

Observer role for SOPAC on French survey vessel L'Atalante

Written by Administrator

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SOPAC's Emily Artack, Project Officer and Cartographer of **SOPAC's Maritime Boundaries Project**, is on board the French multi-purpose Research Vessel L'Atalante, as it sails throughout the EEZs of Tuvalu, Wallis & Futuna and Tokelau. SOPAC provides assistance to 19 Pacific countries and territories through applied geoscience and technology.

"In the true spirit of regional cooperation, SOPAC has been invited to participate in this expedition in an observer capacity. As well, Mr Faatasi Malologa and Mr Vakafa Lupe of the Tuvalu Department of Lands and Survey have also been invited to take part in the French Government-funded survey cruise," said Ms Artack. Our participation in this survey was possible through funding from the University of the Sea programme, based from the University of Sydney, Australia.

The RV L'Atalante has been specifically commissioned to carry out research in the marine geosciences, physical oceanography and marine biology. On board are state-of-the-art equipment and scientific computer facilities, and data acquisition and processing stations. Ms Artack explained that purpose of the scientific expedition, called WALLISPLAC, is to carry out a seabed survey in the Wallis region. This is in preparation for France's (with regards to Wallis & Futuna) claim for extended Continental Shelf boundaries, or additional seabed territory, under Article 76 of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, which entitles coastal states to lay claim to extended Continental shelf, beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Tuvalu and Tokelau (NZ territory) also share similar interests for claims of extension in the same region.

"Such a claim must be based on sound scientific and technical evidence, and the 3 above named countries all share a common interest in the same area," explained Ms Artack.

Through the use of an on-board multi-beam echo sounder, scientists on the RV L'Atalante will collect geophysical data. "The multi-beam echo sounder is an acoustic system that enables accurate and rapid topographical plotting of the submarine relief. This process is called bathymetry. The collected sonar images are used to create a 3D image of the sea floor, and in this case, will contribute to the seabed profile of across the 3 countries EEZs," concluded Ms Artack.

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Mr Faatasi Malologa and **Mr Vakafa Lupe** of the Tuvalu Department of Lands and Survey, with **Emily Artack** in front of research vessel L'Atalante, IFREMER (French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea).