



An external and internal view of the work of the Commission

Walter R Roest

Twentieth Anniversary of the
Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf



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Twentieth Anniversary of the CLCS, by Walter R Roest

United Nations Headquarters, NY
10 March 2017

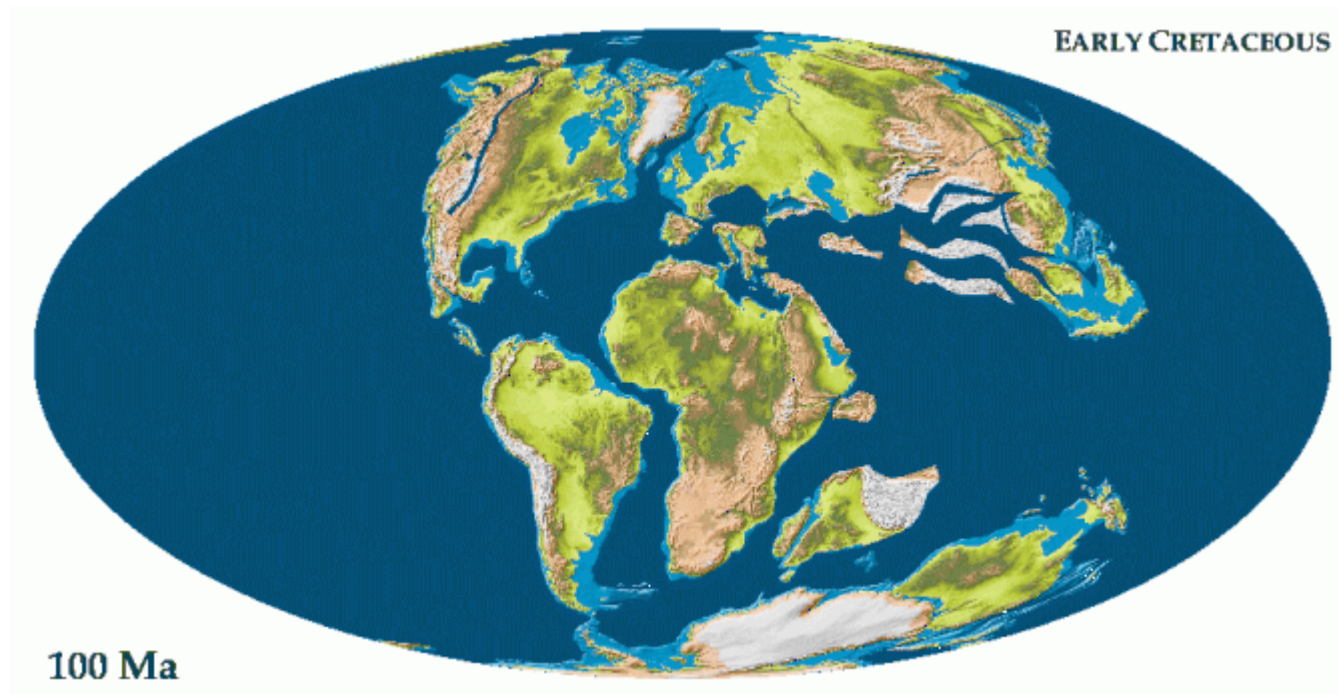


Overview

- Continental Margin Research
- The French Continental Shelf program
- Member of the French Delegation at the CLCS
- Member of the CLCS
- Conclusion



Continental Margin Research



Continental margins in many different settings (passive margins, active margins, oceanic islands, plateaus, ...) formed by many geological processes including plate tectonics

