

# VANUATU'S MARITIME BOUNDARIES

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



## Vanuatu's islands

Spread across the vast Pacific Ocean, Vanuatu's 83 islands are rich with the stories of ancient cultures and a deep respect for people and place. Among them are the cherished islands: Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands, or Matthew and Hunter in English. These small, volcanic islands lie in the southeast of Vanuatu and hold enduring cultural significance, enshrined in ni-Vanuatu legislation since the declaration of Vanuatu's independence.

### Connection to Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka 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.

The Indigenous leaders of New Caledonia endorsed their acknowledgement of Vanuatu's sovereignty of these islands with the signing the Kéamu Accord which is:

*"A solemn commitment between the Kanak people and the people of Vanuatu that whatever the political and institutional future of New Caledonia, Matthew and Hunter Islands will always remain the property of the people of Vanuatu."*



Photo credit: Vanuatu Tourism Office

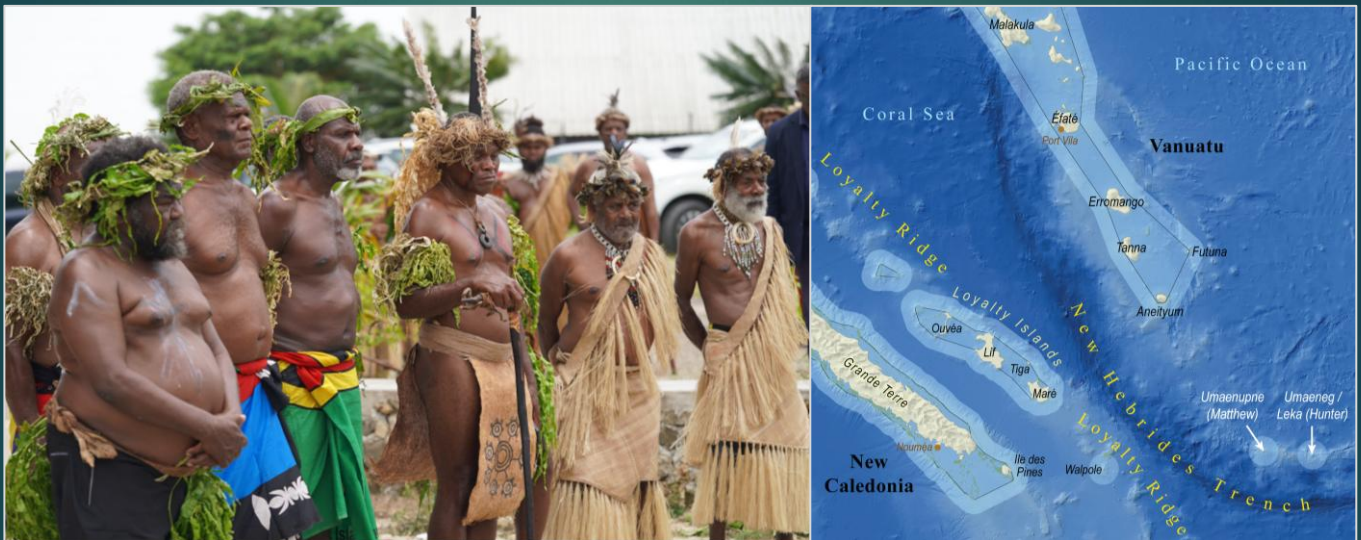
# Resolving the maritime boundaries between Vanuatu and France



Special Envoy Director Benoît Guidée leads the French delegation and Deputy Prime Minister Johnny Koanapo leads the Vanuatu delegation

Talks are now underway between the governments of Vanuatu and France to resolve sovereignty over Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands and establish a permanent maritime boundary between Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

These talks follow a bilateral meeting in Paris in July 2025 with President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu Jotham Napat. The leaders agreed to work together to identify an amicable resolution. A further round of negotiations took place between Vanuatu and France in Port Vila in November 2025.



TAFEA Chiefs and descendants of the custodians of Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands

Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands lies south of Vanuatu

The Government of Vanuatu is unified in its pursuit of sovereignty and has prioritised the finalisation of its maritime boundaries as a matter of national interest.

Deputy Prime Minister Johnny Koanapo has been appointed the Lead Negotiator for maritime boundary delimitation, sovereignty, and decolonisation matters, and is leading the effort for Vanuatu.

Clearly defined and agreed maritime boundaries between Vanuatu and New Caledonia, and confirming ni-Vanuatu sovereignty over Umaenupne and Umaeneg/Leka islands will complete Vanuatu's journey to independence and help finalise the decolonisation process.

A resolution will also strengthen the already close bilateral relationship between Vanuatu and France and foster regional cooperation and stability.

Listening to the Indigenous people of Vanuatu and New Caledonia will help forge a respectful and collaborative future for the region.