

New Zealand continental shelf project

The New Zealand Continental Shelf Project was a 7 year, \$44 million government funded programme to collect data for New Zealand's submission to the Continental Shelf Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

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About the New Zealand continental shelf project

LINZ commissioned the initial desktop study to collate and examine all relevant data and identify areas where data was lacking relating to New Zealand's continental shelf.

The Desktop Study approach is now supported and recommended as a first step for other countries by the UN Commission.

LINZ was responsible for obtaining initial seabed data, determining the furthestmost extent of the continental shelf and assisting with developing New Zealand's submission to the United Nations. All marine survey work was completed in 2004. The marine information was then processed, quality assured and submission reports were then written. New Zealand lodged its submission with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) on 16 April 2006.

Information from marine surveys underpins New Zealand's submission under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to establish the precise outer limits of the ocean floor under our jurisdiction.

The rights to the sea bed resources of the Continental Shelf will have huge potential benefits for future generations. This project can be compared to the United States purchase of Alaska in 1867, where the benefits of gold and oil have flowed into the 20th century.

Before our submission was finalised, LINZ commissioned detailed marine surveys to delimit a claim area equivalent to the size of Western Australia. The data was then combined with existing data and analysed to meet the requirements of article 76 of UNCLOS. Submission reports were then written supporting the scientific analysis and outlining the outer boundary of the extended Continental Shelf.

Once the limits of the shelf are established, we can then plan the management of seabed resources such as the hydrocarbons in the north west area of the Shelf.

The New Zealand continental shelf: 3D flyover

The following computer-simulated flyover of the New Zealand continental shelf has been created by GNS Science for LINZ.

The bathymetric data are from satellite altimetry operations combined with shipborne echo-sounding measurements, and are available from the [National Geophysical Data Centre \(NGDC\)](#). Derivation of this data is described by Walter H. F. Smith and David T. Sandwell in [Global Seafloor Topography from Satellite Altimetry and Ship Depth Soundings](#), published in Science magazine.

[New Zealand EEZ and Extended Continental Shelf established via UNCLOS](#)

The New Zealand-Australia maritime treaty

In July 2004, New Zealand and Australia signed the 'Treaty between the Government of Australia and the Government of New Zealand establishing certain Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf Boundaries'.

The treaty definitively settles the maritime boundaries between the two countries in the Tasman Sea and adjacent areas of the south-western Pacific Ocean.

Read the media statement on the Beehive website:

[NZ, Australia sign Treaty settling maritime boundaries from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

What does the Treaty do?

It establishes and describes the boundary lines between Australia's and New Zealand's exclusive economic zones and continental shelf.

What is the exclusive economic zone?

The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is the area extending out 200 nautical miles (M) from the coast, including both the sea and the seabed. It is measured from the baseline of the territorial sea, generally the low water line.

Within the EEZ, the coastal State has sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources of the sea and the sea-bed.

The continental shelf

The continental shelf is the seabed and the subsoil beyond the territorial sea out to 200 nautical miles from the coast or, where the 'natural prolongation' of the land territory extends beyond that limit, to the outer edge of the continental margin.

In no case, can it extend beyond the greater of 350 nautical miles from the baseline or 100 nautical miles from the 2500m isobath (a line connecting all points lying at a depth of 2500 metres).

On the continental shelf, the coastal State exercises sovereign rights over the non-living resources and sedentary living organisms (such as sponges and molluscs).

Why was it necessary to conclude the Treaty?

Fixing the maritime boundaries gives certainty of jurisdiction where the legitimate maritime claims of neighbouring states overlap.

Australia and New Zealand will submit information on their continental shelves (in 2004 and 2006 respectively) to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. The Commission will make recommendations based on that information about the limits of each country's continental shelf.

Establishing agreed boundaries ensures that both New Zealand and Australia will be supportive of each other's submissions to the Commission.

What benefits will the Treaty bring?

The Treaty confirms the median line boundary between the overlapping EEZs that has been observed de facto by the two countries for more than two decades. It gives certainty on the extent of these zones.

The Treaty establishes the boundary between the areas of continental shelf beyond 200M claimed by Australia and New Zealand in the Tasman Sea and adjacent areas of the south-western South Pacific and Southern Oceans.

Each country will also exercise sovereign rights over additional areas of continental shelf beyond 200M outside the areas covered in the negotiations.

The establishment of these boundaries provides both countries with certainty of jurisdiction over the relevant offshore resources within their boundaries, such as fisheries and petroleum and other mineral or biological resources of the seabed.

What kind of jurisdiction do the two countries have over the continental shelf?

Under UNCLOS, a coastal State exercises 'sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring' the continental shelf and 'exploiting its natural resources'.

The natural resources of the continental shelf are:

- mineral and other non-living resources of the sea-bed and subsoil
- living organisms belonging to sedentary species, such as sponges and molluscs.

Are there hydrocarbon deposits on the continental shelf subject to the Treaty?

