A centre for scientific research;
- A centre of innovation, particularly in terms of surveillance and security;
- A centre for experimenting with new sustainable activities;
- A regional development centre for marine protected areas.

New Caledonia will submit its project in early 2019. If it is selected, it could receive financial assistance of more than 5 billion francs from the government.



1. The Natural Park of the Coral Sea

The Natural Park of the Coral Sea is a marine protected area that was created on 23 April 2014 by the government of New Caledonia. At nearly 1.3 million km², it is France's biggest and one of the largest such areas in the world. Its biodiversity is exceptional, with more than 2,000 species of fish, 310 species of coral, more than a third of the world's virgin reefs (or "pristine reefs") and more than 149 sea mounts. The park is a great asset that makes New Caledonia a leader for marine environments.

It is managed by a Management Committee (see box), which has adopted the Park's Management Plan for 2018-2022 (validated by the government decree of 19 March 2018).

The Management Plan of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea sets out the objectives to be met over the next five years. In particular, it must allow for the preservation of all the various ecosystems (terrestrial and marine environments) as well as the rare and migratory species that live there, and to support economic development and sustainable and responsible practices (fishing, maritime transport, and human activities).

It is based on four pillars:

Protect our natural and cultural heritage;

Guarantee and support recognized sustainable and responsible practices;

Ensure good management;

Integrate the park at local, regional and international levels.

The Management Committee: an advisory body

The Management Committee develops and proposes the Management Plan and gives opinions on its implementation, its evaluation, and any other matters relating to the sustainable management of the Park. Its administration is provided by the Directorate of Maritime Affairs and its members are appointed for a period of five years, by decision of the High Commissioner and the President of the Government.

Encourage participatory management

In order to involve the population in the implementation of the Management Plan, the participatory approach is preferred. The priority actions, in the form of draft enactments, were submitted for public consultation.

Thus, a first public consultation took place from 1 to 28 February 2017, on the Management Plan (247 contributions). The second was held from 28 June to 12 July 2018 on the subject of the protection of pristine reefs and lagoons, the management of professional tourism and the action plan for the management of the Entrecasteaux atolls (187 contributions).



© Green turtle DAM NC



© Nereis terns, Pierre Bachy SCO

2. The last refuges of biodiversity now under protection

The government of New Caledonia adopted a decree on Tuesday, 14 August, establishing reserves in the Natural Park of the Coral Sea in Chesterfield, Bellona, Entrecasteaux, Petrie and Astrolabe.

From now on, and only four months after the start of the participatory reflection process, the decree establishing reserves specifies the following classification:

- 7,000 km² have the status of wilderness area (compared to 0.6 km² before then), an area equivalent to that of the Southern Province;
- 21,000 km² are classified as nature reserves (compared to 3,100 km² previously), an area larger than that of Grande-Terre;

