



The FFEM-SWIO Project

*French Global Environment Facility (FFEM)
South West Indian Ocean*

Conservation and sustainable exploitation of seamount and hydrothermal vent ecosystems of the South West Indian Ocean in areas beyond national jurisdiction

Context and Key Challenges

The **areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ)** provide a unique setting from both a geographic (remoteness, surface area, depth) and legal (international status, different regimes applying to the high seas and the Area, regime relying on the freedom principle) point of views. It houses unique and rich ecosystems such as **seamounts** and **hydrothermal vents**. These marine environments are characterised by their isolation, the lack of sunlight and generally low temperatures which lead to the development of very specific characteristics:

- Highly specific biological assemblages;
- A very high level of biological endemism (potential for new genetic resources);
- Adapted reproduction strategies;
- Low growth rates- and thus a potential low rate of restoration;
- High biomass exploitation potential on the top of seamounts.

These specific features make these ecosystems particularly vulnerable. Fishing and deep-sea mining are the two human activities that represent the two major potential threats to these ecosystems.

The project focuses on ABNJ of the South West Indian Ocean, which are particularly interesting for several reasons:

- Extremely dynamic «intersection» zone for sea currents;
- Important role in climate regulation through both ocean-atmosphere and inter-ocean (Atlantic and Indian oceans) exchanges;
- High biological productivity zone that sustains fish, sea birds and marine mammal populations;
- Connecting zone for the distribution of tropical and temperate species.

The project takes place within a **broader context of international discussions** on how to improve governance in ABNJ. The vast majority of countries recognize today that there are regulatory and governance gaps in ABNJ. Several projects and initiatives have been developed in the Western Indian Ocean but very few are addressing ABNJ issues.

Project Identification

COUNTRY(IES) / REGION : Multi-country / South West Indian Ocean

FUNDING AGENCY : French Global Environment Facility (FFEM)

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS : French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; French Ministry of Higher Education and Research

FOCAL AREA: International Waters

TOTAL PROJECT AMOUNT: 9 M Euros

FFEM CONTRIBUTION: 1,3 M Euros (14%)

SOURCES OF CO-FINANCING: FAO/IUCN, IDDRI, Oxford University

PROJECT COORDINATION: International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - Global Marine and Polar Programme

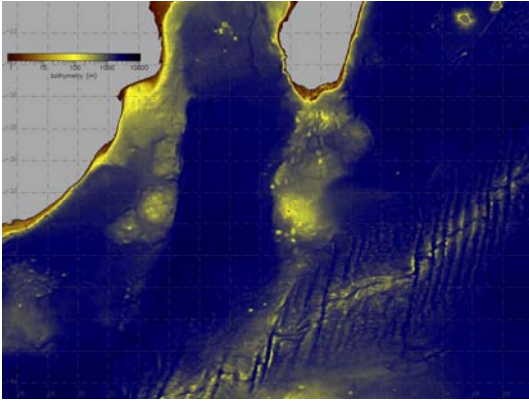
EXECUTING PARTNERS: MNHN (National Museum of Natural History – Paris), IDDRI (Institute of Sustainable Development and International Relations), IRD (Institute of Research for Development), IUCN, Oxford University

OTHER PARTNERS and INSTITUTIONS: FAO (with regards to its Deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity project of the GEF ABNJ Programme), universities in South Africa and Reunion Island, The Nairobi Convention, IFREMER, the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the Southern Indian Ocean Deepsea Fishers Association (SIODFA), SAPHIRE, AfriCOG, the Department of Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Environmental Affairs of the Republic of South Africa

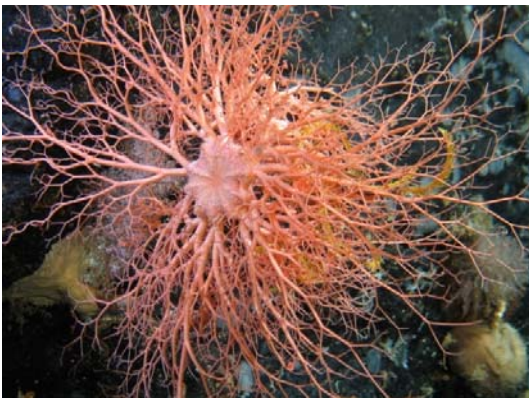
FINAL BENEFICIARIES : 1-Coastal States; 2- Interested States (fisheries, mining, other resources); 3-International community

PROJECT DURATION: 3 years [2014-2016]

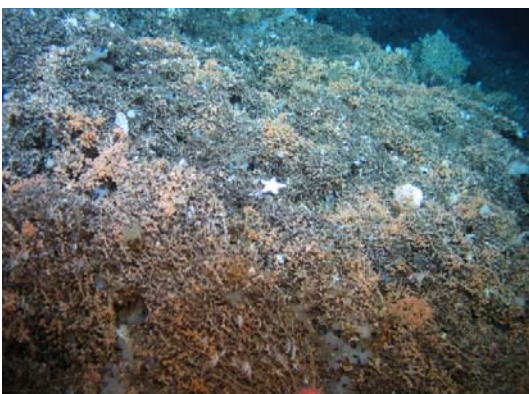




Bathymetry of the SWIO in meters. Copyright IRD.



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Objectives

Within this context, the overall objective of the project is to improve scientific knowledge, to better understand the potential links between local and regional fishing resources of the Indian South West Ocean, to improve governance and to develop integrated management tools for areas beyond national jurisdiction, in order to better conserve biodiversity associated with seamount and hydrothermal vent ecosystems. The specific objectives are:

- **To advance the state of knowledge of deep sea marine ecosystems** associated with hydrothermal vents and seamounts as well as their interrelationship with local and regional fish populations; to document the link between coastal ecosystems and oceanic ecosystems of areas beyond national jurisdiction in order to increase the involvement of coastal states in the governance of the high seas;
- **To improve and strengthen the governance framework** for the management of fish stocks associated with deep sea ecosystems including the monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing activities; **to develop governance frameworks** for the conservation of biodiversity and the preservation of different types of habitats in this marine region, especially with regards to the possibility of offshore mineral exploration and exploitation activities;
- **To suggest sound conservation and management measures** for deep sea ecosystems in areas beyond national jurisdiction, especially with regards to the creation of networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) in this region of the global ocean;
- **To raise awareness** of policy makers, the fishing and mining industries and the general public on the importance of preserving marine deep sea life.

For more information

Aurélie Spadone, Project manager, IUCN Global Marine and Polar Programme
aurelie.spadone@iucn.org

François Simard, Deputy Director of the IUCN Global Marine and Polar Programme
francois.simard@iucn.org

www.iucn.org/marine
www.ffem.fr



Areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) (dark blue); the high seas cover 64% of the world's oceans, i.e. 50% of the planet's surface.