

## **The French Southern and Antarctic Territories in France's Indo-Pacific Strategy**

The French Southern and Antarctic Territories are a unique component of France's Indo-Pacific presence. Under the authority of a Prefect, these territories – Crozet, Kerguelen, Saint Paul and Amsterdam Islands, Scattered Islands and Adélie Land – have no permanent residents. However, French sovereignty is guaranteed by the constant presence of personnel (technicians, military personnel and scientists) present on a temporary basis.

Their maritime range (more than 2.2 million km<sup>2</sup> of cumulative exclusive economic zones) and their position at key points in the Indian and Southern Oceans make the French Southern and Antarctic Territories crucial for France's status as an Indo-Pacific nation. They offer a strategic foothold and are a major lever in France's environmental sovereignty strategy, supporting maritime surveillance (fight against illegal fishing and data collection), as well as a vector of scientific diplomacy.

Following the French President's visit to the Glorioso archipelago (Scattered Islands) in 2019, the French Southern and Antarctic Territories and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in partnership with the major French research institutes, drew up a 2022-2026 roadmap entitled "Development Initiative for Research in the Scattered Islands". This roadmap provides an ambitious framework for developing research in the Scattered Islands and encourages partnerships and scientific cooperation with south-western Indian Ocean countries (skills and knowledge transfers, networking of marine protected areas).

### **A pillar of French scientific diplomacy**

The French Southern and Antarctic Territories are above all major natural laboratories to study ecological dynamics, from evolution of life to global climate change. Their exceptional state of preservation, with endemic species and ecosystems that are some of the planet's most intact, make them scientific benchmarks globally. This role as an ecological watchdog strengthens France's position in international climate and biodiversity talks.

The research tradition in France's sub-Antarctic islands (Crozet, Kerguelen, Saint Paul and Amsterdam) and the Antarctic (Adélie Land) is long-standing and supported by solid infrastructure – scientific stations, regular missions, institutes such as the French Polar Institute Paul-Émile Victor (IPEV), National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) programmes and the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (IFREMER) – and by exemplary management of natural reserves (Glorioso archipelago, Austral Islands) and sustainable fisheries (toothfish, rock lobsters and tuna-like fish). The Austral Islands Nature Reserve was created in 2006 and extended in 2022 and enables exemplary management of the associated terrestrial and maritime areas. The Glorioso Islands were made a National Nature Reserve in 2021, illustrating the contribution of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories to preserving the ocean and marine ecosystems.

### **Environmental scientific cooperation rooted in the region**

The strategic and scientific importance of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories is also tied in with a number of regional cooperation initiatives. France has close scientific and technical partnerships with several Indo-Pacific powers. With South Africa, it is collaborating notably in the Crozet area and the Marion and Prince Edward Islands, through exchanges of expertise and shared research. Australia, meanwhile, is a key partner in monitoring the

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Kerguelen continental shelf, under a scientific co-development approach involving monitoring of fish stocks and preservation of the Southern Ocean environment.

In the Antarctic, Adélie Land is a strategic area for France within the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). This body is central to environmental governance of the Southern Ocean. France therefore has an ambitious vision for protection of the environment based on science and international cooperation.