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**BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE  
FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

**BU-DBP**

**Group of specialists - European Diploma**

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**Port Cros National Park  
(France)**

**ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL  
with a view to awarding the European Diploma**

*Expert report  
by Joan MAYOL  
(Majorca - Spain)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Port-Cros national park (France), founded in 1963 by Decree No. 63-1235 of 14 December 1963, is proposed for the award of the European Diploma.

The application was submitted to the Group of Specialists for Protected Areas at the session from 6 to 8 March 1995. In accordance with the regulations of the European Diploma, a joint visit by an expert and a representative of the Secretariat was decided.

On 28 March 1996 the Council of Europe Secretariat asked me to make an on-the-spot appraisal in July.

It is noted that an initial application was submitted by the French Government in 1978, which the committee decided to defer at the time because of the need to improve the national park's marine protection.

## II. DETAILS OF THE VISIT

On 1, 2 and 3 July 1996 Ms Françoise Bauer (Council of Europe) and myself visited the park with the assistance of Mr Martí Mayol, geographer and diver, who was able to make dives for us in the most interesting locations and give us exact information as well as comparisons with the sea bed in the Balearic Islands, of which he has a very thorough knowledge (cf. appendix).

The tour was accompanied by the park technicians, the Director Mr E Lopez, the Deputy Director Mr L Olivier, who ably assisted and informed us, Mr P Robert the chief technician for educational and marine questions, the sector head Mr A Faure, and other park officials. In all, we received information from 8 or more park staff members.

We also had discussions with Drs R Loisel and JG Harmelin, chairing the "land" and "sea" groups of the park's Scientific Committee. The day of our arrival coincided with a board meeting which enabled us to see for ourselves the interest taken by the park administration in the preservation of its natural heritage. Contacts with landowners in certain parts of the island assured us of their excellent relations with the park. Other scientists or specialists were contacted later for second opinions.

We are most grateful for the help and hospitality which we received while visiting the park.

## III. DESCRIPTION OF THE PARK

The description of the park given in the application file is very detailed. Further particulars may be obtained from the bibliographic and documentary references listed at the end of this report; Port-Cros is among those European nature areas having a comprehensive list of publications. I shall therefore make a very succinct analysis highlighting just a few details with evident bearing on the committee's decision.

## 1. Description of natural and heritage features

The park protects the entire island of Port-Cros (675 ha) and its coastal waters (1,800 ha). The two form a geographically coherent whole consisting of a complete land mass and a representative sea area. Virtually all the surrounding sea bottom is protected from the shallows to the 50 m depth mark. The island and the photic marine zone have "national park" status, exemplifying the integrated conservation of a functional biological unit.

The island's rock formation is schist with quite a variety of other material, forming a rugged terrain. Agriculture has long been abandoned and the island is now almost entirely wooded. The terrain, exposures, microclimate and substratum determine a plant cover with minor differentiation, but predominantly oak woods which are supplanting an earlier pine forest. The transition between these two associations is not gentle; the generalised fall of the old pine trees necessitates a conservation management approach which will be further discussed. The island's plant life derives its unique value from a small number of southern or endemic plant species.

Land-dwelling fauna is limited by insularity. A few herpetological rarities are noteworthy (Tyrrhenian painted frog *Discoglossus sardus*, gecko, Hermann's tortoise), and likewise the importance of the sea birds (shearwaters in particular). Certain chiroptera are also of international significance. It is appropriate to mention that the species of European importance listed in the application include migratory birds which only alight on the island (not conferring conservation value) or species long extinct which cannot be regenerated in situ, as for example the monk seal. Plainly, the park's protection can do nothing towards the preservation of these species.

The sea bottom is of striking importance: a *Posidonia* bed in very good condition (seldom the case, alas, along the coast of the European mainland), coralligenous communities, sea fans, a mother-of pearl ground, etc. It is the oldest marine park in the Mediterranean, where the concept of "reserve effect" on the fish population was described for the first time. The marine invertebrates are also remarkably rich and interesting.

Historically, the islands formed open frontiers for centuries, hence the need for fortification. Five large forts give the landscape a vigorous stamp and are of outstanding architectural and historical value.