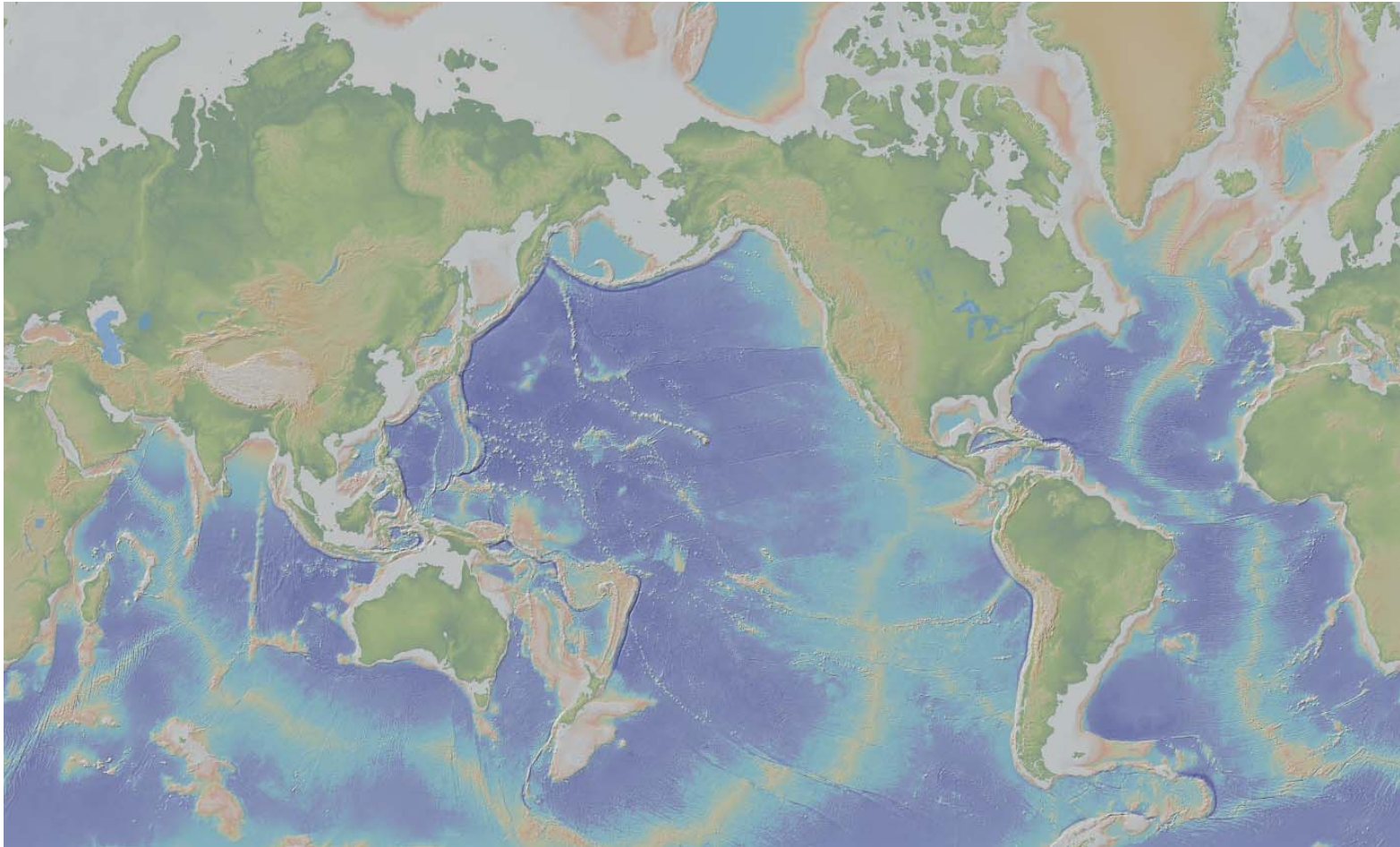
The French Continental Shelf program



- Submissions to the Commission have to be supported by technical and scientific data and information based on bathymetric, geomorphological and geological/geophysical studies
- Coastal States needed to respect a deadline of 10 years (from 1999, or after ratification) to present their submission(s) to the CLCS
- Many States established a national program to delineate the outer limits of their continental shelf. The French program is called EXTRAPLAC, and was established in 2002
- EXTRAPLAC is led by Ifremer, has several institutional partners and has an interdepartmental Steering Committee



