

## **Does Ascension Island have an outer continental shelf?**

by

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### **ABSTRACT**

Continental shelf beyond 200M associated with oceanic ridges has been a difficult subject during the negotiation of the UN Convention and now for States Parties and the CLCS alike.

The UK's submission for Ascension Island is one of several for outer continental shelf areas associated with oceanic islands situated on or near mid-ocean ridges, and the first to be considered by the CLCS. None of these oceanic islands has a conventional continental shelf, slope and rise in the sense of the Convention.

The UK's position is that Ascension Island is an integral component of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) and that its natural prolongation fundamentally extends to, and along the MAR. As a consequence the MAR is included as part of the continental margin of the island and may be regarded as a "submarine ridge" or "submarine elevation" in the sense of Article 76, and not part of the deep ocean floor.

The UK picked foot of the slope positions in the east of the island along the western edge of the axial valley of the MAR, and in the west where the westward dipping flank of the MAR meets the deep abyssal plain of the western south Atlantic. The FOS picks in the west all fall beyond the 350 nautical mile constraint. The UK maintains that the data show that Ascension Island passes the test of appurtenance and is therefore entitled to delineate its continental margin beyond 200 nautical miles.

The Commission however considered that Ascension Island's edifice sits directly on deep ocean floor and that the only credible location for the base of slope zone is at the base of the insular slope and not in the locations selected by the UK. On this basis Ascension Island has no continental shelf beyond 200M.

Discussions between the UK delegation and the Sub-Commission focussed on several key areas of interpretation of the Convention. The main areas of discussion were the definition of deep ocean floor, the role of natural prolongation, and the relative merits of morphological and geological data. These discussions revealed significant differences in opinion regarding interpretation and implementation of Article 76

This paper will summarise the details of the Ascension Island submission and review the analysis and recommendations of the Commission, in particular the distinction between continental margin and deep ocean floor.