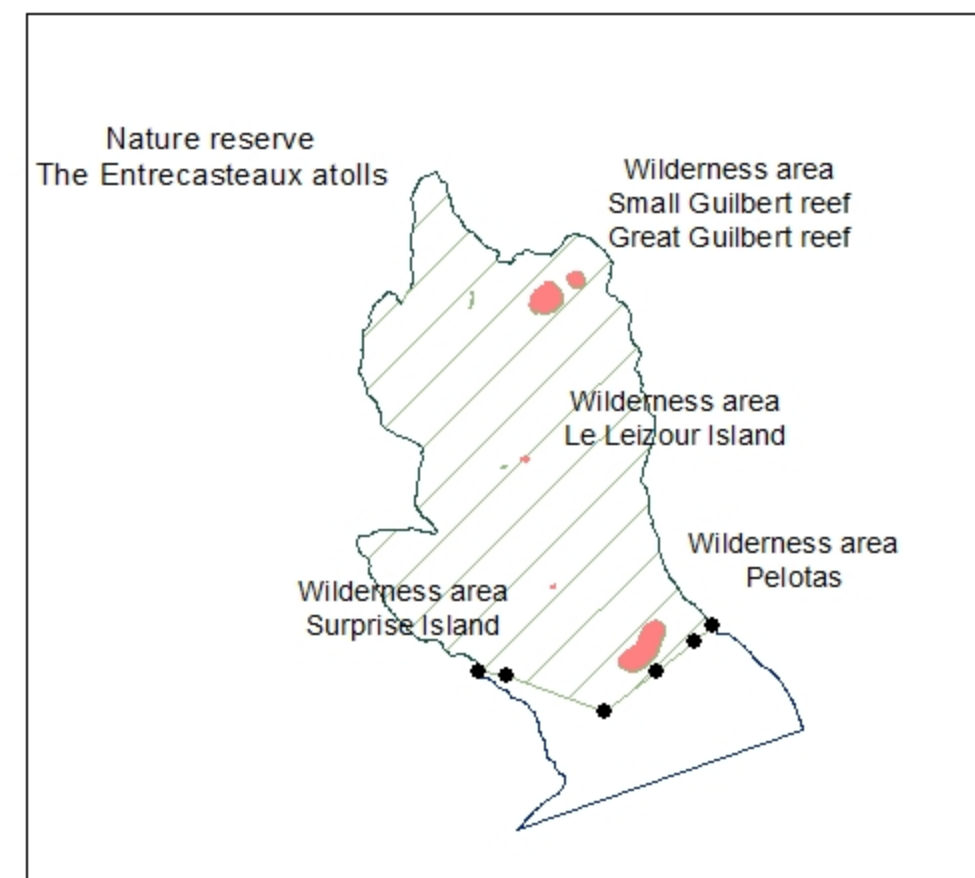
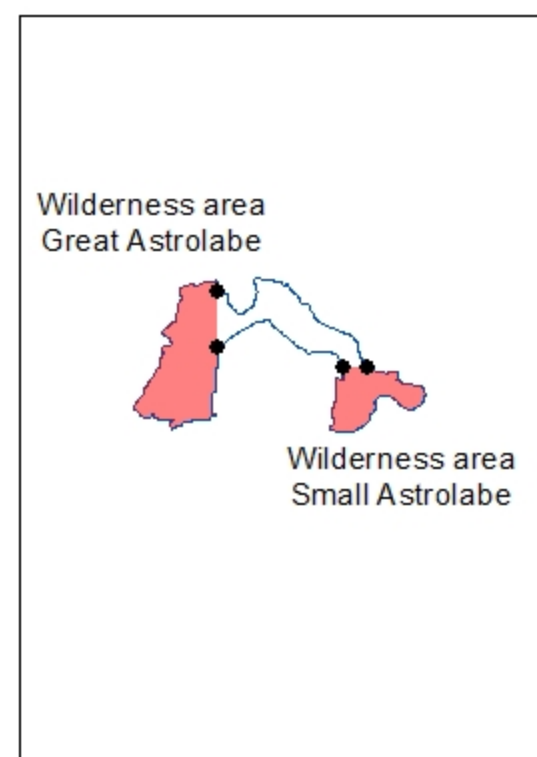
