



## ARGENTINA'S MOST EXTENSIVE LIMIT OUR FRONTIER WITH MANKIND

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SUCCESS OF A STATE POLICY IMPLEMENTED  
THROUGHOUT ALMOST 20 YEARS

### **Outer Limit of the Continental Shelf**

After 20 years of intense scientific, technical and legal work of an inter-disciplinary and inter-ministerial team led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship through the National Commission on the Outer Limit of the Continental Shelf (COPLA), Argentina achieved an important foreign policy success: on March 11th, 2016, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) adopted by consensus (with no negative votes) the Recommendations on the Argentine Submission of the outer limit of its continental shelf.

The Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) is a scientific body in charge of examining the information and data submitted by coastal States, which was created by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), based in United Nations Headquarters in New York and is made up of 21 international renowned experts.

### **Analysis of the Submission**

The outer limit of the Argentine continental shelf was submitted to the CLCS on April 21, 2009, and is the result of the work carried out by COPLA since 1997.

This submission consists of a Main Body, divided into six chapters, which are developed in 13 volumes and contains the scientific grounds for the demarcation of the outer limit of the Argentine continental shelf. Other 13 volumes and a digital database compile the supporting scientific and technical data. Finally, the most relevant bibliography is annexed in other 24 volumes. The Argentine continental shelf between the 200 nautical miles (M) line and the outer limit has a surface of approximately 1,782,500 km<sup>2</sup> that is equivalent to 48% of the emerged territory of Argentina.

In August, 2012, the analysis of the Argentine Submission began after the 7 member Subcommittee of the CLCS was established. The Subcommittee evaluated the pertinent information and data and then drafted the Recommendations that were submitted to the Plenary of the Commission for consideration in August, 2015.

Between August, 2012 and August, 2015, Argentina and the Subcommittee held 31 working sessions of a technical nature, during which Argentina answered questions about the supporting data, data processing and the geological and geophysical interpretation, among other issues.

The Commission considered the Argentine submission a "leading case", since Argentina became the first State to ever use all the elements provided for in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in the most favorable manner for the Coastal State and it was also the first State to successfully use geological arguments to determine the foot of the continental slope.

The Draft Recommendations reflect the several agreements achieved between Argentina and the Subcommittee throughout three years of intensive work, which either respect what was originally submitted or accept small modifications that Argentina afterwards presented and are beneficial to our country. During the working sessions there were also some discrepancies that arose mainly due to the specific characteristics of the passive volcanic margin on which there is scarce literature. Nevertheless, Argentina obtained through COPLA, a great amount of data that support the outer limit that was submitted.



## Data on the continental shelf

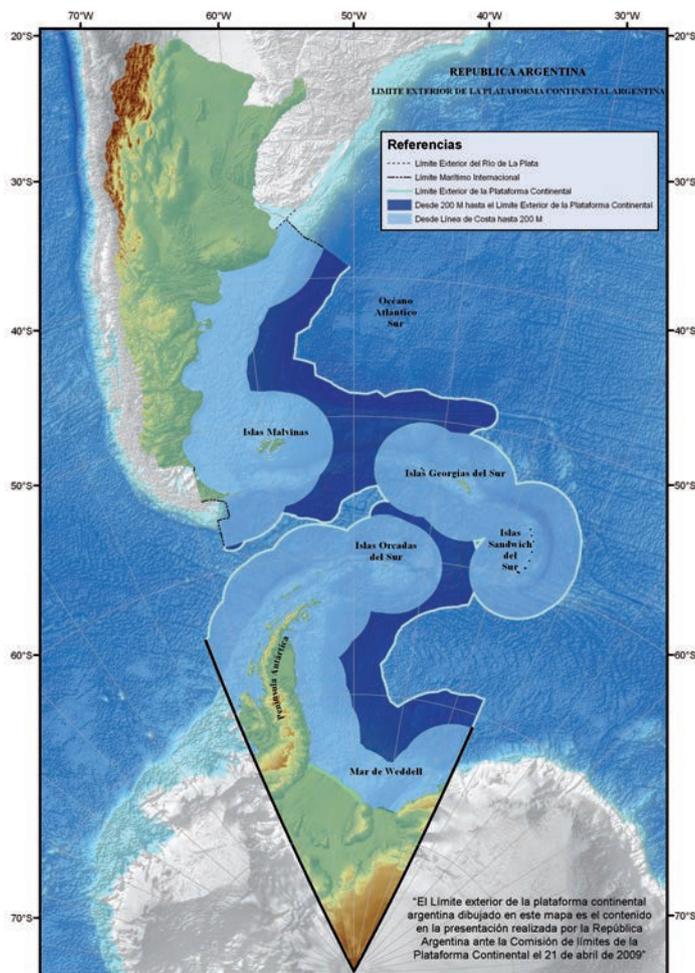
The Argentine Republic submitted the outer limit of the continental shelf of the entire Argentine territory: continental territory, the Malvinas Islands, Georgias del Sur Islands and Sandwich Islands and the Argentine Antarctica. It is made up of 6,336 points of WGS84 geographic coordinates.