The natural and historical landscape is of very high quality, with no significant disfigurement (a single antenna was observed on the island). Scenic aspects feature prominently in the management arrangements. The signposting of the park is very modern and well integrated. Levant, another island in the group visible from Port-Cros, is in stark contrast: eyesores such as indiscriminately scattered houses, antennae and obtrusive firebreaks bear witness to the way Port-Cros could have gone had it not been protected by the national park. The assessment is unequivocally positive.

## 2. The park regulations

The park was founded by Decree No. 63-1235 of 14 December 1963. In addition to this statute, several regulations concerning the park should be mentioned: 13 or more orders relating to the port, fishing, traffic, etc. (see Appendix I). Amalgamation of the regulations could no doubt be contemplated, as this profusion of rules is becoming too complex for the park officials as well as its visitors and users. Certain details of the regulations could be rectified, and greater specificity would enhance their effectiveness.

With regard to the marine regulations (see Appendix II) there are two areas closed to navigation (the Posidonia barrier reef and the Rascas reserve). It is forbidden at all times to cast anchor off the southern beach and along the sea front from the port to La Galère point. At Bagaud there are two anchorages alternately open and closed at five-year intervals as part of a Posidonia "set-aside" experiment. Fishing from the shore is not permitted, and recreational fishing is to be limited to a small sector near the port. Furthermore, all fishing will be banned in the areas designated exclusively for observation diving.

Because it is of special interest, though not legally enforceable in the strict sense, let us mention the "Diving Partnership Charter" with local scuba clubs laying down ethical rules for this activity, whose educational potential can definitely foster conservation.

### **3. Working methods: budget and staff**

The national park has a very large staff totalling about 68, temporaries included, plus 9 others employed on the island for the summer. The annual budget is 8 million francs for staff expenditure and 5-6 million for capital outlay. Having regard to the situation of the park, we found this sufficient to ensure sound conservation.

The finance is derived from public funds but also from the proceeds of boat access permits (for use of the port administered by the park). There are plans to levy a new 7% access surcharge on the cost of the permits in future as a direct contribution to the preservation of the park.

The park, it should be noted, also administers Porquerolles island and Cap Lardier, owned by the Coastal Conservancy. This case of a public foundation operating beyond its boundaries for conservation purposes sets a constructive and valuable example. The multiple responsibility borne helps to account for the disproportion of the staff complement (77 persons) with the number working in the actual park (4 permanent appointees on the island and 20 or more casual employees). Perhaps consideration should also be given to the point that systems invariably tend to continue growing with decreasingly functional structures: should this tendency be rectified?

### **4. Public use of the park**

Port-Cros is both a settled and a visited area. In winter the population is 30 or so, and some 300 in the tourist season. There are over 95,000 visitors to the island. Yachting, swimming and rambling are the chief recreational activities.

Diving is a major activity; some 12,000 observation dives are estimated to have been made, under the responsibility of clubs and businesses in the region.

The facilities offered by the park to visitors consist of access to the reception centre at the port, a fine exhibition concerning the park at Estissac fort, and quite comprehensive signposting along the trails (30 km of marked footpaths). The "underwater itinerary", a marine adaptation of guided tours, is most remarkable. Considerable effort is devoted to it, with high dividends in terms of success and quality. As Professor Ros said regarding the school pupils from all over Europe who visit the island, "the delight of discovering the Mediterranean sea bed forms the climax to a wonderful week during which the young people have become acquainted with the woods, the beach and the local history. Discovery of nature, whether on land or under water, is one of the park's principal activities [...]".

The educational work is indeed significant, with an annual turnover of some 1,000 pupils from different countries of Europe. At the time of our visit, an Italian group was staying in one of the two forts.

The publications on offer to visitors, dealing with natural, cultural and other aspects, are reasonably complete.

## V. NOTES ON THE PARK MANAGEMENT

### 1. Wardenship

The park officers and boats carry out effective surveillance. According to our information, there are few reports of infringements (three or four per year). An effective means has been found to validate the wardens' oath of service for offshore as well as land-based operations. The possibility of occasional poaching exists (spear fishing at night) but would seem to be more a police matter. We found the situation in order.

### 2. Biological conservation

From its inception, the park has been especially attentive to the forest fires which pose a major risk in Mediterranean regions. Should the need arise, intervention by helicopter within five minutes is assured. Care of the forest, on the principle of natural vegetation growth, takes account of fire danger and a proper balance between management and conservation is achieved. There is room for improvement only as regards the unduly artificial placement of the cut wood.

Preservation of emblematic species has been developing for several years. We learned of initiatives for the benefit of seabirds (shearwaters), the painted toad, etc. A scheme to rid the islets of rats commences this year, and measures against the *Carpobrotus edulis* invasion are being applied on Bagaud islet. A patch of Mediterranean *Caulerpa taxifolia* (the prolific green algae) which caused great concern was completely destroyed last year. In fact every year dozens of volunteer divers have a field day which ensures effective surveillance on the spot.

An improvement might be recommended in the control of feral cats (recently estimated at some 300 on the island) and of the yellow-legged herring gull which we found very prevalent. This over-population may be a factor impeding the implantation of Eleorora's falcon or even the osprey. Another species possibly in need of control is the pine caterpillar.

### 2. Cleaning operations

The beaches and the main pathways are cleaned daily. Refuse is compacted and sent to the mainland, thereby ending a dumping problem which could not be resolved in situ. The significant effort yields a satisfactory result.

Sewage is treated, albeit incompletely, and it is planned to improve the system.

### 3. Park infrastructure

The park has a mainland office acting as information centre, the administrative and reception centre on the island itself, and an exhibition area in Estissac fort. Boats and vehicles ensure effective upkeep and surveillance, fire-spotting included. The fixed and mobile equipment is thus adequate to all routine tasks.

#### 4. Scientific research

Port-Cros is an outstanding example of linkage between scientific research and conservation in a nature area: an 18 member scientific committee is officially established and has a specified role in the park's management. The importance of the scientific knowledge acquired at Port-Cros is demonstrated by the publication of a scientific journal since 1975 (16 volumes, over 150 studies on subjects including fauna and flora, terrestrial and marine habitats, history and pollution), in addition to works published elsewhere. Few parks in Europe possess such an extensive and authoritative corpus of scientific documentation.

The progress of scientific work, as can be seen from the index of publications, is very marked: starting with a virtually random distribution of work (probably due to the researchers' personal interests), there is progressive specialisation in a number of main avenues. The ever more explicit objective is to concentrate research on the "exemplary" species which indicate the ecological situation. The desirable end result of this approach would be a monitoring system compatible with other Mediterranean areas, which would vastly increase its effectiveness, and continuation of long-term research - eg the monitoring of the sea-urchin population - to ensure its future value.

#### 5. Fishing

Commercial fishing has had an insignificant impact to date as the system of conciliation boards applying in southern France ensures restricted exploitation. It is planned to dispense with this system in a few years' time under the Community arrangements. More stringent park regulations are contemplated to guard against any increase in catches on the fishing grounds. The condition of local fish populations is kept under surveillance by selective checking of the sizes taken, which indicates a distinctly positive situation for the time being.

### VI. REMARKS CONCERNING THE EUROPEAN IMPORTANCE OF THE NATIONAL PARK AND THE DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

The features of the park considered most remarkable in European terms are as follows:

1. European importance of the natural heritage, discernible in the forest cover (oak wood supplanting old pine forest, exemplifying the potential developments in other Mediterranean localities if fire is properly controlled in future) and in the marine environment (Posidonia bed, coralligenous community, mother-of-pearl, etc). Being the oldest marine reserve in the Mediterranean makes it especially significant.
2. Scientific quality: already mentioned in para. 5. Two points should be stressed: the intrinsic value of the publications produced (especially on the Posidonia, the reserve effect of marine conservation and the study of spray-borne pollution) but also the standard-setting value of research/management co-ordination, in which Port-Cros sets an example of collaboration and participation for Europe.
3. Cultural, scenic and recreational quality. The image of a "wild" island with its imposing forts and protected coast is something very rare and precious in the modern-day context of the northern Mediterranean. The quality is indisputable, as evidenced by the flow of visitors.

4. Protection arrangements: national park status ensures effective protection, particularly with the backing of the official orders (see para. 2 and Appendix II). Marine protection is open to improvement, and certain recommendations have accordingly been drawn up.

## VII. CHANGE IN THE SITUATION SINCE THE 1978 REPORT

As mentioned above, in 1978 the park was the subject of a similar proposal to the present one. On that occasion the Secretariat representative, Dr P Baum, said: "1. - *The European importance of Port-Cros National Park is undeniable ...* 3.- *The maritime zone of the Park remains subject to regulations which were undoubtedly sufficient when the Park was opened but no longer guarantee long-term conservation of the coastal biocenoses because of the growing pressure of marine tourism ...* 4.- *... the granting of the European Diploma ... should be postponed until the authorities take ... protection measures ...*". The changes which have occurred should therefore be reviewed.