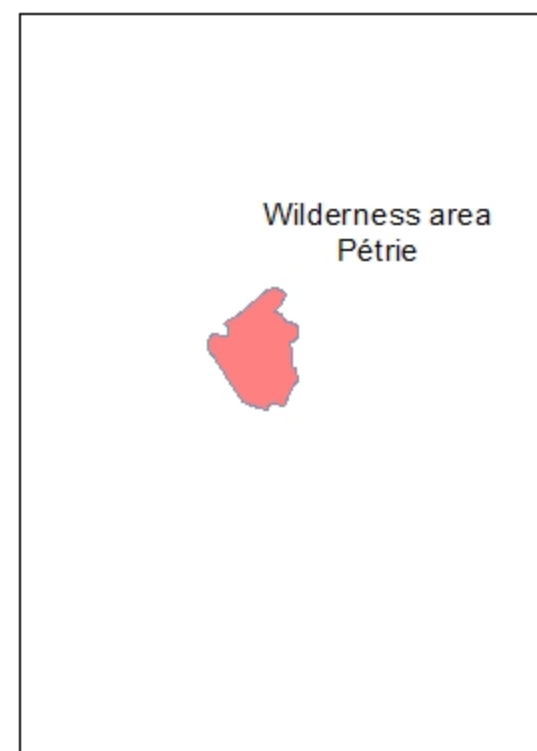
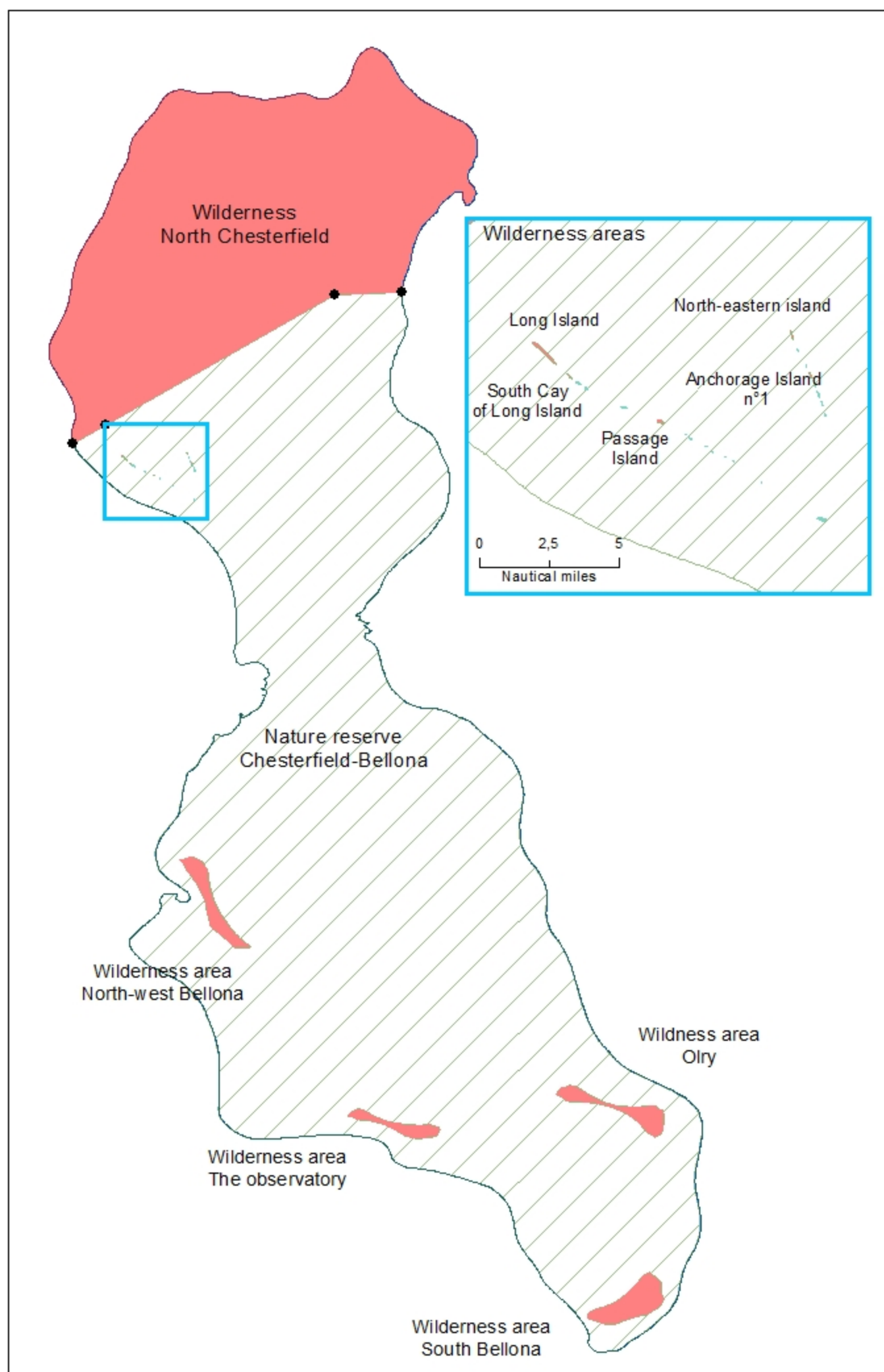
The decree protects:

- 3.3 km² of land areas that are essential for the reproduction of seabirds and green turtles, i.e. 100% of the low-lying islands of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea;
- 1,634 km² of coral reefs, i.e. 100% of the Park's pristine reefs, or 36% of New Caledonia's reefs;
- 12,377 km² of lagoons connected with pristine reefs, or 39% of New Caledonia's lagoons;
- 696 km² of submerged reefs used as breeding grounds by many whales

For the sake of consistency, the decree establishing these reserves includes the Entrecasteaux atolls. It includes the existing reserves at Entrecasteaux, and adds three marine wilderness areas on the Pelotas atoll and Guilbert reefs.

For the record, New Caledonia's largest wilderness area today is the Merlet reserve, with a surface area of 170 km², and the land surface of New Caledonia is 18 000 km². This decree therefore aims to provide a high level of protection to an area equivalent to about one and a half times the surface area of Grande Terre.

Classification Natural Park of the Coral Sea



Natural Park of the Coral sea reserve

- Wilderness area
- Nature reserve
- Points defining reserve boundaries
- Isobathe 1000

0 25 50
Nautical miles

In the event of litigation resulting from possible discrepancies between the text and the cartographic representation, only the text must be taken into account

Chesterfield-Bellona



© Chesterfield, Long Island Thea Jacob WWF

The following are now classified as wilderness areas in North Chesterfield: [Longue Island](#) and its southern cay, the [Passage islet](#), the [North-East islet](#) and [Mouillage Island No. 1](#), and the [Bampton](#), [Reynard](#) and [Avon islets](#).

All are considered by scientists as the richest and most frequented by green turtles and seabirds. The site is a coral sanctuary where sharks abound and humpback whales come to mate, give birth and nurse their young.

Petrie and Astrolabe



© Petrie Reef, Pierre Laboute, Conservation International

The whole of [Petrie and Astrolabe](#) is classified as a wilderness area. Since 2014, the excellent condition of these reefs and lagoons, located several hours by sea from Ouvéa, is illustrated by the presence of many species of fish. Petrie holds the world record in terms of biomass density.

Entrecasteaux



© Entrecasteaux, Surprise island Pierre Bachy SCO

Three new marine wilderness areas have been created at the Entrecasteaux atolls: [the Pelotas atoll](#) and [Guilbert reefs](#).

They are considered by scientists as the most diverse

A measure provided for in the Park Management Plan

This classification makes it possible to define several sub-objectives in the Management Plan:

- Sub-objective 1: to protect isolated reefs
- Sub-objective 2: to limit direct human impact on a significant part of the ecosystems
- Sub-Objective 6: to protect key habitats that are critical to the life cycle of heritage, rare and migratory species.



© Entrecasteaux, Huon Island DAM NC SPE

The participatory approach respected

The classification proposal was developed through participatory workshops that brought together scientists, experts, stakeholders and interested members of the Management Committee in the first half of 2018.

This draft decree received a favourable opinion from the Management Committee of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea on 20 June 2018 and the Marine Resources Commission (Commission des ressources marines) on 12 July 2018. It was submitted for public consultation between 29 June and 12 July 2018: **69% of the participants were in favor** of the proposals contained in the decree.

It was also forwarded for opinion to the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) on 25 June 2018.

Wilderness areas vs. nature reserves

The classification system used worldwide is the one laid out by the World Commission on Protected Areas of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (or IUCN).

The wilderness areas have the IUCN's highest level of protection (category 1). In the areas concerned by this designation, no access or human activity is authorized except in the context of scientific research validated beforehand by government decree.

These areas are a natural reference indicator and are managed primarily for the purpose of scientific study and environmental monitoring, with minimal disruption.

In the nature reserves (IUCN category 2) fishing is prohibited (including fishing for self-consumption) as well as pets, camping and picnics, motorized water sports, hunting, and motorized or non-motorized aviation activities.

Access is subject to government authorization under strict conditions. No samples can be taken and there are access fees.

