

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND
NATURAL HERITAGE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Extended forty-fifth session
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
10-25 September 2023

Item 7B of the Provisional Agenda:

State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List

WHC/23/45.COM/7B.Add, p.16-9

10. Mosi-oa-Tunya / Victoria Falls (Zambia, Zimbabwe) (N 509)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List: 1989

Criteria: (vii)(viii)

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

Previous Committee Decisions: see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/documents/>

International Assistance

Requests approved: 6 (from 2001-2022) Total amount approved: USD 118,585 For details, see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/assistance/>

UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

Total amount granted: USD 50,000 in 2015 through the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism programme (Flanders Funds-in-Trust)

Previous monitoring missions

November 2006: joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission;

February 2022: joint UNESCO/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Air pollution
- Drought
- Housing (uncontrolled urban development driven by population increase)
- Impacts of tourism / visitor / recreation
- Invasive/alien species
- Major visitor accommodation and associated infrastructure
- Management systems/ management plan
- Solid waste
- Surface water pollution
- Water extraction (related to existing hydropower production)
- Water infrastructure (Batoka Gorge Hydro Electric Scheme- downstream hydropower dam with reservoir encroaching on the property)

Illustrative material see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/>

Current conservation issues

On 1 February 2022, the States Parties of Zambia and Zimbabwe submitted a state of conservation report for the property available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/documents/>, reporting the following:

- The draft Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the Batoka Gorge Hydro Electric Scheme (BGHES) is undergoing consultation between the Zambezi River Authority and Joint Site Management Committee (JSMC) in order to mitigate any possible negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;
- The first phase of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on the cumulative developmental and environmental pressure on the property has been completed;
- A hydrological study of the Zambezi River system included a water quality assessment, which concluded the pH to be satisfactory. Annual Zambezi River water flow assessments show large variations due to different rainfall patterns;

- Construction of Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort in the buffer zone is underway, and 16 other infrastructure projects are proposed in the property or its buffer zone;
- Wildlife and ecological monitoring is conducted regularly in partnership with different stakeholders, including bird counts which are conducted twice a year;
- Mechanical and chemical control methods are being applied to manage Lantana camara and other invasive alien species (IAS) in the property;
- The JSMC is continuing to meet regularly demonstrating a high level of collaboration between the States Parties in the management of the property;
- An updated map of the property is provided.

The joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property took place between 9 and 13 February 2022 in line with Decision **44 COM 7B.177**, the report for which is available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/documents/>

In preparation for the mission, the States Parties submitted in February 2022: an ESIA for Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort; 2016-2021 Joint Integrated Management Plan (JIMP); ESIA for BGHES and a boundary map of the property.

The States Parties requested International Assistance for the 2022 cycle to review and update the JIMP, which was accepted and communicated in a letter dated 10 August 2022.

In a letter dated 14 March 2023, the World Heritage Centre transmitted to the State Party of Zimbabwe, for comments, third-party information reporting the issuing of a permit for two commercial sites for tourism developments within areas of the property that are recognized as highly sensitive zones according to the JIMP. No response has been received from the State Party at the time of writing this report.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The continued strong collaboration between the States Parties for the management of the property is welcomed, as are the ongoing efforts to undertake monitoring and to control IAS.

Nevertheless, the property continues to face serious threats from individual and cumulative infrastructure developments within the property, its buffer zone and its wider setting. While the property recorded decreased visitor numbers in the 2020-2021 period

due to COVID-19, tourism-related infrastructure developments have continued. Contrary to the Committee's request to the State Party of Zambia to halt the Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort Hotel development, construction has continued, and the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission identified numerous shortfalls and non-compliance with World Heritage status, the JIMP, and the State Party's own legal regulations. Other proposed developments in the property and its buffer zone have not been assessed as to their cumulative impacts on the OUV, in response to which the mission has recommended the States Parties produce a blueprint to guide strategic level planning. It should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre, together with the individual ESIA's of the developments proposed for approval, prior to authorizing any further projects.

The reservoir of BGHES will be fully contained within the gorges but the mission found that its reservoir will extend approximately 10.75 km into the property at full supply level, which at the deepest point will increase the water level in the property by around 43m, thereby altering the unique gorge ecosystem and water flow. The project should therefore not proceed as currently proposed and the ESIA should be revised to assess alternative project designs that avoid any impact on the property, and include a comprehensive ecological assessment of the gorge ecosystem.