The French Continental Shelf program



France had a potential for more than 10 Submissions

Seafloor Exploration



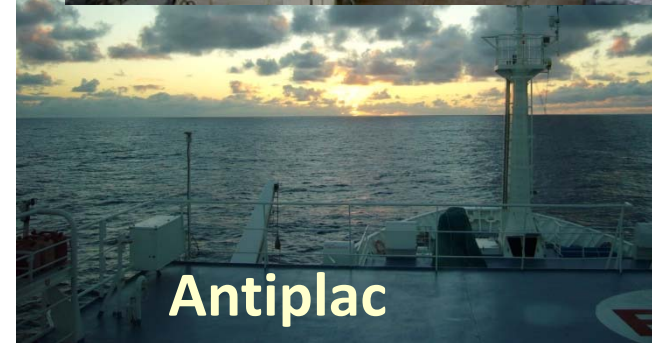
Guyaplac



Kerguelaplac



Polyplac

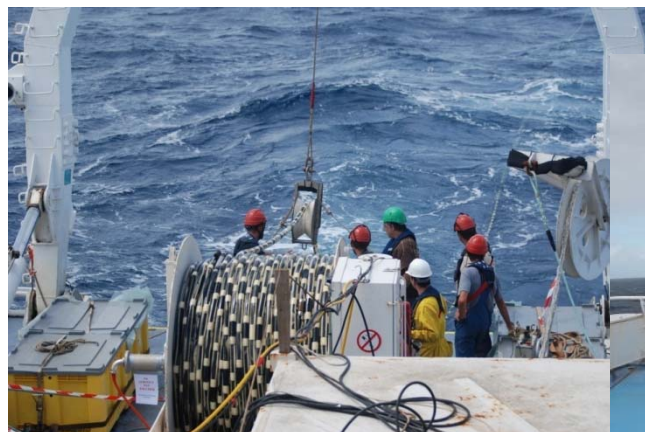


Antiplac

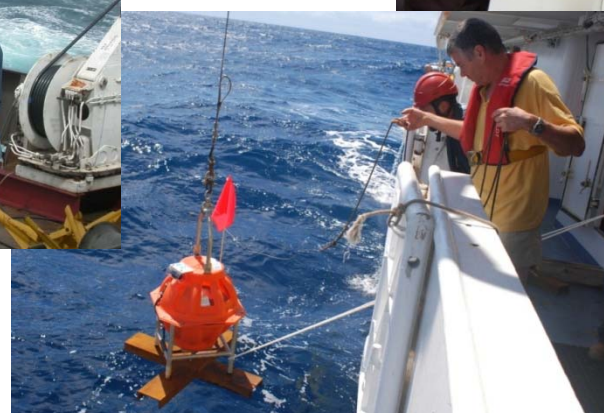
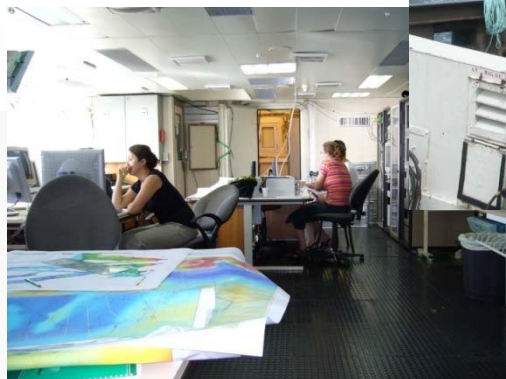


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Over 20 Oceanographic
Cruises on Marion Dufresne, Atalante, Suroît, ...
More than one year accumulated at sea

