

THE EXTENSION OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF BEYOND 200 NAUTICAL MILES: AN ASSET FOR FRANCE

The issue of the extension of the French continental shelf is totally foreign to public opinion, unrecognised in political circles and generally absent from media seminars and symposia related to the sea, as well as from discussions on our country's maritime policy.

With the exception of a few specialists and the very close circle of individuals responsible for the implementation of the national programme of Reasonable Extension of the Continental Shelf (EXTRAPLAC) aimed at extending the French continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles, this issue is unknown.

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France occupies the second largest area of maritime space in the world with 11 million km² spread over all the oceans”

What is the extended continental shelf?

For France, which already occupies the second largest area of maritime space in the world, just behind the United States, with 11 million km² spread throughout all the oceans, owing to its Overseas Territories, this is the possibility of:

- extending its sovereign rights over the natural resources of the seabed and subsoil over nearly 2 million additional km²;
- acquiring sovereign rights for exploration and exploitation of natural resources in these new areas;
- increasing its geostrategic power.

Access to potential resources (hydrocarbons, hydrothermal sulphides, cobalt-rich crusts, polymetallic nodules, rare earth elements, natural hydrogen and biological resources) can be an asset to our country if it contributes

to a new model of sustainable development, in particular in the overseas territories.

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The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, “A Constitution for the Oceans”, and more specifically its article 76 thereof, allows coastal countries to extend their continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. With this aim, France has implemented the EXTRAPLAC programme.

In order to finalise the conquest of

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The extension of the continental shelf is the possibility for France to extend its sovereign rights over the natural resources of the seabed and the subsoil by nearly 2 million km²”

the extended continental shelf and to put in place a genuine maritime policy corresponding to the responsibilities and duties of France, the ESEC makes a certain number of recommendations.



Gérard Grignon

is a member of the Overseas group of the ESEC in respect of Saint Pierre and Miquelon. He is the President of the Delegation for Overseas Territories and he also sits on the economy and finance section. He is a former member of parliament and former president of the community of Saint Pierre and Miquelon.

Contact :

grignon.g@orange.fr
+33(0)1.44.43.60.36/35

COMPLETION OF THE EXTRAPLAC PROGRAMME

The council recommends the following:

- Identify and secure funding for the completion of the EXTRAPLAC programme
- File with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) a claim relative to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon before the end of 2013; the claim for French Polynesia and Clipperton early in 2014;
- Resolve diplomatic problems preventing the process of the Caledonian case;
- Establish and publish, at an appropriate rate and as soon as possible, the maritime boundaries on the basis of the recommendations issued by the CLCS;
- Strengthen the budget and human resources of the CLCS.

AN EXEMPLARY FRANCE WITH REGARDS TO A NEW MARITIME AREA

The Council recommends the following:

- To protect and monitor areas concerned by the extension of sovereign rights of France;
- To incorporate into the Law the provisions relating to the objectives of the Convention on biological diversity.

👉 A duty to acquire knowledge on marine resources and ecosystems

- To initiate a national, multidisciplinary and ambitious programme on the knowledge, identification and quantification of the resources of the seabed and subsoil of the extended continental shelf resources;
- To implement, in relation to the “Sea programme”, a scientific marine research programme with the goal of understanding the environment of the ecosystems and habitats of the extended continental shelf;
- To strengthen the financing of the Agency for Protected Marine Areas;
- To inform the European Union and associate it with the various programmes of the French maritime policy.

👉 Establishing responsibility with regard to the legal framework for exploration and exploitation activities

- To initiate a research program specialised in technology of methods, exploration equipment and gear and of seabed exploitation at great depths;
- To establish as soon as possible a legal framework for exploration, exploitation and scientific research activities on the extended continental shelf and in particular to reform the mining code to adapt it to the specific situation of the extended continental shelf in maritime areas.

👉 An obligation to involve and integrate the overseas territories into elaboration of the maritime policy of our country

- To strengthen the regional cooperation of Overseas territories in marine resources management;
- To inform and involve the executives of various Overseas communities in all operations and decisions that affect maritime policy. The agents of civil society should also be involved;
- To make arrangements that enable those territories to access new resources and to create concomitant economic activities. In order to do this, insofar as necessary, legislative and regulatory provisions relating to the competences of the Overseas authorities must be adapted and effectively applied;
- To consider the establishment of a training inventory for overseas youth in activities generated by the resources of the extended continental shelf;
- To plan a scheme of development and structural equipment relating to future activities generated by the resources of the extended continental shelf.

👉 The development of a truly ambitious maritime policy

- To develop a great law of the oceans to gather together all legislation and regulations defining and supporting the development of our country’s maritime policy;
- To annually establish a transversal policy document entitled “The Maritime Policy of France”;
- To organise an annual debate in Parliament on the theme of Maritime Policy of France, on the basis of a transversal policy document;
- To systematically include in the agenda of the CIMER meeting, which the ESEC wishes to be annual, the finalisation of the EXTRAPLAC programme.