The aim of managing these areas is to preserve ecosystems, protect ecological integrity for the benefit of present and future generations, and eliminate any exploitation or occupation that is inconsistent with these objectives; but nevertheless offer opportunities for scientific and educational etc. visits, while respecting the natural environment and the culture of local communities.

The categorization of our New Caledonian "pristine" reefs is as follows:

- An IUCN level 1 protection for a quarter of the reefs and lagoons classed as a wilderness area. This measure is the strictest to date.
- An IUCN level 2 protection for three quarters of these areas classed as a nature reserve, plus additional prohibitions.

Upon publication in the Official Journal of the decree establishing the reserves, access to all areas of the Park, classed as part of the reserves, will no longer be free.



© Chesterfield, Reef sharks, Pierre Frolla UNC

The international interpretation of the "pristine" reef classification

As of now, 16,630 KM² of reefs are highly protected worldwide, which makes 11% of the planet's reefs.

Aside from the pristine nature of these sites, other factors motivated New Caledonia to put them in the reserve. For example, [the immense value of the Park's islands](#) which are, at regional level, important for the nesting of seabirds and, globally, for the nesting of green turtles. This observation is the result of 10 years of monitoring by experts.

These global "hot spots" of biodiversity, a third of which are part of the Park, form [a heritage which should be transferred](#), intact, to future generations

New Caledonia
is aware of its responsibility to humanity
to preserve our natural heritage, and so
provides these precious, internationally-recognised areas with very high levels of protection.

In this International Year of the Reefs of France (IYOR2018), this ranking illustrates the strong [mobilisation of the Caledonians](#) in favour of the sustainable protection of the reef and lagoon ecosystems.



© Entrecasteaux, Laurent Vigliola IRD

3. Controlling professional tourism

The government of New Caledonia issued a decree on Tuesday, 14 August regulating professional tourism activities in the Natural Park of the Coral Sea. It sets the framework within which professional tourism activity can be carried out in Park areas that do not have prohibited access.

As a reminder, access to wilderness areas is prohibited.

A tour operator wishing to organise a sightseeing tour of the Park must have **prior authorisation** from the government, as well as requirements tailored to its activity and the ecosystems visited.

Access to the Park's nature reserves **is prohibited for all boats with a capacity of more than 200 passengers**. For boats with a capacity of 13 to 200 passengers, there is an agreement to specify the measures to oversee and monitor their activities, in addition to the authorisation order.

Certain activities considered to have too much impact on the Park, such as motorised water sports, fishing, hunting and motorised or non-motorised aviation activities, are not permitted. Other activities will be closely supervised (number of authorised persons, dedicated areas, etc.) in terms of the authorisations issued for tourist activities. Personnel trained in regulations and good practices in the Park will be required to be on board every vessel.

This enactment does not apply to personal pleasure boats, yachts, charter vessels and those passing through the area. These vessels will be subject to a specific decree that is currently being prepared.



© Nicolas Job, Heos Pacific Marine

A measure set out in the Park Management Plan

The decree sets out sub-objective 14 of the Management Plan of "certify[ing] the visits by tourism professionals", in line with sub-objective 2 "limit[ing] the direct human impact on a significant part of the ecosystems" and 6 of "protect[ing] key habitats essential to the life cycle of heritage, rare and migratory species".

Using the participatory approach

The draft decree was developed through participatory workshops that brought together scientists, experts, stakeholders and relevant Management Committee members.

It was positively received by the Management Committee on 20 June 2018 and was submitted for public consultation between 29 June and 12 July 2018: 48% of those who gave their opinion on this matter were in favour of the decree. Opinion is clearly divided between those who participated in the consultation. Thanks to contributors' proposals, 6 articles have improved and one more has been added.

4. A new action plan for Entrecasteaux

The government of New Caledonia issued a decree on Tuesday, 14 August, creating the 2018-2022 action plan for the Entrecasteaux atolls.

The protected area of the Entrecasteaux atolls, created by decree of 23 April 2013, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2008. This protected area, which was included in the Natural Park of the Coral Sea when it was created, has had its own action plan since 2013, at UNESCO's request.