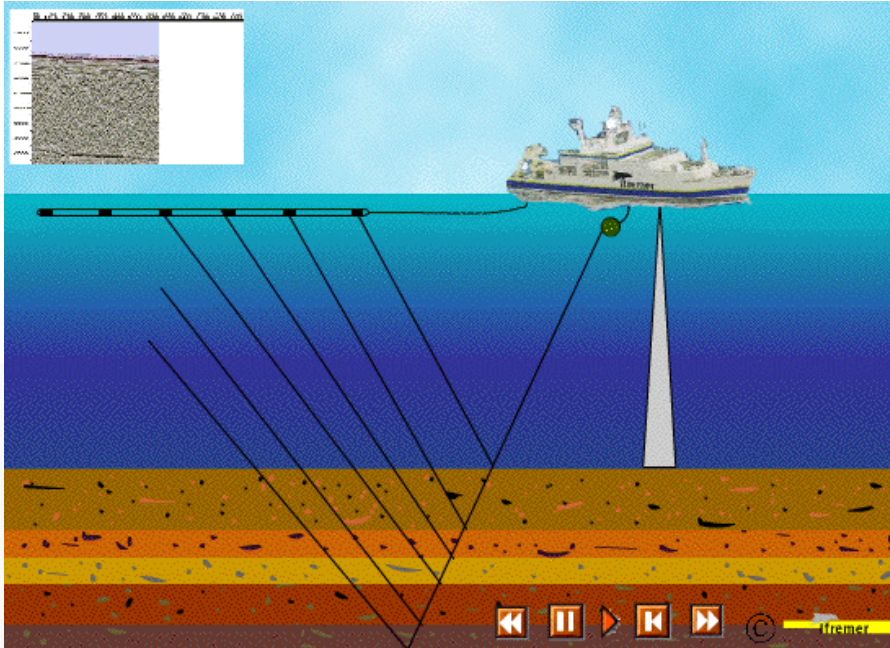
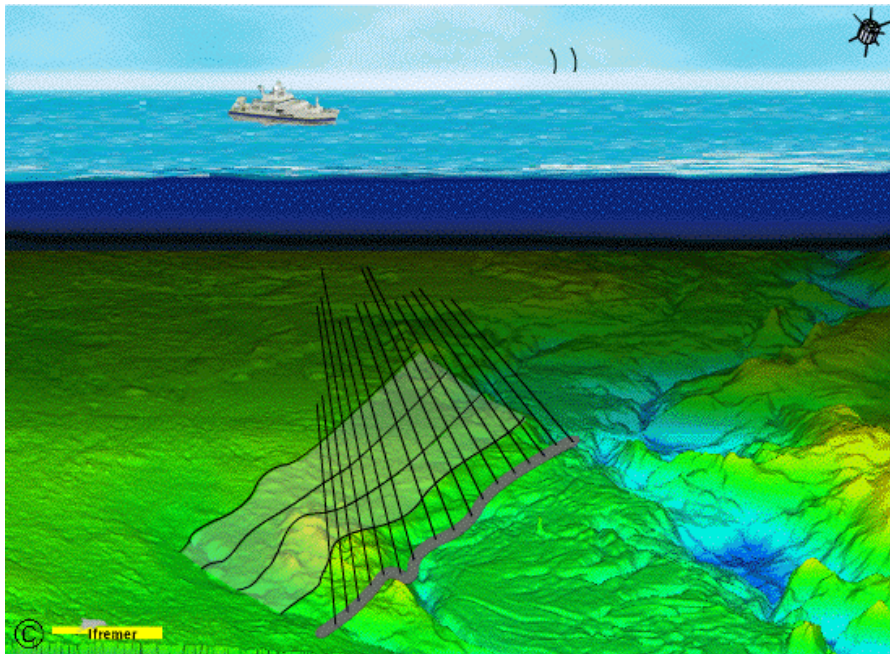


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Mapping the seafloor with Multi-Beam echosounder

