



VANUATU'S MARITIME BOUNDARIES

Sovereignty over Umaenupne (Matthew) & Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) Islands



Vanuatu's islands

The people of Vanuatu share a deep and sacred connection to Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands. They are believed to be the resting place for ancestral spirits and a place to perform spiritual and customary ceremonies. Communities across the southern islands of Aneityum, Futuna, and Tanna maintain enduring bloodlines and cultural connections to the islands, reflecting a living tradition passed down through generations.

France lays claim to these islands, as part of New Caledonia. However, France did not consult with Vanuatu about these claims and has no entitlement to them.

Resolving the maritime boundaries between Vanuatu and France – International Court of Justice

Vanuatu has initiated proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to seek a definitive resolution to Vanuatu's sovereignty over Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) Islands and the maritime boundaries between Vanuatu and New Caledonia (France).

Vanuatu has sought to address these issues through dialogue and negotiation with France since its independence in 1980. The countries first held milestone discussions aimed at addressing maritime delimitation in February 2018 and June 2019 in Sydney and Brussels. Following this, two rounds of bilateral meetings were conducted in November 2025 in Port Vila and June 2026 in Paris. Despite these efforts, the fundamental differences between the two countries over sovereignty remains unresolved.





Vanuatu considers that referral of the matter to the ICJ provides a peaceful and lawful means of resolving the issue. The ICJ is the principal legal court of the United Nations and provides a forum in which states can resolve disputes in accordance with international law. By initiating proceedings, Vanuatu is seeking clarity, certainty and a lasting resolution through the rule of law.

Vanuatu filed its claim with the ICJ on 31 August 2026. For the ICJ to hear and determine the dispute, both Vanuatu and France must agree to the Court's jurisdiction.



Vanuatu is seeking nothing more than what it is entitled to under international law – and what the people of Vanuatu have known in their hearts for over three thousand years.