The revision of the current action plan was scheduled for 2018 and it was decided to link it to that of the Park. The plan inaugurates the development of the action plans for the other protected areas of the Park.



© Entrecasteaux, Huon island DAM NC SPE

A measure set out in the Park Management Plan

The new Entrecasteaux action plan sets out the main objectives of chapters 1 to 4 of the Natural Park Management Plan, as well as sub-objective 34: "improve knowledge for the management of the Park".

This plan continues to achieve UNESCO's objectives of improving knowledge, protecting and preserving ecosystems and promoting participatory management.

Using the participatory approach

The proposed classification was developed through participatory workshops that brought together scientists, experts, stakeholders and relevant members of the Management Committee in the first half of 2018.

The action plan was positively received by the Management Committee of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea on 20 June 2018 and was submitted for public consultation between 29 June and 12 July 2018. **76% of participants expressed their support for the decree.** As a result, the action plan for the Entrecasteaux atolls was approved and one action was added to it.

The proposed amendments to the decree following the public consultation were positively received by the Management Committee on 26 July 2018.



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5. The TIGA project (Territories of Highly Ambitious Innovation - Territoire d'innovation de grande ambition)

New Caledonia submitted its application for the Investment for the Future programme (programme d'investissements d'avenir - PIA) in the areas of "Territories of Highly Ambitious Innovation" in September 2017. If accepted, it represents a potential budget of 5.4 billion francs that would help to make the Natural Park of the Coral Sea an engine for growth in the Pacific.

Investment for the Future Programme (les Programmes d'investissements d'avenir - PIA)

This is a government-run programme designed to support excellence, innovation and cooperation. The principle is to co-finance each project, which will lead to growth and the creation of jobs.

The programme is managed by the General Commissariat for Investment and was set up by the government in 2010 to co-finance innovative and promising investments, such as the implementation of priority public policies to support transitions that have a strong impact on the economy.

Three successive waves of these programmes have been implemented, covering the themes of ecological transition, skills in society and the competitiveness of innovation and the digital transition.

Territory of Highly Ambitious Innovation (TIGA)

This is the title given to one of the arms of the Investment for the Future Programme. It has a budget of €450 million and aims to support around ten territories of national interest in the key stages of an ambitious and unifying transformation project, in accordance with a clearly defined strategy that takes into account territorial specificities (i.e. €45 million Euros or 5.4 billion francs per project over 5 years).

The co-financing principle of the TIGA programme is for one third of the budget to go to each project. So, in 2018 the government has an investment budget of 9 billion francs, the Southern Province has 11.9 billion francs and the town of Nouméa has 6.3 billion francs.

¹ An allocation of €35 billion in 2010, an allocation of €12 billion in 2013 and in an additional €10 billion in 2016.

Call for expression of interest (2017)

The call for expression of interest for TIGA was published on 24 March 2017 at a nationwide level by the General Commissariat for Investment and relayed in New Caledonia by the Caisse des Depots et Consignations (CDC).

Wanting to be part of the project, the President of the Government of New Caledonia responded with a project entitled *"The Park of the Coral Sea, or how to make biodiversity an engine for growth in the Pacific"*.

New Caledonia's motivation for this project is based on three issues:

- Exceptional biodiversity that is a local, regional and international responsibility;
- A nickel-dependent economy and state transfers that force New Caledonia to reinvent its economic model;
- A maritime area that is still underestimated and undervalued in terms of its potential for "blue growth", scientific research and innovation.

Along with the public policy guidelines given according to several adopted strategic plans, the strategic vision of the proposed dossier is based on: "preservation - research - promotion".

The aim is to make the Natural Park of the Coral Sea a worldwide centre of excellence for the preservation of biodiversity, with a global vision integrating the environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects for the development of existing or new activities.

Under the guidance of the President of the Government's cabinet, the dossier was made possible thanks to the involvement of several partners, including the maritime cluster of New Caledonia, OPT, CIPAC, ADECAL-Technopole, CRESICA and NGOs.