The hydrocarbon potential of most areas of continental shelf beyond 200M that have been delimited by the Treaty is largely unknown, but in general, is not likely to be high.

What were the main issues that arose in the negotiations?

During negotiations, the relevant issues included the relative length of coastlines, the effect of islands, and the distances from relevant coastlines, as well as geomorphological factors such as natural prolongation and the legal and technical case for connectivity of the continental shelf.

Why are the lines drawn as they are?

The boundary has two parts:

- in the north, dividing Australia and New Zealand EEZs and continental shelf in the region extending from Lord Howe Rise, past Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands to Three Kings Ridge
- in the south, separating the EEZs and continental shelves between Macquarie Island and Campbell and Auckland Islands.

[View a map that shows the different boundary lines](#)

What further boundary treaties need to be negotiated?

Australia and New Zealand have yet to delimit the maritime spaces off their respective Antarctic territories, but otherwise have now settled all maritime boundaries between them.

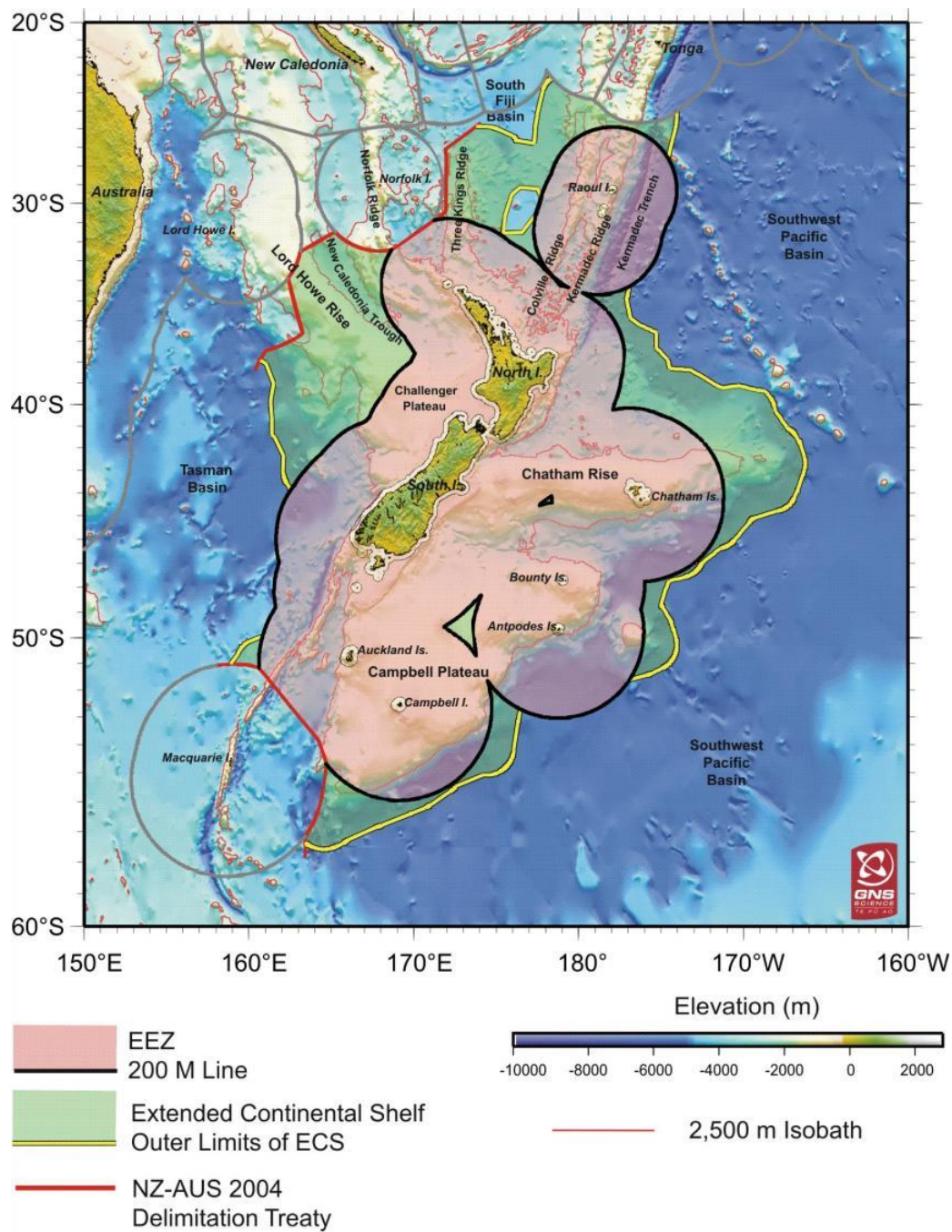
Australia has still to conclude maritime boundary treaties with East Timor, France and Norway.

New Zealand has still to conclude maritime boundary treaties with Fiji and Tonga.

Map of the continental shelf boundary

This map shows the boundaries for New Zealand's extended continental shelf confirmed by the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

Boundary delimitation negotiations with Fiji and Tonga are still to be completed.



The outer limits of the New Zealand ECS north of New Zealand are subject to the delimitation of boundaries with Fiji, Tonga and France in respect of New Caledonia

Key

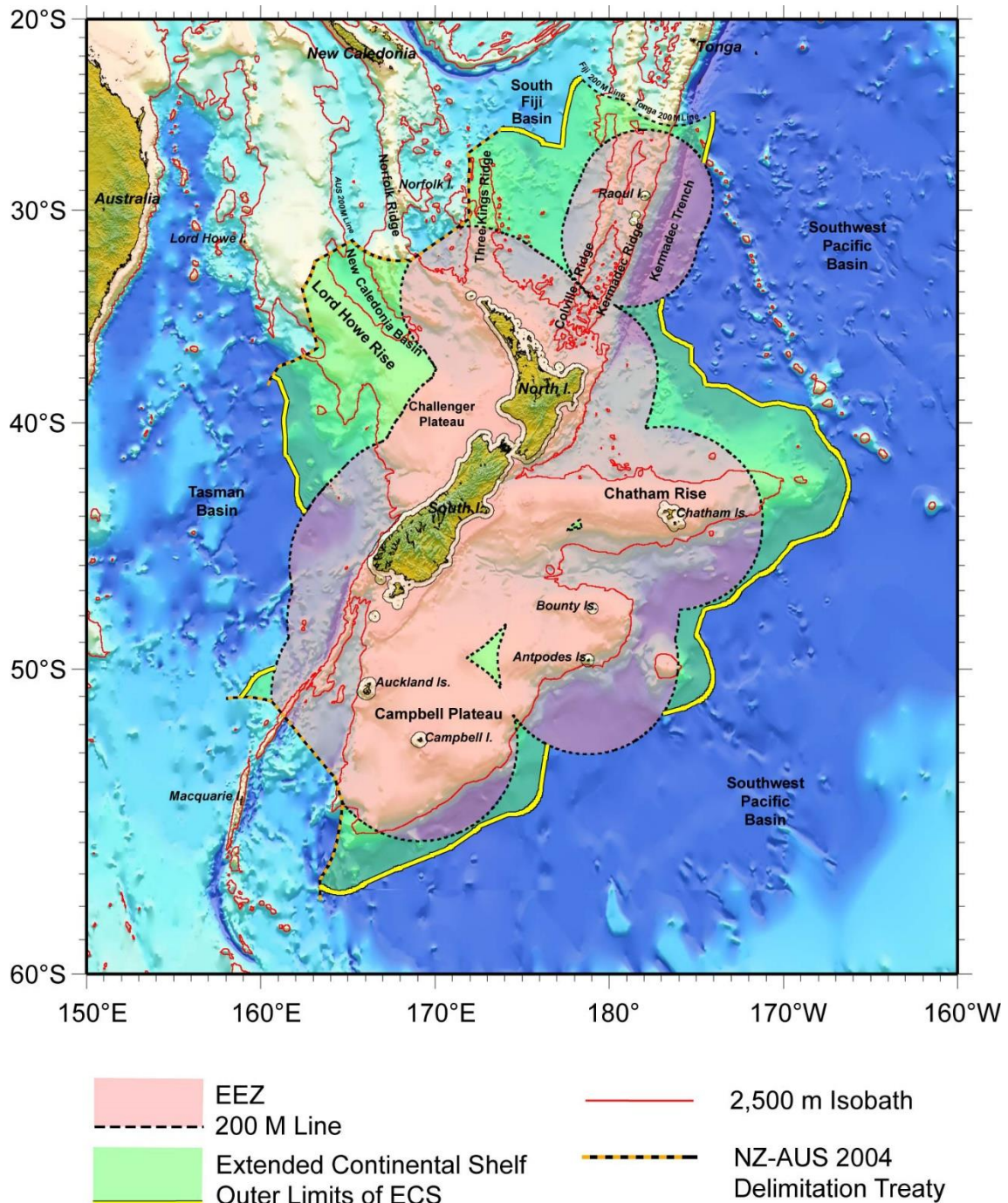
- Yellow- New Zealand Extended Continental Shelf beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
- Black - New Zealand EEZ
- Grey - Other States' EEZ
- Red - 2004 New Zealand-Australia Delimitation Treaty

Area covered

- NZ Exclusive Economic Zone = 4,000,000 square kilometres
- NZ Extended Continental Shelf = 1,700,000 square kilometres

Submitted boundaries

This map shows the boundaries for the Exclusive Economic Zone, extended continental shelf boundaries submitted to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, and New Zealand and Australia Maritime Treaty. Boundary delimitation negotiations with Fiji and Tonga are still to be completed.



UN Recommendations on the continental shelf

Following New Zealand's successful submission to extend the outer limits of our continental shelf, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf released its recommendations on the submission.

The UN's recommendations include recognition of:

- the quality of the submission
- the quality of the science behind the submission
- the soundness of New Zealand's interpretation of article 76 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea on which the submission was based.

[UN continental shelf recommendations](#)