The continental shelf that was submitted has a surface of approximately 1,782,500 km<sup>2</sup> between the 200 nautical mile line and the outer limit.

The continental shelf delineated by Argentina extends to 369 nautical miles (683 km<sup>2</sup>) in some sectors of the margin, in others to 350 nautical miles and, in those sectors where the continental margin does not extend so far, it still extends beyond 200 nautical miles.

Approximately 50% of the continental shelf beyond the 200 nautical miles reaches depths of over 5,500 meters and up to 6,400 meters. We have come a long way since the 200 meters continental shelf depth of the 50's.

It is important to point out that according to UNCLOS, ratified by 165 States plus the European Union, the coastal State exercises over the continental shelf sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources: minerals, hydrocarbons and sedentary species (lobster, mussels, scallops, etc.).





## **Recommendations**

On March 11th, 2016, the Plenary of the CLCS adopted the Recommendations on the Argentine submission of the outer limit of its continental shelf.

The Commission recommends that Argentina delineates the limit according to the points that were the result of the working sessions, therefore accepting the methodology applied by Argentina.

The Recommendations are not binding for the coastal State, nor is it necessary for the State to formally express its acceptance or dissent. Only the State can determine the outer limit of its continental shelf which, if established on the basis of these recommendations, shall be final and binding.

In the case of disagreement by the coastal State with the Recommendations of the Commission, the coastal State can make a revised submission or present a new one to the Commission within a reasonable time.

## **Malvinas Islands, Georgias del Sur Islands and Sandwich del Sur Islands**

In regard to the continental shelf appurtenant to Malvinas Islands, Georgias del Sur Islands and Sandwich del Sur Islands, the Submission and the Commission's performance have been positive for our country for the following reasons:

The Commission acknowledged the existence of a sovereignty dispute and for that reason, pursuant to UNCLOS and its Rules of Procedure; it did not analyze for the time being the limit in that zone. In fact it postponed the analysis until the sovereignty dispute is resolved. Nevertheless, all data presented by Argentina in relation to that area is being kept in deposit by the UN Secretariat.

The map of the continental shelf is the one presented in 2009, encompassing the continental shelf appurtenant to the continental territory, Malvinas Islands, Georgias del Sur Islands and Sandwich del Sur Islands, and Argentine Antarctica. The only effect of the postponement of the analysis of the area under dispute, is that the limit in that area shall not be final and binding for the international community until the dispute has been resolved.

## **Argentine Antarctica**

Argentina performed all the necessary tasks in order to submit the outer limit of the continental shelf in Antarctica. However, the Commission may not take any action, for the time being, with regard to the information in this Submission that relates to the continental shelf appurtenant to the Antarctic territory, due to the circumstances of the region south of latitude 60° S and the special territorial status of Antarctica under Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty. The same applies to the submissions presented by Australia and Norway regarding the continental shelf, appurtenant to Antarctica, which they claim. Meanwhile, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Chile have not made a submission yet, reserving the right to do in at a later stage.



## **National Commission on the Outer Limit of the Continental Shelf (COPLA)**

The National Commission on the Outer Limit of the Continental Shelf (COPLA) was created by Law 24.815. COPLA is an inter-ministerial commission under the direct authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, which presides over it and it is made up of a Member from the Naval Hydrographic Service and another one from the Ministry of Public Finance. The Members are assisted by a General Coordinator. The professionals that carry out COPLA's tasks are international law experts, geologists, oceanographers, geophysicists, hydrographers, cartographers, Geographic Information System experts, among others.

## **Next Steps**

More work lies ahead. Additional studies have to be carried out in order to make a revised presentation in a reasonable time in relation to two points in the north still pending demarcation, and also continue studies regarding the continental shelf appurtenant from Malvinas Islands, Georgias del Sur Islands and Sandwich del Sur Islands.

The demarcation of the outer limit of the continental shelf is a true example of a state policy in which a dedicated and very professional team has worked really hard for almost 20 years, through different Administrations, with a clear and identical objective, that is to reaffirm our presence, preserve our resources and reaffirm our sovereign rights over a strategic politic and economic area as important as the South Atlantic.

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