



# Building Bridges over the Blue Pacific Beyond Marine Protected Areas – A Europe-Oceania Cooperation

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## ► Key Takeaways

- For the past ten years, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – a scheme to protect endangered marine biodiversity and conserve fish stocks – have been mushrooming, especially in the Pacific. However, this loosely defined tool has also raised controversies, leading to alternative approaches.
- To be successful, MPAs or other protection schemes need to be considered efficient and fair – hence legitimate. This requires bridging local knowledge and global science, ensuring a sustainable blue economy beyond conservation, and providing surveillance to deter illegal activities and enforce protection measures.
- Building two-way bridges between experts, decision-makers and populations in Europe and the Pacific Islands will be extremely beneficial. The Pacific needs Europe's scientific expertise. Europe can greatly benefit from understanding the Pacific Islanders' needs and learn from local customary practices to protect resources. Europeans can help with funding and assist in building local capacities to monitor and patrol the areas, while benefiting from the rebound of resources the protection schemes will allow.

## Introduction

The “new scramble for the Pacific” is characterized by **a race for the control of maritime space and resources**, oscillating between *ocean grabbing* and *ocean commoning*.<sup>1</sup> This tendency can be seen in the endemic nature of Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (estimated in 2016 as 10% of the overall catch in the Pacific Islands Countries – PICs), but also in the multiplication of large Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): delimited areas in which certain human activities such as fishing are restricted to conserve resources (the Pacific hosts the majority of the world’s MPAs).

**The European Union (EU)**, as the biggest importer of fish (which imports half of its tuna from the Pacific) and a leader in biodiversity protection, **has a key stake in ensuring a sustainable management of these resources**. Moreover, Europe has territories in the Pacific (French New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis & Futuna) with large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) that are challenging to monitor and protect in the face of diverse challenges: foreign intrusions, IUU fishing, narcotrafficking and interstate tensions. Hence, ocean governance is one of the seven priority areas of the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

**MPAs have been the favorite scheme to manage the maritime space and protect biodiversity & marine resources**. Large or small, they can offer minimal or total protection by limiting certain human practices. A loosely defined framework,<sup>3</sup> MPAs allow for a greater control over a designated territory. As such, it is a truly geopolitical object,<sup>4</sup> and is not immune to controversy.<sup>5</sup> This said, MPAs are a key tool for biodiversity conservation, and a vital scheme to achieve the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity’s call to protect at least 30% of the planet – land and sea – by 2030 (the 30x30 initiative).

**To be useful and successful, MPAs or other protection schemes need to be considered efficient and fair – hence legitimate**. This requires adequate access to scientific data to ensure the process is knowledge-driven and to gauge the effectiveness

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1. E. Fache, P.-Y. Le Meur and E. Rodary, “The New Scramble for the Pacific: A Frontier Approach”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1, March 2021.

2. “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, September 16, 2021, available at: [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu).

3. This issue is addressed by K. Grorud-Colvert *et al.*, “The MPA Guide: A Framework to Achieve Global Goals for the Ocean”, *Science*, No. 373, 2021.

4. According to Yves Lacoste, “par géopolitique, il faut entendre toute rivalité de pouvoirs sur ou pour du territoire.” See also P. Leenhardt *et al.*, “The Rise of Large-scale Marine Protected Areas: Conservation or Geopolitics?”, *Ocean and Coastal Management*, 2013.

5. A famous case is the set-up, in 2010, of a MPA by the United Kingdom in the Chagos Islands to reassert its sovereignty and protect the Diego Garcia military base leased to the US. See E. M. de Santo, “Militarized Marine Protected Areas in Overseas Territories: Conserving Biodiversity, Geopolitical Positioning and Securing Resources in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, *Ocean and Coastal Management*, No. 184, 2020. See also F. Pearce, “Will Large Protected Areas Save the Oceans or Politicize Them?”, *YaleEnvironment360*, 25 March 2019, available at: [www.e360.yale.edu](http://www.e360.yale.edu).

of the protection measures. Local communities, their economic needs and their traditional knowledge of the ocean, should be taken into account at each stage. Moreover, surveillance should be ensured to deter illegal activities and enforce protection measures.