The dossier was submitted on 29 September 2017. 124 dossiers were filed nationally and on 22 November 2017 the New Caledonia file was one of 40 dossiers that were examined by the jury. On 4 January 2018, the steering committee issued a negative opinion on the New Caledonian project, but offered support from the CDC and the Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition (le ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire - MTES) to finalise the dossier, indicating that a new call for projects would be issued in mid-2018⁴.

² Notably, the development plan of New Caledonia (NC2025), the Territorial Strategy for Innovation (Decree no. 2016-051/GNC of 12 January 2016), the Natural Park of the Coral Sea (Decree no. 2014-1063/GNC of 23 April 2014) and the Strategic Plan for the Digital Economy.

³ The steering committee selected 24 winners. The committee noted that the New Caledonian dossier contained many strengths, such as the high value of the scientific teams and the ecological and geopolitical interest for France, but it also contained a weakness in terms of the governance model (the incomplete Management Plan of the Park at this point, and the credibility of the management of the TIGA project in the absence of consortium of governance).

⁴ The publication date of the call for projects, initially scheduled for June 2018, was postponed until September 2018. Applications must be submitted within 6 months of September i.e. around February or March 2019.

Progressing towards the call for projects (2018)

The CDC's specific support for 2018 has been as follows:

- An equity contribution from the CDC limited to €100,000, with 50% co-financing, for studies focused exclusively on the development of investment projects (business plan and assembly) corresponding to the general TIGA project backed by New Caledonia;
- A contribution from the Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition, the amount of which remains to be specified, for the financing of a high-level research office to be finalised with the New Caledonian partners. The dossier will be delivered at the end of the call for projects.

The government of New Caledonia had planned to provide a budget of 20 million francs in the event of having to support the finalisation of the TIGA dossier in 2018.

The project partners discussed six areas in order to identify additional studies likely to consolidate the New Caledonia's project that will be delivered at the end of the call for projects:

- Group n 1: develop research programmes likely to make New Caledonia an "international hot-spot" for biodiversity research
- Group 2: define and develop the means to observe, monitor and protect the Park
- Group 3: Create an innovative technological ecosystem, bringing together innovative initiatives to enable project developers, students and scientists to access infrastructure and tools in one place
- Group 4: develop eco-responsible, value-generating and job-creating activities linked to living beings
- Group 5: promote economic recreational and eco-responsible activities
- Group 6: strengthen local and regional coherence.

⁵ The selection criteria announced by the CDC are: (i) relevance of the project to transform the territory, (ii) the proposed degree of innovation (taking into account all forms of innovation), (iii) the quality of the planned management envisaged, (iv) the quality of the methodology for measuring results and reproducibility, (v) the maturity of investment projects, (vi) the financing must also include investment, not only contributions in kind.

⁶ This amount was voted in 2018 and is recorded in the lines of credit of the Planning Department (le service de l'aménagement et de la planification - SAP).

Moving towards a blue economy

The TIGA project is only one component of the President of the Government's more ambitious project for an economic transition for the country.

The aim is to show New Caledonia off as an innovative land...

- ...Institutional innovation through the original process of decolonisation with the Nouméa Accord, the statute with the widest powers, unique in the Republic, a proportional, collegial and solidarity-based government;
- Industrial innovation with three metallurgical companies and many local subcontractors;
- Entrepreneurial innovation with companies internationally recognised for innovative processes and products that can be exported (spatial imagery, video analysis, educational games, above-ground crop irrigation, agriculture/agribusiness, aquaculture, health-biology and the building industry);
- Political innovation with a territorial innovation strategy adopted in January 2016 and pilot projects (revenue).

... and to support the Natural Park of the Coral Sea on four pillars:

1. Highlight preservation efforts for economic wealth by making New Caledonia a hotspot for research, by combining research and innovation and making it a driver of sustainable development.
2. Make a center of excellence of knowledge and innovation in order to enhance the image of New Caledonia, raise awareness in the international community, and learn to reproduce.
3. Build a blue economy pilot project by developing niche and authentic tourism, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.
4. Use the Park as a means of integration and regional cooperation, by organizing the protection of ecosystems and securing the Coral Sea, by pooling knowledge and research, sharing good fishing practices, developing authentic tourism and sharing traditional knowledge with neighbouring countries.



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