IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2017 **(archived)**
Finalised on 10 November 2017

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for East Rennell. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

East Rennell

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Solomon Islands
Inscribed in: 1998
Criteria:
(ix)

Site description:
East Rennell makes up the southern third of Rennell Island, the southernmost island in the Solomon Island group in the western Pacific. Rennell, 86 km long x 15 km wide, is the largest raised coral atoll in the world. The site includes approximately 37,000 ha and a marine area extending 3 nautical miles to sea. A major feature of the island is Lake Tegano, which was the former lagoon on the atoll. The lake, the largest in the insular Pacific (15,500 ha), is brackish and contains many rugged limestone islands and endemic species. Rennell is mostly covered with dense forest, with a canopy averaging 20 m in height. Combined with the strong climatic effects of frequent cyclones, the site is a true natural laboratory for scientific study. The site is under customary land ownership and management. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2017 Conservation Outlook

Critical

The remoteness of the property, near natural conditions and small local population on the island gave this site a good conservation outlook at time of inscription in 1998. Logging operations that commenced in 2008 on the part of the island that is not inscribed as World Heritage. However the traditional owners re-confirmed through commitment to manage the ERWHS for its OUV. This is an important commitment. The wish of the local population is the WHS is to improve their living conditions through sustainable activities. Additional support should urgently be provided to communities to ensue enhancement of protection and management of the site. the DSOCR is a very important step in this process and needs to be supported and resourced.

Current state and trend of VALUES

High Concern
Trend: Data Deficient

There is no current field based information to evaluate the current status of the conditions for the property to remain “an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals”. Recent studies (HIST 2016) indicate the forests and forest cover is largely intact in ERWHS. While there are some concerns of component parts of its ecosystem in decline, and more monitoring is needed to determine the overall trend. Specific indicators, e.g. forest cover as propsed in SOC (2017) are a useful indicator to measure change in state and trend of the site.

Overall THREATS

Very High Threat

The local communities with customary stewardship of ERWHS must be congratulated for their commitment to protect and manage the site and maintain OUV. However, this can not be achieved without long-term commitment and funding by both the government and international community to contribute to support the community to maintain the OUV. Local communities need to be supported to manage invasive species, e.g. rats, protect the environment from new invasive species, e.g. Giant African Land Snail and invasive ant species. The commencement of bauxite mining in West Rennell as proposed in SOC report (SOC 2017) will also have impacts. East Rennel’s lake is also threatened by sea level rise and increased salinity of the lake have also caused the local population to develop unsustainable practices. World Heritage inscription has not delivered the promised incentives to local communities by those promoting the WH Convention. There remains an urgent need to support local communities and mobilise resources to support management of the OUV of this site.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Serious Concern

East Rennell WHS is managed by the local community under a customary tenure system and this community manages the island traditionally. However, with increasing global pressures, the community does not possess the necessary resources and capacity to protect and manage the property to World Heritage standards. The resident population in the property is steadily declining and experiencing significant demographic change. The site is not yet incorporated into the national protected area system and lacks formal government recognition. However the Cabinet decision demonstrated the Government of the SI commitment to ERWHS. The SOC Report (2017) also presents the Desired State of Conservation (DSOCR) for ERWHS. The DSOCR is a useful document, however although a 4-year timetable is provided, specific intermediate milestones are not provided. However, national level commitments to implement the DSOCR are demonstrated. The matters in the WHC Decision: 40 COM 7A.49 and the indicators in the DSOCR (2017) need to be implemented to begin the process of effective management of the site.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▶ **Exceptional stepping-stone for on-going speciation processes (particularly avifauna) in the western Pacific**
Criterion:(ix)

One of the most natural, undisturbed oceanic islands in the Pacific region, the site is a true natural laboratory for scientific study where the impacts of humans, invasive predators and weeds on the native biodiversity have been relatively small. Of 43 breeding land and water bird species, four species and nine subspecies are endemic to Rennell Island, with a further seven subspecies endemic to Rennell and nearby Bellona (IUCN, 1998; SoOUV; 2012). Further research will probably revise these figures (Filardi et al., 2007).

▶ **Important site for the study of island biogeography**
Criterion:(ix)

The unmodified forest vegetation contains floral elements from the more impoverished Pacific Islands to the east and the much richer Melanesian flora to the west (IUCN, 1998; SoOUV, 2012).

