

### **Wallis-and-Futuna in France's Indo-Pacific Strategy**

Wallis and Futuna, an overseas community with a unique institutional organization combining Republican institutions and customary authorities, has a strategic position in the Pacific. Wallis and Futuna is full member of the Pacific Community and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, as well as an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum. This participation reflects the territory's desire to help tackle major regional environmental, education and geopolitical challenges.

#### **A state-backed regional diplomacy**

The French Government plays a driving role in enhancing Wallis and Futuna's regional cooperation. The High Administrator assists the elected officials of the Territorial Assembly in defining new areas of cooperation with neighbouring States in the Pacific. The purpose of this stepped up dialogue is to make this territory a recognized actor in regional networks, while promoting its cultural and institutional specificities.

Several bilateral agreements are currently being finalized with Fiji and Vanuatu, key countries in the regional architecture. Other partnerships are in the pipeline with Tonga, Samoa and Nauru. These agreements, based on shared priorities (training, health, sustainable development, maritime governance), fully participate in the implementation of France's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

#### **A strong voice in ocean conservation efforts**

This territory, a proponent of the moratorium on deep seabed mining, and even a total ban on such mining, adopted a local declaration for the ocean shared with customary authorities affirming its strong commitment to the protection of marine biodiversity. This position reflects the growing concern of Pacific societies about the environmental, cultural and economic impacts of seabed mining.

#### **An education ambition focused on the Pacific**

With the aim of preparing young generations to cope with future challenges, the territory's authorities, with support from the French Government, are developing structural projects in the area of higher education. The newly established digital university in Wallis intends to offer broader access to training, given the remote location of the territory.

Building on these efforts, Wallis and Futuna plans to take an active role in creating a platform for university exchanges in the Pacific. This project will enable students to participate in classes in South Pacific universities, notably in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. This project will further the mobility of young people and strengthen educational and cultural ties between Pacific islands.