This briefing argues that **building two-way bridges between experts, decision-makers and populations in Europe and the Pacific Islands will be extremely beneficial to ensure the effectiveness and fairness of ocean governance schemes.** The Pacific needs scientific data that Europe can offer. Europe can greatly benefit from understanding the Pacific Islanders' needs and learn from local customary practices to protect resources in a more relevant and democratic manner. This participatory, multi-scaled approach would provide new paths towards more efficient resource protection schemes in Europe, too, taking into consideration tools that may not have conservation as an objective, but are effectively sustaining biodiversity.<sup>6</sup>

This briefing is based on discussions that took place during the webinar “Are Marine Protected Areas a relevant tool for the Pacific?” organized by Ifri’s Pacific Islands Program on June 21, 2022.<sup>7</sup> Contributions from panelists will therefore be highlighted.

## Marine Protected Areas in the Pacific: What’s at stake?

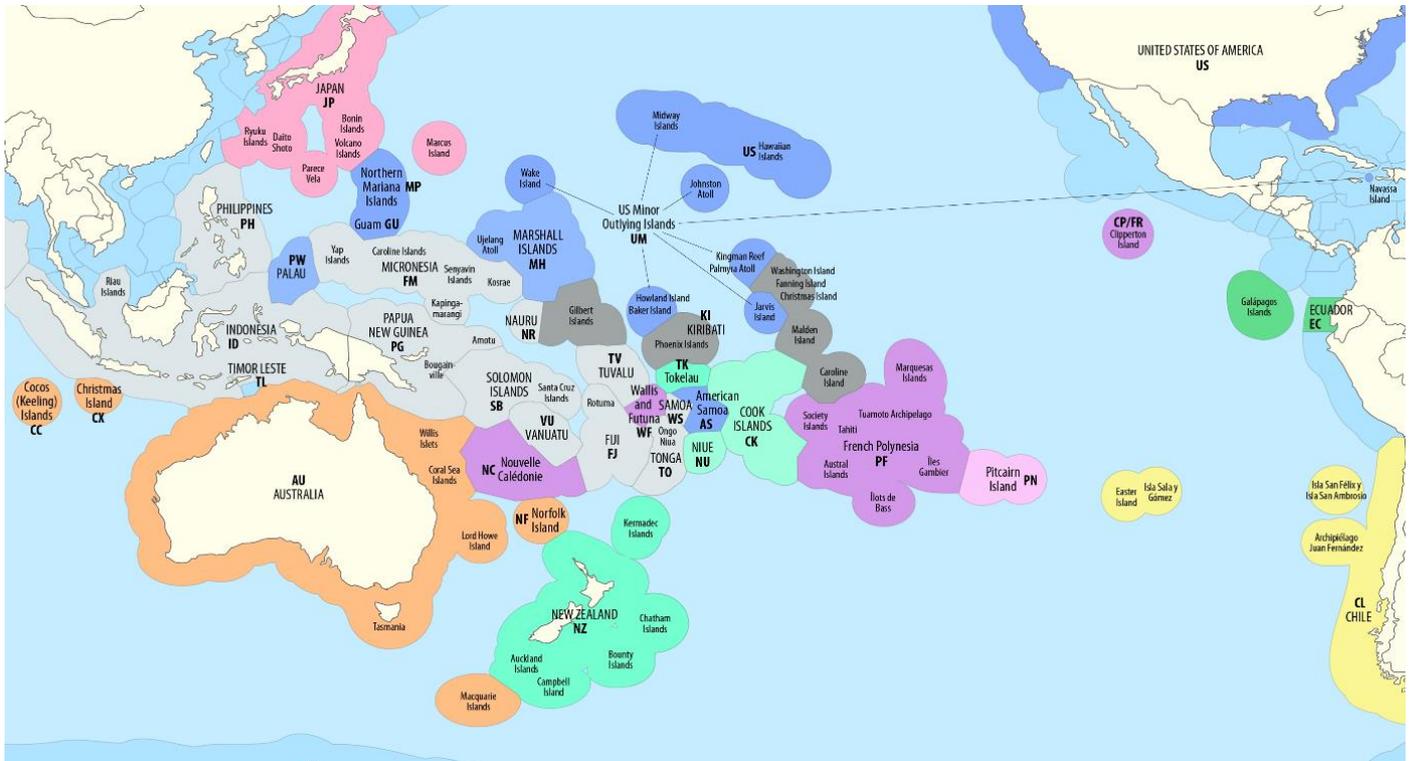
According to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the EEZ is an area of the sea stretching from the outer limit of the territorial sea – 12 nautical miles (nm) from the baseline – out to 200 nm (370 km) from the littoral, where the sovereign state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources. However, it implies that the state is able to monitor the area and to ensure a sustainable development of the resources within it.