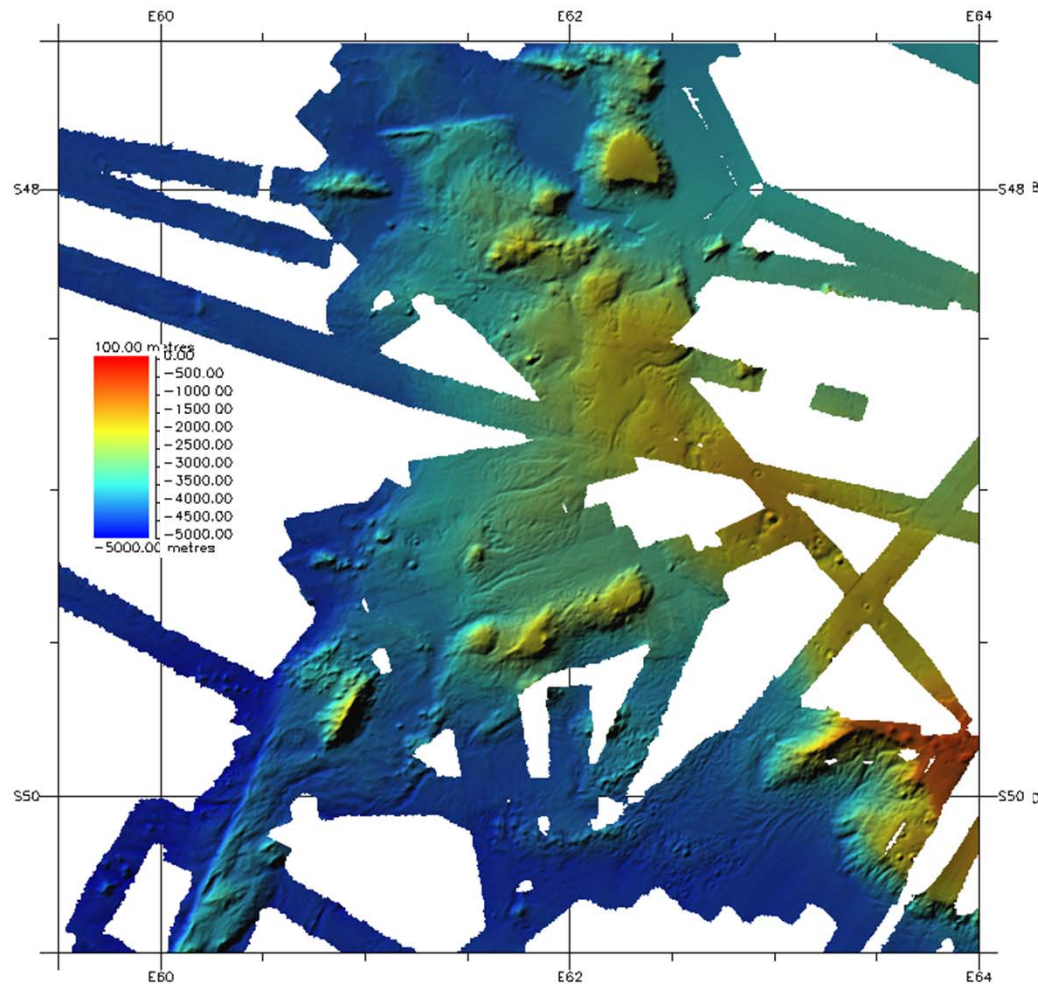


Ground Truth, dredging rock samples from the seafloor

Mapping the subsurface with seismic methods



The French Continental Shelf program



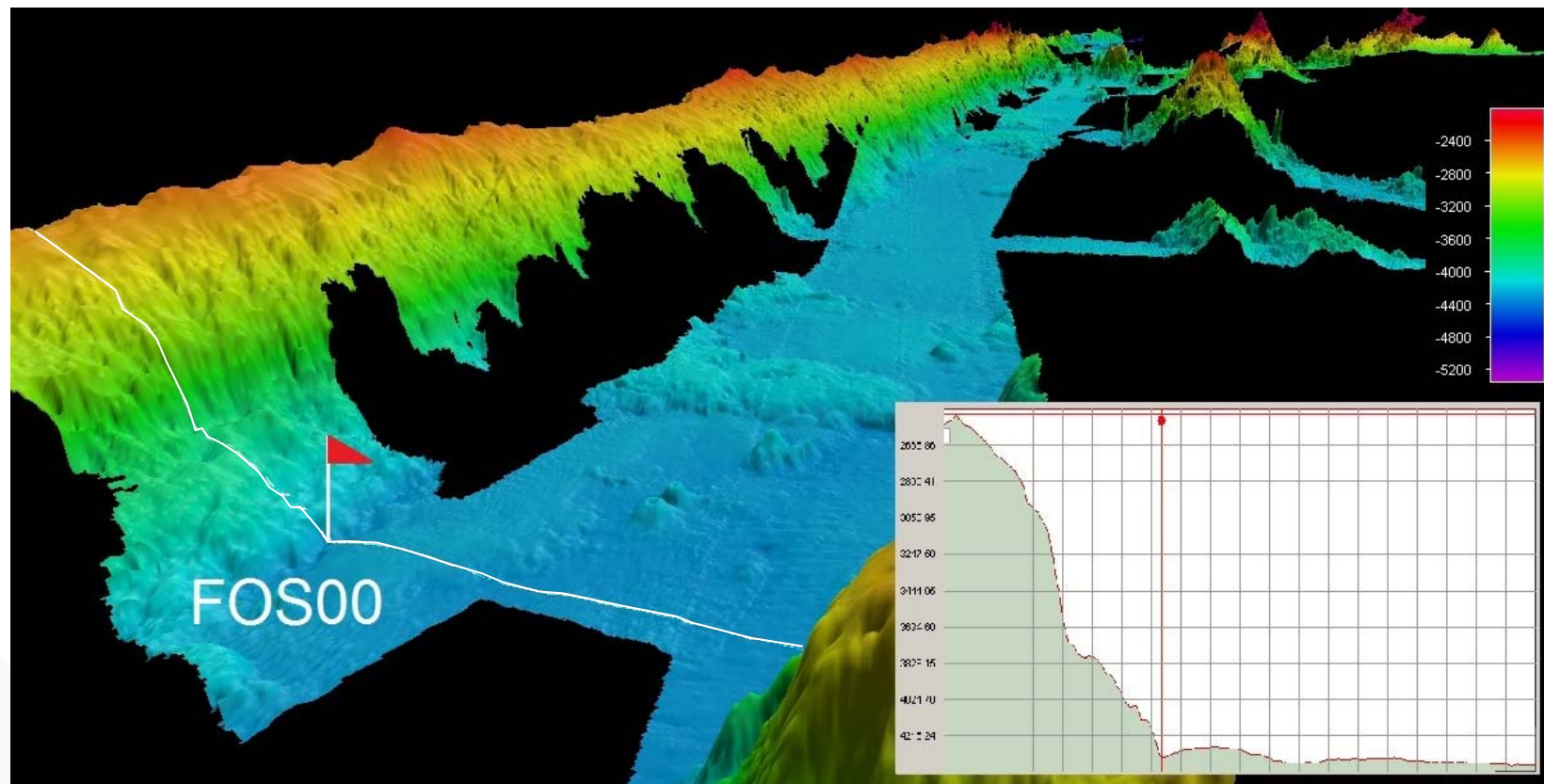
Example: Multi-Beam Bathymetric Data collected by R/V Marion Dufresne II, along the western margin of the Kerguelen Plateau, Indian Ocean

