

Socaire claims there is a lack of political will to protect heritage and ancestral rights

COMMUNITY. They claim that the implementation of the Protected Salt Flats Network has revealed an incompatibility between the Government's application of the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law and the Indigenous Law.

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In recent months, as part of the National Lithium Strategy, the Government, through the Ministry of the Environment (MMA), has intensified actions to define the areas of the Protected Salt Flats Network (RSP) in the Atacama Salt Flat. This initiative primarily involves creating a network of protected sectors, six of which are located in the ancestral territory of the Atacameño community of Socaire.

While the Minister of the portfolio, Maisa Rojas, has highlighted the importance and need to "listen to the voices, experiences, and knowledge of indigenous peoples who have ancestrally coexisted within territories and areas of biodiversity conservation, to review how to involve them in managing these protected areas," the truth, according to the community, is that dialogue has not flowed as expected because "authorities do not show political will to safeguard our heritage and ancestral rights recognized by law."

This statement arises from the incompatibility between how the RSP is being implemented under the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law (SBAP) and the Indigenous Law. The latter establishes the State's duty to legalize or restore indigenous land titles, especially Atacameño lands, while the implementation of the RSP has led the Ministry of the Environment to define these areas as state property, despite being ancestral territories of indigenous communities undergoing a title-clearing process.

CLEARING LAND TITLES

Regarding the scope of this situation, the president of Socaire, Sandra Cruz, explained that "the territory ancestrally claimed by our community has received various recognitions from the State, at least since the 1990s, particularly in 1998, and this was further updated last year. Therefore, what corresponds now is the clearing and restitution of these territories, followed by their declaration as protected areas, thereby fulfilling both the legal obligation and the environmental protection objective. However, the Government has not shown the will to clear these titles, instead only granting us

temporary land use concessions. Now, with the implementation of the RSP, we are also being asked to renounce our ancestral territorial rights."

The territories in question correspond to the Capur Salt Flat, Aguas Calientes 3 Salt Flat, Talar Salt Flat, Tuyajto Lagoon, El Laco Salt Flat, and a portion of the Atacama Salt Flat within the community territory. All of these are significant sites for the Socaire community. It is also worth noting the historical and ongoing commitment of indigenous peoples to protecting and conserving ecosystems, which means this demand does not in any way oppose the Protected Salt Flats Network—an argument the CAS has strongly emphasized.

"As a community, we value the concept of protection and have expressed to environmental authorities our willingness to collaborate. However, we need the Government's commitment to move forward effectively and promptly with clearing titles in the ancestral territory of the community, particularly in key areas such as those surrounding Aguas Calientes 3 and El Laco Salt Flat, which have significant tourism and traditional activity value for the community. Yet we have only received rejections. That is why we maintain that there has been a lack of political will to safeguard our ancestral territorial rights," the community leader emphasized.

Additionally, she noted that they are internally working on a proposal of criteria and guidelines to address the request for cooperation in preparing the Technical Justification Reports that the MMA will carry out to define the protected areas. They hope to be received by the authorities to discuss and agree on commitments.

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86 km from San Pedro de Atacama, and at an altitude of 3,500 meters, lies the Atacameño community of Socaire.

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THE ATACAMEÑO COMMUNITY OF SOCAIRE FEATURES BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES WITHIN ITS TERRITORY.

THE LAGOON AREA IS ONE OF THE MOST VISITED BY TOURISTS.