

France: driving regional multilateralism in the Indian Ocean

As part of the French strategy for the Indo-Pacific, France is strengthening its links with regional organizations in the Indian Ocean and its involvement in regional programmes, which form the appropriate multilateral framework to address the issues of maritime safety, economic integration, sustainable development and disaster response. The French islands of Réunion and Mayotte, as well as the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF) are just as affected by these issues as all the other countries in the region.

The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)

France is a member of the IOC, along with Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. The IOC's activities cover the sectors of regional security (maritime, health, food and environmental aspects), sustainable natural resource management, entrepreneurship and culture. France supports the full involvement of Mayotte in the work of the IOC, as it is facing the same challenges as the rest of the region and is cooperating directly with each of its neighbours in all areas.

The AFD is providing over €100 million to support the IOC, in order to fund projects in the areas of health security, fighting climate change, protecting the environment, fighting maritime pollution, culture and governance.

The French Armed Forces in the Southern Indian Ocean (FAZSOI) are particularly concerned about the development of cooperation on maritime safety, supporting initiatives such as the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC, based in Madagascar) and the Regional Centre for Operational Coordination (RCOC, in Seychelles) of the Safe Seas Africa programme (formerly MASE), financed by the European Union and led by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

The FAZSOI also conduct regular exercises with partner forces from IOC countries, such as "Papangue 2024" on Réunion and the "Tulipe 25" joint military and allied exercise in Madagascar.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

France has been an IORA member since 2020, prior to which it had been a dialogue partner. The IORA, which brings together the States on the rim of the Indian Ocean, from South Africa to Australia, within a structure to facilitate discussions on technical expertise, including in the areas of the environment and sustainable development. France's involvement in the IORA provides an opportunity to collaborate with the Association's member states on issues of shared interest (preserving fishing resources with Indonesia; freedom of navigation, fighting climate change and disaster management with Sri Lanka; disaster risk management with Madagascar). France is chairing the IORA Working Group on Disaster Risk Management.

The blue economy, maritime safety, protecting biodiversity and the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are the IORA's priorities. France and Indonesia formulated guidelines to prevent IUU fishing, which were adopted by the IORA Council of Ministers on 21 May 2025. This initiative, funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD, French Development Agency), contains political commitments which reflect the rigorous standards and creates a network of focal points to exchange information and provide operational cooperation to combat IUU fishing.

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

France's presence in the Indian Ocean makes France a full member of the IONS, which it joined in 2014. This forum, which was created in 2008 at the initiative of India, brings together 25 Member States (and 8 observers) and their navy chiefs of staff to discuss major maritime issues in the region, particularly regarding maritime safety.

The Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA)

France is also a Contracting Party to SIOFA. A regional fisheries organization which has been operating since 2012 and located on Réunion since 2016, SIOFA aims to ensure the conservation and management of non-tuna fish stocks in the high seas in the Southern Indian Ocean. The SIOFA's Scientific Committee plays a key role in assessing fishery resources and estimating the impact of fishing on the marine environment.