1. Mooring restrictions. The greater part of the north coast (sheltered and suitable for marine tourism) is now under protection; anchoring is banned along this coast, but unrestricted in the harbour and Port Man bay. Naturally matters could be (and we think ought to be) improved because the pressure on Port Man is obviously too great. The first step should be to impose time limits and introduce a system of mooring buoys, for example, to eliminate the impact caused by anchoring.

2. Creation of reserves, declaring sectors of sea bed temporary reserves and the Gabinière reserve are initiatives which have very significantly enhanced marine protection. It should be mentioned that the marker buoy system is very distinct compared to other parks in the Mediterranean without fixed navigational aids.

3. The impending schemes to separate diving and fishing activities are highly constructive and might be improved by other measures suggested at the end of this report.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

From our analysis of the documentation, field visit and perusal of earlier reports, we conclude:

- Port-Cros Park is a protected area unique in Europe by virtue of its high-quality biological values, heritage, landscape and seascape;
- the state of preservation of Port-Cros National Park is most satisfactory and evolving positively. The marine protection aspects have considerably improved over the last few years.

## IX. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The national park could further improve its state of preservation. We accordingly suggest the following recommendations or conditions:

1. improve the protection status of the park's marine sector through the following specific measures: **use of Portman bay** (where mooring facilities are needed to obviate anchoring; restrictions on number of boats or time in harbour to avoid crowding; redefinition of the protected bands to safeguard the Posidonia). **Extension of the non-anchorage areas**, especially on the southern side. **Effective regulation of diving** in place of the present honour system, with demarcation of the authorised seabed areas as planned. **Effective regulation of**

**commercial fishing** and measures to keep the pressure under control in the immediate future. **Monitoring of water quality around the island**, eg by extending the "musselwatch" applied in the region;

2. maintain the park management methods, which will be reinforced if **development and management plans** are approved as envisaged by the end of 1996. **The plans should be in force by the end of 1997;**

3. improve the **visual qualities of the port**, in particular by reduction of the advertising signboards. Although the status as a classified site is already high, it can be further improved, especially in view of the classification as a national park and a special reserve;

4. the park regulations are on the whole adequate and in order, but a revision and unification of the texts would be an advantage;

5. the visual aspects of forest management could be improved by distributing the dead wood more naturally, while still ensuring that fire danger is reduced to a minimum;

6. research efforts should be maintained, keeping the focus on conservation-related aspects with, if possible, standardisation at international level and closer co-operative relations with other Mediterranean countries.



DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

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|-----------------|--|
| SN-R-DP (79) 18 | On-the-spot appraisal of Port-Cros National Park (France) in 1978                            |
| PE-S-ZP (91) 48 | Resolution (91) 61 on the regulations for the European Diploma                               |
| PE-S-ZP (96) 59 | Award of the European Diploma: proposed criteria to be applied when considering applications |
| PE-S-ZP (6) 55  | Application for the award of a European Diploma to Port-Cros National Park (France)          |

**CONTACTS ESTABLISHED**

On the spot

Mr E Lopez, Park Director  
Dr L Olivier, Deputy Director  
Mr P Robert, Senior Technician, Port-Cros National park  
Mr A Faure, Head of Sector on Port-Cros  
Dr JG Harmelin, marine ecology specialist  
Dr R Loisel, land ecology specialist

After the journey

Dr I Guyot, botanist and ornithologist  
Mr X Montbaillu, Secretary General of Medmaravis, France  
Mr R Zotier, ornithologist working for the park (faxed 4 pages)  
Dr M Zabala, marine biologist having worked at Port-Cros and the Medas Islands (Costa Brava, Catalonia)

### COMMENTS BY THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat's representative approves the content of the expert's report. The visit made it possible to review the progress achieved since the deferral of the application in 1979 and to certify that Port-Cros National Park meets the following standards:

- European importance = scientific and cultural significance (military architecture, archaeological heritage);
- more stringent protection arrangements for the marine environment - marked progress with organisation and control of yachting; the park administers the port and has authority over all land-based activities;
- rigorous management aimed at maintaining the biological quality and variety of the habitat while catering for discovery activities and for economic and social use compatible with its conservation, even though such use may appear *prima facie* incompatible with the idea of a protected zone;
- very serious scientific monitoring: management relying on numerous studies and programmes concerning exemplary species or indicator species (sea perch, etc.) and human activities and disturbances (anchoring methods, impact of divers' flippers, etc);
- partnership policy (approach based on "contract" rather than "constraint") pursued with all users of the marine environment, in keeping with the intention not to regard the park as self-contained but allow public access so that its assets are appreciated and respected by the public;
- good relations with the 30 residents of Port-Cros hamlet and consensus among landowners to keep the legacy of their forebears intact and assist in its preservation;
- the park's international activities: for six years the National Park has been committed to a policy of outreach to the Mediterranean, and thus prompted the creation in 1990 of MEDPAN (Network of Mediterranean marine and coastal reserve managers).

The park is at once a "testimony" to the former state of the Mediterranean coast before degradation set in, and a model for land-use patterns.

## APPENDIX I

## PORT-CROS NATIONAL PARK

## CHRONOLOGY OF REGULATORY DEVELOPMENT

## MARINE ENVIRONMENT

1963	Founding Decree No. 63-1235 of 14/12/63	Prohibition of spear-fishing and trawling
1979	APM No. 18/79 of 10/07/79	Creation of the underwater itinerary
1981	February 1981	Commissioning of staff for maritime work
1981	APM No. 49/81 of 21/08/81	Marking plan
1981	AP of 23/06/81	Port franchise
1982	AP of 12/05/82	Port policing regulations
1985	APM No. 51/85 of 02/10/85	Creation of prohibited area (artificial reefs)
1988	APM No. 84/88 of 08/12/88	Anchoring ban; speed limit
1990	APR no 218 of 14/05/90	Prohibition of angling within 50 m of the shore (renewed annually up to 93)
1990	AM No. 120 of 06/08/90	New port policing regulations
1990	AM No. 122 of 06/08/90	Restriction on size of passenger craft
1991	APR No. 50/91 of 24/09/91	Renewal of APR No. 51/85 of 02/10/85 (artificial reefs)
1993	APR No. 723 of 22/12/93	Renewal of APR 218/90 (valid for 2 years)
1994	07/07/94	Signature of Diving Charter
1995	APM No. 9/95 of 06/06/95	Traffic/anchoring (superseding APM No. 84/88)
1995	APM No. 44/95 of 09/10/95	Creation of prohibited areas (superseding APM No. 50/91)

Key AP: Prefectorial Order  
 APM: Order by the Préfet Maritime (port admiral)  
 APR: Order by the Regional Prefect  
 AM: Mayoral Order