Other important biodiversity values

▶ **Endemic plants**

At least ten species of endemic plants occur in the property including an orchid found on the island lakes, three species of Pandanus and an

undescribed palm (Nomination, 1997; IUCN, 1998; SoOUV, 2012).

► **Bats**

Eleven species of bats of which one is endemic (Nomination, 1997; IUCN, 1998; SoOUV, 2012).

► **Invertebrates**

Rich invertebrate fauna including approximately 730 insect species, many of which are endemic, and 27 species of land snail of which seven are endemic. Coconut Crabs are an important element (Nomination, 1997; IUCN, 1998; SoOUV, 2012).

► **Fauna and flora of Lake Tegano**

Lake Tegano, the largest lake in the insular Pacific, has 78 species of animals recorded including 12 species and one subspecies endemic to the lake. The endemic Sea Krait is the second record of a sea snake living in a brackish water lake. The flora of Lake Tegano is dominated by more than 300 species of diatoms and algae, some of which are endemic (Nomination, 1997; IUCN, 1998; SoOUV, 2012).

► **Marine fauna**

A marine survey was completed by the University of Queensland in December 2012, results awaited (SOC, 2012).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Very High Threat

Logging operations in 2008 on Rennell Island (just 12 km from the inscribed eastern third of the property) has initiated several highly negative effects within the property, including the reduction and transformation of forest habitat necessary for the maintenance of the bird fauna within the property. However, a recent study (HIST 2016) indicated that the impact of logging may be limited in nature. This needs to be confirmed. The Mining leases that have been granted on West Rennell will also have substantial impacts on the overall natural values of the Rennell Island. Although the west and east of the island are geographically isolated, there will be impacts to avian fauna that rely upon the island ecosystem. Increased populations in mining camps will also increase natural resource extraction from the island to meet food and other natural resource demands. Logging as well as sea level rise and increased salinity of the lake have also caused the local population to develop unsustainable practices. The promises by proponents of World Heritage inscription to provide benefits to local communities through forgoing other development (i.e. logging and mining) are yet to be realised.

▶ Fishing / Harvesting Aquatic Resources

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Previous sustainable use of the Coconut Crab (Birgus latro) and other aquatic resources appears to have become unsustainable, and logging activities appear to have increased poaching of endemic, rare and threatened species of biota (Mission Report, 2012).

▶ Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

Very High Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known
Outside site

The absence of many invasive species supported the inscription of East Rennell under criterion (ix). However, rats (e.g. Rattus rattus) have probably been on the island for a long time (similar to other Pacific islands) and have been observed in the vicinity of log ponds and jetties and adjacent log storage areas (Mission Report, 2012). All invasive species must be treated with caution on island ecosystems. CEPF and other funding mechanisms of

the World Heritage Committee are vital in supporting the ongoing battle to prevent invasive species causing irreparable damage to the OUV of the property.

► Identity/ Social Cohesion/ Changes in local population and community

Very High Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known
Outside site

The development of a cash economy and the demand for modern conveniences are forcing residents to find sources of income, which in turn increases pressure on local resources (Mission Report, 2012). The potential for upto 600 workers on the mining leases (SOC 2017) will promote the cash economy, however may be detrimental to the long-term sustainable harvesting of natural resources.

► Logging/ Wood Harvesting

High Threat
Outside site

On its own, the East Rennell forest is insufficiently large to ensure the long-term survival of endemic birds (IUCN, 1998). Since 2008 logging commenced on West Rennell that has directly and indirectly impacted the feeding and breeding habitat of animals (particularly birds). Physical disturbance to soils through erosion and water quality (both surface and ground water) has occurred. However, more recent remote sensing data suggests that logging has not dramatically reduced on forest coverage on West Rennell and not impacted ERWHS (HIST 2016). However, there are concerns logging will bring invasive species and possibly increased the unsustainable use of native species, as well as had cultural ramifications (Mission Report, 2012). However, the Cabinet of the SI has directed the revocation and refusal of any tree felling licence within the boundaries of East Rennell (SOC 2017) and the monitoring of the forest cover as an ongoing measure of management of ERWHS (DSCOR 2017).

► Mining/ Quarrying

High Threat

Outside site

Currently in West Rennell two companies that have been issued with mining licences to extract bauxite from their respective tenement sites. There is a proven resource of at least 26 million metric tonnes (SOC 2017). The operation is targeting only bauxite pocket soils deposits which aparently will have a lesser impact to the natural surrounding and ecosystem (s) (SOC 2017). The large scale of mining on a small island ecosystem will have substatnial impacts to the integrity of the Rennell Island ecosystem. The assessment of impacts presented for one of the operations (SOC 2017) argues that confining the operation to only the west of the island will limit ecosytem impacts. However, the is likely to be a degradation of the overall ecosystem health without appropriate planning.

