



France Pacific Territories Committee

"The deep sea: the state of play in Asia-Pacific"

13-14 June 2023, Noumea, New Caledonia

Main findings and recommendations

*On 13-14 June 2023 the France Pacific Territories Committee (FPTPEC) organized an international PECC seminar in New Caledonia on the issue of the deep seabed in Asia Pacific. The seminar was introduced by the PECC Co-Chairs **Richard Cantor**, USPECC chair, and **Zhan Yongxin**, CNCPEC chair and brought together 34 international experts and decision makers.*

The global economy's need for critical materials, which are essential for satisfying growing worldwide demand and enabling the energy transition in the face of climate change, has led more and more players to take an interest in the deep seabed. The deep seabed harbors abundant mineral resources could indeed limit the risk of shortages caused by the extinction or mismanagement of existing resources, or even offset a deterioration in the geopolitical context that could disrupt supply chains. For many economies with large exclusive maritime zones rich in mineral resources, this also represents an interesting promise of development and of growth; with this in mind, some of them have already issued permits for commercial exploitation of the deep seabed.

The Asia-Pacific region is particularly concerned by this drive to explore and possibly, in the short term, exploit deep-sea mineral resources. The two shores of the Pacific Ocean link the world's two largest and most dynamic economic groups, around the USA and China. At the same time, it is in the Pacific Ocean, and in particular in the Clarion-Clipperton zone, that studies aimed at the commercial exploitation of oceanic mineral resources are most advanced. Last but not least, the region is home to a number of island economies, some of which are keen to make a quick profit from the little-known or as yet hard-to-exploit resources in their exclusive economic zones.

However, beyond the technical challenge of mining at great depths, numerous environmental and societal parameters will have to be considered by the economies on both sides of the Pacific and beyond before embarking on the path of large-scale exploitation of these ocean mineral resources.

With a view to shedding responsible light on deep-sea exploration and exploitation, the PECC's France Pacific Territories Committee (FPTPEC) conducted an in-depth examination of the technical, environmental, and societal issues involved, at a seminar that brought together 34 experts from the Asia-Pacific region in Noumea, the capital of a territory renowned for its mining expertise. The seminar provided public and private decision-makers with an overview of the challenges involved around the deep seabed.

At the end of the seminar, participants wished to present the following recommendations to the PECC.

1/ **The lack of knowledge about the deep seabed was the main observation made during the seminar.** It is this observation that has prompted some territories, such as New Caledonia, to adopt a moratorium on all forms of deep-sea mining. The most uncertain impact at this stage seems to be on deep-sea marine biodiversity, whose systemic role in food chains and climate is still insufficiently understood. The oceans and seabed are interconnected **spaces that link** the inhabitants of a global community, who today face challenges that call for global cooperation. Faced with these challenges, it is crucial to strike **a balance between exploiting and protecting the deep-sea environment.**

- **Against this backdrop, participants were unanimous in their call for governments to invest massively in scientific research.**

2/ On technology, even before considering the development of new technologies to exploit the oceans, **there is an urgent need to refine existing exploration and data collection technologies,** which are not yet capable of delivering a complete vision of the reality of the deep seabed, and therefore of enabling government decision-makers to take decisions with all the necessary insight.

- **Efforts to develop innovative exploration technologies must be continued and expanded.**

3/ Despite progress in ocean governance following the adoption of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ) on 19 June 2023, **the legal framework surrounding the deep seabed still appears very fragile and volatile,** which should prompt a cautious approach to legal matters, including possible recourse to the moratorium formula. There are many stakeholders with different interests and priorities, which does not facilitate sustainable governance of these areas. The future of human flourishing therefore depends not only on serious consideration of sustainability issues, but also on the ability to make the right choices when trade-offs are required between competing sustainability objectives.

- **Efforts to clarify the legal framework for the deep seabed must be pursued, particularly in the implementation of the BBNJ treaty.**

4/ This must also involve a **specific mobilization of the international community around the oceans,** as called for by Costa Rica and France, who will co-chair the United Nations Conference on the Oceans in 2025 and propose the creation of an International Panel for the Sustainability of the Oceans (IPOS), built on the model of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

- **The proposal to set up an International Panel for the Sustainability of the Oceans (IPOS) was unanimously welcomed and should be supported at a multilateral level.**

5/ **It also seems essential to involve local populations as closely as possible,** whose way of life, as well as their economy and culture, are closely dependent on the health and preservation of marine ecosystems. Furthermore, the balanced approach of these local communities, which allows for the sustainable exploitation of natural resources, can also serve as a compass to guide public decision-making.

- **Sustainable use of the oceans cannot be envisaged without the contribution of traditional local communities.**