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6. G. G. Gurney *et al.*, “Biodiversity Needs Every Tool in the Box: Use OECMs”, *Nature*, Vol. 595, July 29, 2021.

7. “Are Marine Protected Areas a Relevant Tool for the Pacific?”, Online conference co-organised by Ifri and the SPC, June 21, 2022. Panelists were: Steven Victor, Minister, Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, Republic of Palau; Jérôme Aucan, Head of the Pacific Community Center for Ocean Science (PCCOS), Pacific Community-SPC; Pierre-Yves Le Meur, Researcher in environmental anthropology and ethnoecology, Research Institute for the Development (IRD) Center in Noumea, New Caledonia and Karina von Schuckmann, Oceanographer, Mercator Ocean International. Program and video available at: [www.ifri.org](http://www.ifri.org).

## Exclusive Economic Zones of the Pacific Ocean



Source: Wikimedia Commons (Maximilian Dörrbecker).

The nations of the **Blue Pacific** consider themselves not as small island nations but as large ocean island states.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, their combined EEZs reach almost 40 million square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>). **Compared to their number of inhabitants, their EEZ are much larger than those of the European countries:** France, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest EEZ in the world, has an EEZ/inhabitant of 0,17 km<sup>2</sup>, compared to 28 km<sup>2</sup> for Palau. At the same time, the budget that the PICs can devote to the management of their EEZs is very limited (see the table below). As more than 60% of the inhabitants of their coastal areas depend on fishing, such a vital resource must be protected and managed in a sustainable way.

8. See the reference essay of Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands", *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 1994, pp. 148-161.

## Comparative data on Land mass, EEZ, Population and GDP

	Palau	Fiji	Papua New Guinea	Kiribati	Cook Islands	France	UK	Australia
Land mass (in km <sup>2</sup> )	459	18,270	462,840	811	237	543,940	243,610	7,688,000
EEZ (ZEE) (in km <sup>2</sup> )	600,000	1,290,000	2,700,000	3,500,000	1,960,027	11,691,000	6,805,586	8,200,000
Population	21,291	910,000	9,294,000	121,000	17,459	67,813,396	68,562,151	25,766,605
EEZ/inhabitant	28.18	1.417	0.29	28.926	112.264	0.172	0.099	0.295
GDP (USD billion)	0.24	4.59	26.59	0.181	0.384	2,940,000	3,190,000	1,540,000
GDP/capita (USD)	14,000	5,086	2,916	1,514	21,994	43,518	47,334	59,934

Sources : [World Bank Data](#); [World Population Review](#); [Pacific Data](#); [Marine Regions.org](#); [Worldometer](#).

Some Pacific states have been trading fishing rights to big Asian consumer markets, getting sometimes very significant income from these concessions (the sale of “tuna-vessel days” accounts for more than 50% of the revenues in Tuvalu, Tokelau and Kiribati). Others, such as Palau, have chosen to protect their EEZ by setting up large MPAs and attracting tourists who will pay to access the pristine waters. Palau’s Sanctuary is exceptional as it covers its entire EEZ, with 80% designated as a highly protected area and 20% as an area where local fishing activities are tolerated.

Indeed, **there is a large variety of MPAs** (see the map after). Highly protected areas are mostly small-scale, close to the shore and often result from a bottom-up process of local initiatives to protect the coastal resources important to the livelihood and cultures of the population. Sometimes they refer to local customary habits, and are a community-managed process.

Offshore MPAs are larger and rarely benefit from a high level of protection. They most often result from a top-down process, led by the state or big NGOs that provide funding incentives as well as scientific and technical support. Large-scale MPAs can be sometimes seen locally as a sort of grabbing, because of the exclusion effect or restriction of use by the local communities. Sometimes, large MPAs exist only on paper, these “paper parks” have no concrete effect on conserving biodiversity.