Potential Threats

High Threat

The potential introduction of invasive alien species such as Giant African Land Snail would have very negative effects on the biodiversity aspects of the property.

Mining is reported to be confirmed to West Rennel outside the boudaries of the WHS, however without long-term legal protection the use of the resources within the WHS are able to be varied by local communties.

► Mining/ Quarrying

High Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known

Prospecting for bauxite occurred in the early 1970’s although there are no mining leases in ERWHS (SOC 2017). The community through the LTWSA has ruled out mining within boundaries of the WHS in East Rennell (SOC 2017-Appendix 3). However, it is the reponsiblity of the international community to ensure that other benefits, tourism, alternative livlihood generation, etc, are able to be provided to the local community to ensure that have alternatives to mining.

▶ Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

Data Deficient
Inside site
Outside site

There is potential for Giant African Land Snails that have been seen in Honiara to gain access to Rennell Island on shipments of food and other produce, and these aggressive invaders could have a destructive impact on crops and other vegetation and would compete with the 27 species of native land snails (Mission Report, 2012).

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

▶ Relationships with local people

Some Concern

East Rennell was the first inscribed World Heritage site with customary ownership land tenure. Land is vested in the clan and all clan members have access to land through their lineages. East Rennell communities are patrilineal with land passing down through the male line. The Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA), consists of elected community members (which can be women), who act as the local management authority. There is a great need for capacity building and external funding to ensure that the property is managed at WH standard (Mission Report, 2012). The LTWHSA wrote a letters to the Ministry of Forestry and Ministry of Mines and Energy (SOC 2017 – Annex 3) confirming their commitment to management of the site, requesting support and confirming their intention to not allow logging or mining within the ERWHS.

▶ Legal framework

Serious Concern

At the time of inscription there was no adequate national or provincial legislation for protecting the property. The property is not yet protected under the Protected Areas Act 2010 (see below reference to SOC -2017) and

the draft provincial Lake Tegano Heritage Park Ordinance 2009 should be approved and come into force as soon as possible. The provisions of both these legal instruments should be properly administered and fully implemented in respect of the World Heritage property by the Ministry of Environment and the provincial Premier's Office . Legislation should also give legal effect to the property management plan, and customary owners should be given the opportunity to enter into a full and effective partnership with the provincial and national authorities. Other legislation such as the Environment Act 1998 and the Wildlife Management and Protection Act 1998 have provisions relevant to the property, but these are often not effectively enforced at local level, and there is some uncertainty as to the relative powers of national and customary laws in respect of land and resources under customary ownership and traditional management (Mission Report, 2012).

► Enforcement

Some Concern

The mechanisms for enforcement are not clear. Traditional management systems remain in place. National protected area legislation is not applicable.

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Some Concern

A Cabinet Paper has been prepared (SOC 2017 - Annex 1) and directs the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology ((MECDM) to consult with landowners including the LTWHA and relevant stakeholders to register ERWHS as a protected area under the Protected Area Act 2010.

► Management system

Serious Concern

The Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA) elects community members as the local management authority The community needs a full-time officer as a focal point within Rennell-Bellona Province to advocate on behalf of the people and the World Heritage requirements of the property, with strong links to a counterpart position in the Ministry of

Environment and to the LTWHSA in the property (Mission Report, 2012).

▶ Management effectiveness

Serious Concern

A previous management plan (Wein, 2007) was never been implemented and it was not resourced (Mission report, 2012). The SOC Report (2017) indicates the ERWHS Management Plan can be revised to align it with the Protected Area regulation and guidelines. Developing and revising the ERWHS Management Plan is a key milestone in the registration process of the ERWHS becoming a PA under the PA Act. This is a planned action and indicator in the DSOCR (SOC 2017).

Knowledge of the natural ecosystems, species and habitats is insufficient and needs further survey and assessment, especially in the marine areas. Cultural resources and values are also not well known and there is a need for systematic cataloguing and documentation of cultural values and traditional resource use and conservation practices (Mission Report, 2012). Biodiversity indictors of ecosystem health need to be established and monitored. The monitoring of forest cover in the ERWHS is useful (DSOCR 2017) but also also include indicators that may be impacted by logging and mining.