Multibeam Bathymetry acquired from vessels: high resolution but expensive to achieve complete coverage



The French Continental Shelf program

Example of new data and the determination of the Foot of the Continental Slope (Polyplac Cruise, French Polynesia)

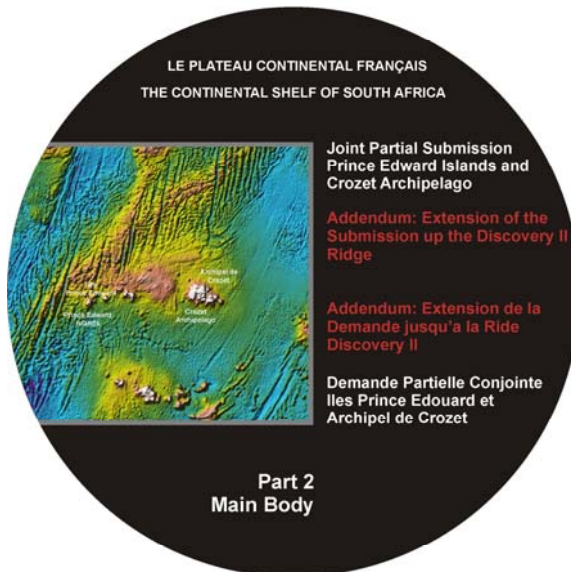




The French Continental Shelf program

Opportunity to collaborate and exchange with neighboring States

Submission
to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
pursuant to Article 76, paragraph 8
of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea



Demande
à la Commission des Limites du Plateau Continental
conformément à l'article 76, paragraphe 8
de la Convention des Nations Unies sur le Droit de la Mer

Joint Submission with South Africa in
respect of the Prince Edward Islands and
the Crozet Archipelago, Indian Ocean



Joint Submission with Tuvalu and
Tokelau (New-Zealand) in the area of
Wallis and Futuna and the Robby Ridge,
Pacific Ocean



The French Continental Shelf program

Scientific and Technical Guidelines of the Commission

During all preparations, the French shelf program heavily relied upon the Scientific and Technical Guidelines

- Requirements for the desktop study
- Search for existing data, identify gaps
- Design of the surveys, data types and quality
- Conduction of all analyses in accordance with the guidelines
- Drafting of the Submission document

The Scientific and Technical Guidelines are extremely useful for States that make submissions



The French Continental Shelf program

Each Submission prepared consists of three parts:

1. Executive Summary
2. Main Body, descriptive part
3. Scientific data and information



The French Continental Shelf

Partial Submission
to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
pursuant to Article 76, paragraph 8
of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
in respect of the areas of the French Antilles and the Kerguelen Islands

Part 1
Executive Summary
English Translation of the French Original

Presentation of the Submission to the plenary of the Commission
Interactions between the Delegation and the Subcommittee



Member of the French Delegation

Interactions with the Commission

- Meetings are in private unless otherwise decided.
- The Rules specify meetings of the Subcommittee which allow for State participation, which include:
 - Consultations between the Delegation and the Subcommittee during the examination of the submission, including the presentation of additional data and information
 - Comprehensive presentation by the Subcommittee of its views and general conclusions arising from the examination of part or all of the submission to the Delegation
 - Meeting(s) during which the coastal State shall have the opportunity to respond to the presentations and requests of the Subcommittee



Member of the French Delegation



Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay

Outer limits were modified as a result of the applicable constraint in a joint Submission. This led to an addition in the Rules of Procedure about appropriate combinations of foot of the continental slope points and constraint lines

First ever Joint Submission

- FISU (France, Ireland, Spain and UK)
- The Subcommittee met for 11 weeks during six sessions over a period of two and a half years. During that time 15 meetings were held with the Delegation
- The Subcommittee posed sixteen questions in writing
- During the course of the examination of the joint partial Submission, the joint Delegation provided additional material consisting of eighteen documents (with enclosures), sixteen presentations as well as CDs/DVDs with additional digital data and information



Member of the French Delegation

Partial Submission in respect of the Antilles and Kerguelen Islands

- The Subcommittee met during 4 sessions over less than two years.
- The Subcommittee held eight meetings with the Delegation of France, it prepared seven documents with observations and questions, and delivered seven presentations covering the entire partial submission
- During the course of the examination of the partial Submission, the Delegation of France provided eight documents, mainly in response to the observations and questions by the Subcommittee. It gave nine presentation, and provided additional digital data and information

Member of the French Delegation

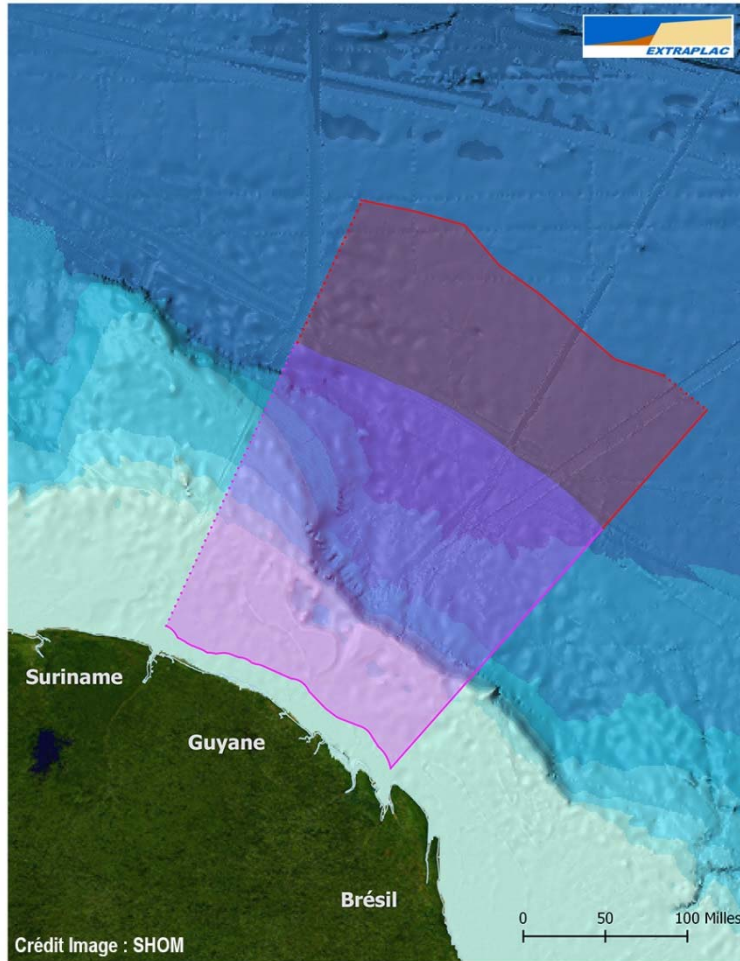


Partial Submission in respect of the Antilles and Kerguelen Islands

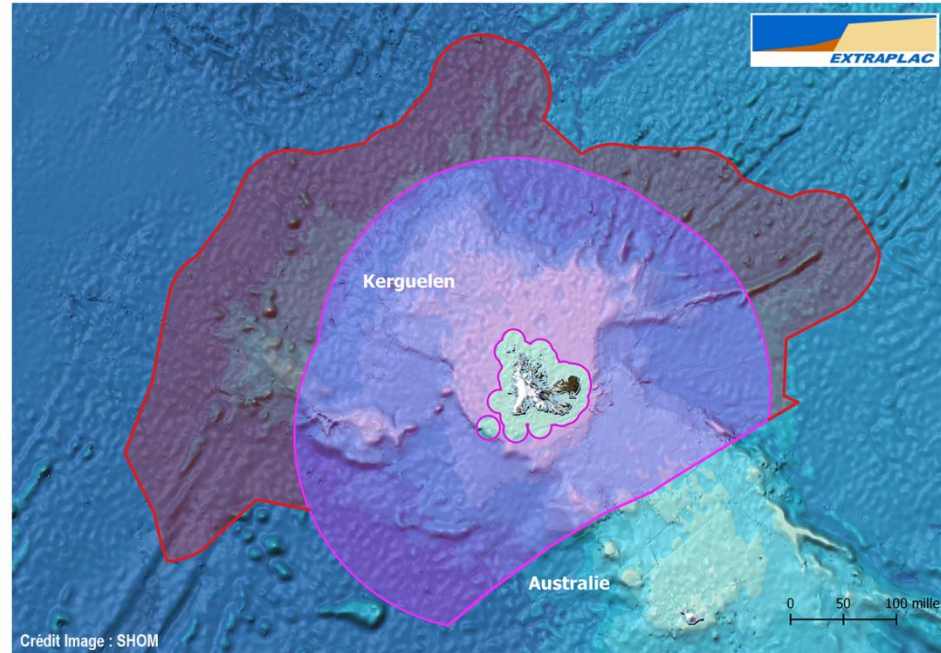
- France accepted the recommendations for the Kerguelen Islands and the Antilles, including all changes to the outer limits that were recommended
- Although France maintains that the data it had provided was sufficient to demonstrate that the Gallieni Ridge was a natural component of the continental margin of the Kerguelen Islands, it decided to implement the recommendation to use the 350 nautical mile constraint. One of the reasons was that additional data acquisition in this remote area would be extremely costly.



Member of the French Delegation



French Guiana



Kerguelen Islands

Four decrees published on 25 September 2015 in the Official Journal of the French Republic establish the outer limits of the Continental shelf off the coast of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, New Caledonia and the Kerguelen Islands, based on the Recommendations of the Commission



Views from the outside

Conclusion

- UNCLOS Article 76 provided tremendous opportunities for exploration of the continental margins and adjacent basins world wide, contributing to a significant increase in scientific knowledge
- The CLCS process, interesting and complex. Subcommissions sometimes ask for further explaining their views