**An alternative and/or complementary scheme appeared in the mid-2010**, when government in French Polynesia announced in 2015 its decision to set up a **Marine Managed Area (MMA)**. Papeete’s decision came as a reaction to MPA projects in the Austral and Marquesas Islands and was respectively pushed by the major NGO Pew and by the French MPAs agency. The MMA project led by Papeete was a way to restore

sovereignty over its waters and decide how best to protect and develop resources in a way that claims to be more respectful of the Oceanian's approach to the Ocean.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Pierre-Yves Le Meur explained during the webinar, the objectives of MMAs beyond conservation and include political and/or economic dimensions.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the Cook Islands followed this path by announcing in 2017 its own MMA. More recently, the Palau government has decided to turn its huge MPA into an MMA. The goal is to adapt to adverse economic conditions and regain control over its marine resources and reaffirm its sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

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## MPAs and MMAs are indeed complex schemes to set up

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MPAs and MMAs are indeed complex schemes to set up, as they require scientific, technical, and human resources to be established and managed, maritime capacities to monitor and protect the zones, and lastly because of the complex governance gathering a diversity of players: from local communities to customary authorities to states, regional organizations, NGOs, fisheries, and so on.

**The EU is as a strong player on ocean governance and wants to lead by example.** In 2016, it launched an International Ocean Governance Agenda, renewed in June 2022, and commits to a safe, secure, clean, healthy and sustainably managed ocean.<sup>12</sup> **Europeans have an interest in supporting fair, knowledge-based, negotiated solutions to protect oceans that have become the locus for geopolitical rivalry.** Ocean governance is a key priority for the EU in its cooperation with the Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

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9. Article M. Dégremont, "LSMPA Sovereignties in New Caledonia and French Polynesia: Territorialities, Alliances and Powers in Oceania", *Oceania*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 2022, pp. 51-73.

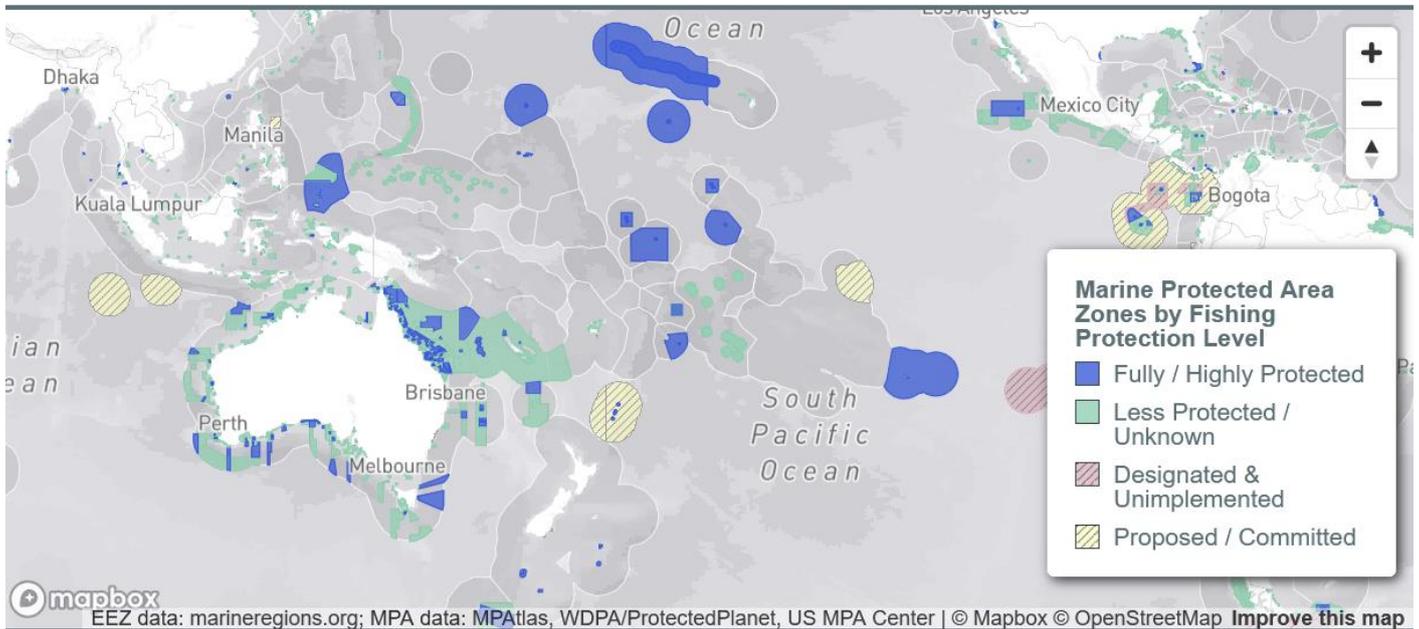
10. Pierre-Yves Le Meur, Researcher in environmental anthropology, Research Institute for the Development (IRD) Center in Noumea, New Caledonia, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, June 21, 2022, *op. cit.*