The above two major concerns have been further compounded by the inconsistent property boundaries that are used in different documentations. The map submitted by the States Parties differs yet again from boundary maps that were previously submitted, and the mission was unable to obtain confirmation on precise property and buffer zone boundaries. To allow the effective management of the property and relevant decision-making, there is a pressing need for the States Parties and national authorities to agree on the boundaries and a mutual understanding of the management and use of the property zonation and buffer zones. The boundaries, zonation and buffer zones should be reviewed as part of the update of the JIMP and submitted for the Committee's approval through a request for boundary modification in line with the Operational Guidelines. The proposal should enhance the protection of the property and its OUV, the benchmark being the current JIMP and the Retrospective Statement of OUV (Decision **36 COM 8E**), which provided details of the property's integrity, including its spatial configuration.

It is positive that the States Parties have pursued the development of a SEA since the Committee's request in 2012 (**36 COM 7B.7**) despite the funding gap. It is noted that the first phase of the SEA has been completed, and that the second phase will be commissioned as soon as external funding is secured to address the core elements of an SEA. The States Parties should seek early inputs and technical guidance from IUCN in undertaking the second phase of the SEA, which

presents the key opportunity to take a landscape-scale approach to cumulative assessment.

The States Parties have presented data from the past few years on water flow and rainfall, but this stops short of responding to the previous Committee request to summarize how these findings have informed management including how water abstraction from the Zambezi River continues to be adapted in the face of climate change.

Draft Decision: 45 COM 7B.10

The World Heritage Committee,

- 1. Having examined Document WHC/23/45.COM/7B.Add,*
- 2. Recalling Decisions **36 COM 7B.7**, **38 COM 7B.7** and **44 COM 7B.177** adopted at its 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), 38th (Doha, 2014) and extended 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) sessions respectively,*
- 3. Welcomes the continued cooperation between the two States Parties in strengthening the joint management of the transboundary property, and the continued efforts to undertake monitoring and control of invasive alien plant species;*
- 4. Notes again with increasing concern the inevitable negative impacts of the proposed Batoka Gorge Hydro Electric Scheme (BGHES) on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property due to inundation of a significant portion of the gorges within the property, and requests the States Parties to implement the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission recommendation to revise the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) in accordance with the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context to assess alternative project designs that will not impact the OUV, to undertake a comprehensive ecological assessment of the gorge ecosystem that takes into account the correct property boundaries, and submit the revised ESIA to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN before making any decisions that may be difficult to reverse in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;*

5. Reiterates its concern over the increasing pressure from tourism infrastructure within and around the property, exacerbated by the absence of strategic planning and also requests the States Parties to produce a blueprint for infrastructure development in and around the property that ensures the protection of the property's OUV, and to not approve any further developments until the blueprint is finalized and submitted to the World Heritage Centre, together with an impact assessment for each proposed project in accordance with the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context, prior to taking any decision that is difficult to reverse ;
6. Notes with utmost concern that the construction of the Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort Hotel has continued despite the Committee's request to halt further activities and urgently requests the State Party of Zambia to implement the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission recommendation to suspend construction and operation of the Resort Hotel until it complies with all the legal conditions of approval issued by Zambian Environmental Management Authority, the ESIA has been revised in accordance with the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context and a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management Plan has been developed and submitted together with impact assessments to the World Heritage Centre;
7. Further requests the States Parties to submit a request for a boundary modification in accordance with the Operational Guidelines to set the precise boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, aligned with past Committee Decisions and the property's Statement of OUV and including details of the internal zonation system and its rationale to protect the property and its OUV;
8. Notes that the first phase of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on the cumulative development and environmental pressure on the property has been undertaken, requests furthermore the States Parties to seek early inputs and technical guidance from IUCN in undertaking the second phase of the SEA and encourage the States Parties to submit an International Assistance request to that effect;
9. Reiterates its request to the States Parties to summarize how the findings of

the analysis undertaken on the water flow, rainfall and upstream activity has informed management, and the measures subsequently taken to ensure water abstraction from the Zambezi River continues to be adapted in the face of climate change;

10. Requests moreover the States Parties to implement all other recommendations from the 2022 joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission, including to:

a) Ensure that tourism infrastructure development within the property and its buffer zone is consistent with the aim to enhance the protection of the OUV of the property and in line with the Joint Integrated Management Plan,

b) Develop a blueprint for infrastructure development in and around the property,

c) Harmonize the roles and responsibilities of the National Heritage Conservation Commission and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife for the management of the property in Zambia;

*11. Finally requests the States Parties to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2024**, 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 46th session in 2024.*