- As a member of a Delegation, I would have liked to have more the reasons, and more guidance on how to proceed related to scientific interpretation and technical matters
- However, overall, the process seems fair and balanced
- France has been adapting its outer limits as a result of the interactions with the Subcommissions, and the recommendations received thus far
- The assistance from the Secretariat to the Delegation was very helpful



Member of the CLCS

Views from the inside



- Nomination by France in 2012
- Election process; meeting 150 State parties in three weeks
- Spending 21 weeks at the UN Headquarters in New York is sometimes difficult in view of other professional obligations. Financing the long stay in New York can be a challenge





Member of the CLCS

Subcommission work

- Extremely interesting, multidisciplinary work on complex scientific and technical submissions in a multicultural environment; working language is English
- Interactions with Delegations of coastal States
- In many cases, different scientific interpretations may be acceptable. Arriving at a conclusion at the level of the Subcommission can sometimes be difficult, and requires time
- Conditions of work are not easy:
 - Working in a common space during 5 to 7 weeks at the time
 - Significant improvements have been made to our working space and comfort within the DOALOS premises



Member of the CLCS

Commission work

- Formal part of the work of CLCS members
- Plenary presentations by coastal States
- Establishing Subcommissions, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure
- Discussing draft recommendations prepared by Subcommissions, and approve them in accordance with the Rules
- Complex scheduling of consideration of Submissions by several Subcommissions, in parallel



Member of the CLCS

Views from the inside

- Each submission is different, examination requires getting familiar with the geological setting of the area of the Submission, which can be very complex
- The quantity and quality of the data and information that forms the basis for submissions is variable
- Nevertheless, the (Sub-)Commission needs to assure a consistent approach
- Reaching consensus at the level of the Subcommittee and the Commission is time consuming
- Dealing with many submissions in parallel has complicated our work
- What advice would I give to new members?



Conclusion

Views from outside and inside

- Honestly, being inside is a lot more stressful and demanding than being outside!
- The examination of Submissions is a scientific approach aiming to arrive at the best possible understanding of the continental margin of the coastal State. Even though Delegations and the Commission may have a different perspective....

... both work towards a common goal, namely to facilitate the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelves of coastal States, in accordance with UNCLOS