▶ Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Serious Concern

The SOC Report (2017) details the Government of SI response to the WHC Decision: 40 COM 7A.49 (2016). This addresses some concerns in the decision, but does not fully address all concerns, e.g. related to establishment of management plans and mining. However the Cabinet decision demonstrated the Government of the SI commitment to ERWHS. The SOC Report 2017 also presents the Desired State of Conservation (DSOCR) for ERWHS. This is to be considered by the Committee in next meeting. The DSOCR is a useful document, however although a 4-year timetable is provided, specific intermediate milestones are not provided. However, national level commitments to implement the DSOCR are demonstrated.

▶ Boundaries

Serious Concern

Boundaries of the property have never been sufficient as the forest in East Rennell is not sufficiently large (according to a study by J. Diamond) to ensure long-term survival of the endemic birds. However, inscription of the entire island was not proposed as local communities on West Rennell were not favourable to being included in the nomination (IUCN, 1998). There is no buffer zone in the property.

► Sustainable finance

Serious Concern

The community receives no financial support from the national budget of the Solomon Islands government, and only a small annual contribution from the province. Essentially, it relies for its funding on the World Heritage Fund and on other external sources, especially donor funding from international governments and non-government organisations. This funding is not sustainable, it is short-term only and comes in pulses, and it is tagged to specific programmes and projects. The local community urgently requires income generation initiatives, including tourism, as an economic incentive to continue to refuse for logging and mining of the area. The balance between meeting "world heritage conservation" objectives and the income needs of local communities for daily sustenance and family needs need to be balanced. Communities will benefit from development of appropriate well-resourced and operated small business enterprises (Mission report, 2012). Long-term sustainable funding is required to assist the customary owners of East Rennell to manage the property to World Heritage standards otherwise the protection of the site will fail.

► Staff training and development

Serious Concern

The process of twinning of the East Rennell and Wet Tropics properties begun in 2009 and should continue. A twinning arrangement would provide an invaluable source of information, expert advice, technical competence and assistance for management capacity-building in East Rennell. It is important to finalise the terms of reference and get the twinning arrangement authorised and operative as soon as possible (Mission report, 2012). SPREP and other Pacific Regional Agencies should also play a role in capacity

building for management.

▶ Sustainable use

Serious Concern

The management plan (Wein, 2007) includes the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources, suggesting establishment of marine protected areas where a ban or restrictions on harvest are imposed; introduction of community-based monitoring and enforcement programs supervised by rangers; increased awareness of regulations and sustainable harvesting methods; use of by-laws to discourage destructive fishing methods; and survey and inventory of reef resources. While the plan is well-directed in principle, it has never been implemented and there is no evidence that resources will be provided for this to occur (Mission report, 2012).

▶ Education and interpretation programs

Serious Concern

None (Periodic report, 2011). No infomation avaiable.

▶ Tourism and visitation management

Serious Concern

There are plans to improve the runway and invest in tourism (SOC 2017). This is considered as vital to the long-term management and integrity of the site.

▶ Monitoring

Serious Concern

No systematic reporting recorded (SOC 2017)

▶ Research

Some Concern

Important research expeditions have occurred on the island (Mission Report, 2012). The management plan (Wein, 2007) proposes the development of a research contract to guide research in East Rennell and to ensure that the results of all research are available to the management authority and communities. THE CEPF is a useful source of funds for both research and

action for ERWHS. However, to-date funds have not be secured (SOC 2017)

Overall assessment of protection and management

Serious Concern

East Rennell WHS is managed by the local community under a customary tenure system and this community manages the island traditionally. However, with increasing global pressures, the community does not possess the necessary resources and capacity to protect and manage the property to World Heritage standards. The resident population in the property is steadily declining and experiencing significant demographic change. The site is not yet incorporated into the national protected area system and lacks formal government recognition. However the Cabinet decision demonstrated the Government of the SI commitment to ERWHS. The SOC Report (2017) also presents the Desired State of Conservation (DSOCR) for ERWHS. The DSOCR is a useful document, however although a 4-year timetable is provided, specific intermediate milestones are not provided. However, national level commitments to implement the DSOCR are demonstrated. The matters in the WHC Decision: 40 COM 7A.49 and the indicators in the DSOCR (2017) need to be implemented to begin the process of effective management of the site.

► Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Serious Concern

The communities in East Rennell maintain committed to protection and mangement of the ERWHS. These efforts need additional support to maintain the OUV of the ERWHS. The connected but geographically isolated West Rennell poses threats to the integrity of the overall island ecosystem values, however the threats to the site, i.e. logging and mineral extraction, need to minimised and mitigated through effective government managment. It is vital that resources are provided to traditional owners of the site to ensure local communities are empowered and provided resources to manage and maintain the OUV of the ERWHS. The DSOCR (2017) is a very important step in this process and needs to be supported and resourced.

▶ Best practice examples

East Rennell is notable as the very first World Heritage property to be inscribed where the resources of the land and sea are under customary ownership and managed using traditional practices. It is important local communities are supported to manage the site not only to thier standard, but to a standard to support OUV.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ Exceptional stepping-stone for on-going speciation processes (particularly avifauna) in the western Pacific

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

The recent threats caused by logging operations on the island outside of the inscribed area (e.g. loss of habitat, changes in soil erosion and run-off, introduction of Black Rats (Mission report, 2012) indicate that the conditions required for on-going speciation processes appear to be compromised. Monitoring, particularly of the avifauna within the property, is required.

▶ Important site for the study of island biogeography

Low Concern
Trend:Stable

Any banalisation of the native flora and fauna due to invasive species and unsustainable practices will reduce the importance of the property as an important site to study island biogeography. However, as this will require long-term change, the current trend for this value remains stable.

Summary of the Values

▶ Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

High Concern

Trend: Data Deficient

There is no current field based information to evaluate the current status of the conditions for the property to remain “an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals”. Recent studies (HIST 2016) indicate the forests and forest cover is largely intact in ERWHS. While there are some concerns of component parts of its ecosystem in decline, and more monitoring is needed to determine the overall trend. Specific indicators, e.g. forest cover as propsed in SOC (2017) are a useful indicator to measure change in state and trend of the site.

▶ Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values

Data Deficient

Trend: Deteriorating

Important biodiversity values which include birds, plants, bats, and aquatic fauna and flora require monitoring to determine trends.

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

▶ Fishing areas and conservation of fish stocks, Traditional agriculture

Resources from the property including introduced tilapia, clams, trochus (sea snail), reef fish, coconut crabs, coconuts and yams which provide subsistence and some cash income to 4 small villages of approximately 350 people residing in the property, a high proportion of which are women, older men

and children. Approximately 800 others from the community, mostly young adults and working-age men, have moved away to Honiara and elsewhere for education and employment (Mission report, 2012).

► Outdoor recreation and tourism

Very limited benefits from tourism have been realised given lack of infrastructure and management. However, benefits from tourism were expected once the property was inscribed as World Heritage, and the potential is there.

► Soil stabilisation

Natural forest protects slopes and groundwater from erosion and sedimentation.

► Importance for research

Rennell Island has been the subject of eight international scientific expeditions, with numerous descriptions of new species and seminal work on island biogeography (e.g. Diamond, 1984).

Summary of benefits

East Rennell provide a global environmental service by protecting a unique store of island biodiversity and contributing to the catalogue of OUV housed on the planet. The system provides an exceptionally well-preserved island ecosystem conserving unique, endemic species that has contributed to global scientific theory. Yet traditional owners are bearing the cost of maintaining these values, through forgoing other economic opportunities, i.e. logging and mining, that although environmentally negative would provide more household income and wealth. It is important that other benefits can be provided to those local communities that forgo these opportunities. Investments are urgently required in infrastructure, economic activities and tourism to ensure that some benefits accrue to communities protecting the OUV of the site.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE).		Livelihoods activities funded by the Australian Government, providing set up funding for alternative livelihoods activities.
2	World Heritage Fund International Assistance project / University of Queensland.		Survey of the Condition of the Marine Ecosystem within the East Rennell World Heritage Area.

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	Investment in community capacity building	A long-term program of community development, engagement and investment is required at the community level to resource the communities to enjoy the benefits associated with maintaining ERWHS. Without this investment the site may have no long-term future. The communities are yet to generate the promised benefits of tourism, income generation and maintaining quality of life. A long-term program is required with subtantial investment to build capacity.	From: 2018 To: 2027
2	Sustainable financing	GIZ provided a great case-study for investment in carbon (REDD) to support local conservation of the forest resources of the Rennell Island (GIZ 2015). This needs to be explored future and funded as on ongoing project	From: 2018 To: 2025
3	Invasive species and biosecurity	Action is require to: (i) assess current invasive species on Rennell Island, (ii) determine a course of action to remove invasive species, and (iii) ensure biosecurity protocols are in place to protect the island from new invasive species.	From: 2019 To: 2026

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