



## THE FRENCH OCEANOGRAPHIC FLEET

**The French Oceanographic Fleet (FOF) is the result of the association of four major public operators and is an essential asset for both research and public service. Its structures will be strengthened to enable it to carry out more and more missions.**

While the development of observation and measurement satellites in the 1980s shook the world of oceanography, the need for scientific vessels has not disappeared. On the contrary, the development of our society has created new needs: better knowledge of marine biodiversity, measurement of the impact of oceans in climatic processes, seismic prevention, seabed mapping for its exploitation and protection, erosion of coastlines... All these studies can only be carried out with the help of scientific vessels.

### THE ORIGINS AND MEANS OF THE FOF

The French scientific bodies operating an oceanographic fleet have therefore decided to come together to offer a better service by coordinating their activities. These are the four public civilian operators: CNRS, Ifremer, the French Polar Institute Paul-Émile Victor (IPEV) and the Research Institute for Development (IRD), in association with SHOM (which already shares two ships with Ifremer) and the administration of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories, or TAAF, which operates the *Marion-Dufresne*.

The gathering of their ships constitutes the FOF which took the form of a "TGIR" (very large research infrastructure) in 2008. In 2011, a management entity was created, "Unité Mixte de Service" (UMS), to coordinate the use of the resources of the four civilian operators and their occasional pooling.

### A COHERENT AND PERFORMING SET

The FOF is composed of eighteen ships. Six offshore vessels, including the *Pourquoi Pas?*, the *Thalassa* and the *Marion Dufresne*, are responsible for the main oceanographic research campaigns. Five inshore ships specialise in scientific research and seven station ships are dispatched alongside the metropolitan and offshore seafronts. They use equipment (lateral sonars, core drilling tools, etc.) and machines (eg a *Victor 6000* robot and a *Nautile* manned submarine capable of operating at a depth of 6 000 m) the quality of which is recognised worldwide. Some of them are unique in Europe.

The FOF operates in three areas: scientific research, public service and partnerships with public bodies and private companies. Its ships therefore carry out a diversity of missions including paleo-oceanographic surveys and biomass estimation, monitoring of natural hazards (seismic, volcanic, tsunamis ...) and ocean chemistry.

The TGIR format facilitates the organisation and the coherence of the work within this large entity of scientific resources and ensures its international visibility.

### A CHANGING ORGANISATION

The creation of the TGIR Fleet was a first step. Beyond the shared management of resources, the next step will be their merger. In November 2016, the Interdepartmental Committee for the Sea voted in favor of bringing together the whole fleet of the UMS under a single entity. In January 2017, the Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research was to approve the establishment of a dedicated structure within Ifremer, no later than 1 September 2017. This Directorate will benefit in 2018 from a unified and global budget for all resources and decide on the programming of the missions, respecting the specific needs of each partnering entity.

This new organisation will allow a more efficient management of vessels to increase the number of days at sea, reinforce the stature of the fleet at European level and facilitate the preparation of the pending renewal of the heavy resources.

A great maritime nation like France must have a world-class oceanographic fleet. Surely, the strengthening of the FOF will make it possible to successfully defend the country's scientific as well as strategic maritime interests.



*The Marion-Dufresne, one of the ships of the French Oceanographic Fleet. © TAAF.*