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# 'We saved Notre-Dame, why not the Camargue?': The French coastline fighting the rising tide

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**FEATURE | An area of coastline in the Camargue is suffering the effects of the worst erosion and submersion on the Mediterranean. But in this land of pink flamingos and white horses, 25% of which lies below sea level, the debate over how best to respond to the threat is becoming heated.**

When the tractor arrives, the oldest bulls approach first: Caberne, Bousieü and Ratis – the star of the Camargue races, 2013 winner of the coveted Biou d'Or trophy for the best specimen of the season. In Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue region of southern France, *manadier* (the Camargue word for a bull herd keeper) Frédéric Raynaud is feeding his 250 cattle, as he does every morning and evening, with hay and alfalfa grown 20 kilometers away. Although his own land covers 1,000 hectares, it can no longer feed the animals for 11 months out of the year. This is due to the salt, which rises to the surface and burns the grass.

Furthermore, the sea is slowly eroding this plot of land, washing away 1 to 2 meters a year. With every storm, 65-year-old Raynaud and his daughters scramble to reinforce the meager dunes of earth that are supposed to keep the water out, sometimes in the middle of the night. The fifth and sixth generations of a dynasty of herders, who were nomadic before settling here in 1950, the family is under no illusions: they will have to leave.

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Frédéric and Aurélie Raynaud in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, February 5 SANDRA MEHL FOR LE MONDE

"It's an uprooting. The soul of our ancestors is here," said Aurélie Raynaud, 35, gesturing to the 1,000-year-old landscape of pink flamingos, white horses and golden-brown reeds under the winter sun. This is the land where her grandfather died, where her father and she and her sisters were born, and where the best bulls are buried. The situation on the Raynaud ranch is a microcosm of the commune of Les Saintes and the wider Camargue, and raises the questions being asked across the region –

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