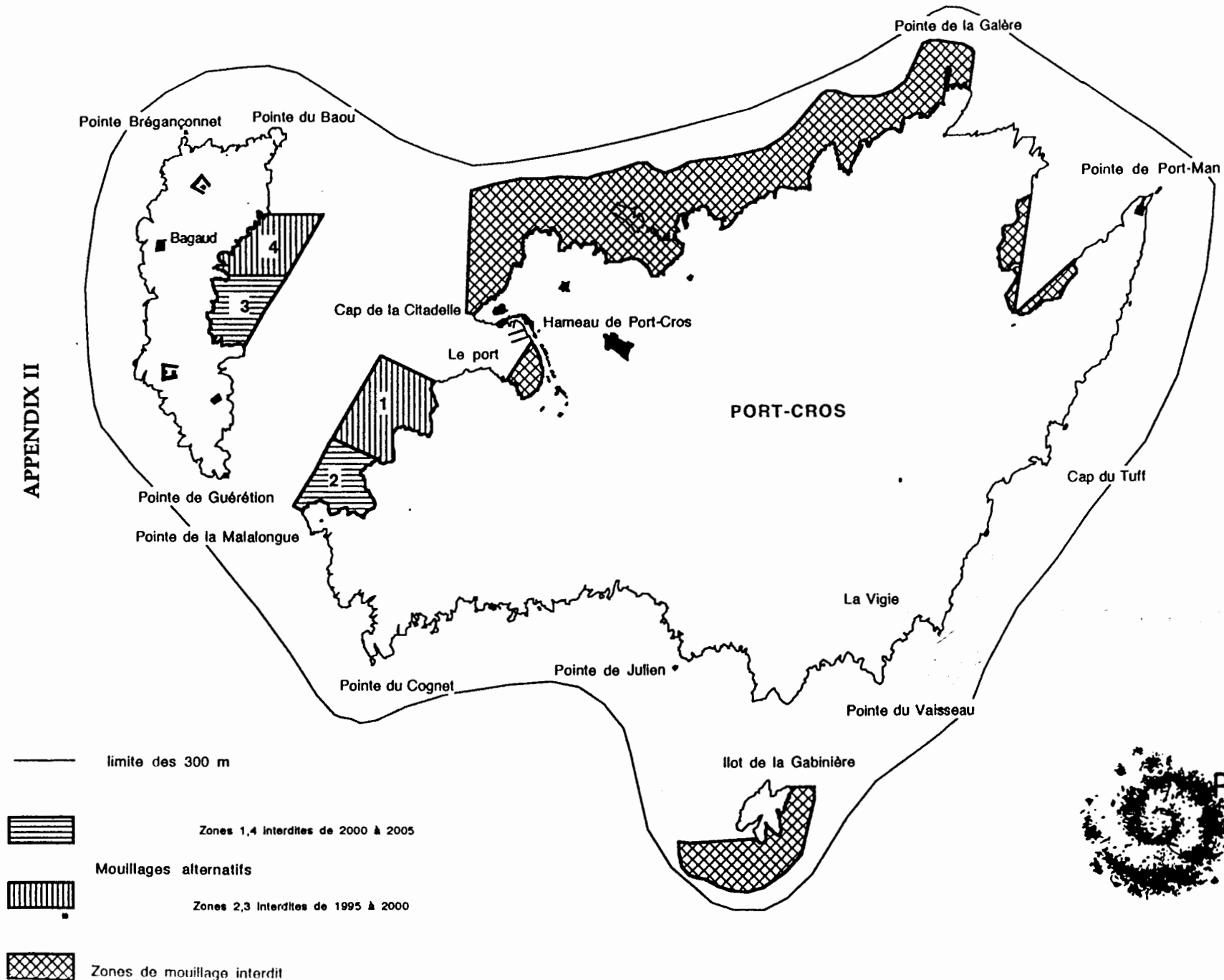
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## APPENDIX II



APPENDIX III

DRAFT RESOLUTION (97) ...

ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA  
TO PORT-CROS NATIONAL PARK

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15a of the Statute of the Council of Europe;

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Council of Europe Committee for Activities on Biological and Landscape Diversity (BU-DBP);

Having noted the agreement of the French Government;

After having deliberated,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category ..., in accordance with the Regulations for the European Diploma (Resolution (91) 16);

Places the aforesaid area under the patronage of the Council of Europe until ... 2000;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. the protection status of the marine park's marine area is to be improved through the following specific measures:

- development of Portman bay (installation of mooring facilities to obviate anchoring; restrictions on number of craft or time in harbour to avoid crowding; redefinition of the protected bands to safeguard the Posidonia);
- extension of the non-anchorage areas, especially on the southern side;
- conversion of the Diving Charter into an official regulation demarcating as envisaged the diving-only ie no-fishing sites and by allowing only one diver's boat per site;
- effective regulation of commercial fishing by maintaining moderate fishing with a control system based on size and quantity and abolishing non-selective methods liable to affect the sea perch or other protected species;
- monitoring of water quality around the island, eg by extending the "musselwatch" applied in the region;

2. the park management methods should be maintained, and will be reinforced if development and management plans are approved as envisaged by the end of 1996. The plans should be in force by the end of 1997;

3. the sewage treatment system should be improved;

4. it is necessary to enhance certain visual features of the port which are incongruous in the unique setting of a national park, particularly by reduction of advertising signboards. Although the status as a classified site is already high, it could be further improved;
5. the park regulations are on the whole adequate and in order, but a revision and unification of the texts, with their incorporation into the founding order, would be an advantage;
6. the visual aspects of forest management could be improved by distributing the dead wood more naturally, while still ensuring that fire danger is reduced to a minimum;
9. research efforts must be maintained, keeping the focus on conservation-related aspects with, if possible, standardisation at international level and closer co-operative relations with other Mediterranean countries.
7. park users' contribution to upkeep and management costs should be increased by raising the surcharges (levied on admission and mooring fees);
8. there should be intensified public relations work to make visitors, yachtsmen, etc. realise the attractiveness of the island's natural and cultural heritage but also its vulnerability.