11. L. Reklai, "Palau to Bring 100% Managed Ocean Concept as Solution to UN Ocean Conference", *Island Times*, April 19, 2022.

12. "International Ocean Governance: EU's Contribution for Setting the Course of a Blue Planet", Press Release, June 21, 2022, available at: [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu).

13. See for example the Pacific-European Union Maritime Partnership (PEUMP) promoting integrated ocean and coastal management by protecting biodiversity and sustainable fisheries in 15 Pacific countries, and coordinated by the Pacific Community (SPC), among others, available at: [www.peump.dev](http://www.peump.dev).

## Maritime Protected Area Zones in the Pacific, by fishing protection level



Source: [Atlas of Marine Protection](#).

## Ensuring Legitimacy of Ocean Governance Schemes: For a Knowledge-based, Cooperative Approach Between Europe and the Pacific

### *Bridging Local Knowledge and Global Science*

**Access to scientific data is crucial** for implementing a knowledge-based approach and informing political decisions on the area delimitation, the adequate level of protection, but also the monitoring of the actual impact of the MPAs on the environment. Data is also needed to have a clearer understanding of the impact of climate change on ocean conditions and fish stocks.<sup>14</sup> Finally, seabed mining and geoengineering initiatives such as ocean alkalization or ocean fertilization are new challenges for the PICs to deal with.

14. See the MICROPAC project is implemented by SPC and the French Development Research Institute (IRD) and supported by France. Designed to gain a better understanding of climate change's impact on tuna resource movements, it analyses micronekton, namely the fish, crustaceans and squid on which tuna feed. See more at: [www.oceanfish.spc.int](http://www.oceanfish.spc.int).

**There are few capacities in the PICs to produce such data locally. European expertise could therefore help bridge that gap by collecting, analyzing and sharing marine data and ocean observations.** In Europe, the **Copernicus** Marine Service provides free and open marine data and real-time ocean monitoring, forecasting as well as ocean climate monitoring and prediction services, both for EU sea basins and for the global ocean.<sup>15</sup> Jérôme Aucan noted during the webinar that this could provide inspiration for a similar scheme to be set up in the Pacific.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, in 2017, the Pacific Community (SPC) established the **Pacific Community Center for Ocean Science (PCCOS)**, partly funded by the EU, to help Pacific Island governments and communities easily access the ocean science and expertise they need to improve ocean governance. In the context of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), PCCOS has applied to become a regional collaborative center for the Pacific Island region.

**PCCOS also serves as an interface between “global” science and local, traditional knowledge that should be considered, as they usefully complement each other.** Centuries of coexistence with the ocean have provided Islanders with a unique, first-hand understanding of the ecosystem, and help complement science in areas where no

measurements are available (indirect knowledge on submarine currents, for instance). Dr. Aucan explained that traditional knowledge is filling gaps of what modern science cannot monitor.

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In a similar way, the European organization Mercator Ocean International is providing scientific data and ocean indicators to decision-makers. But, during the webinar, Karina von Schuckmann acknowledged that the oceanographers need more granular knowledge of local needs to be able to design and co-construct the most relevant and useful indicators.<sup>17</sup> **Bridging large-scale**

**scientific data and local knowledge thus helps to design new solutions for sustainable development.**

**Collaborative learning and co-designed solutions enhance both the efficiency and legitimacy of ocean protection and management schemes.** Solutions based on local traditions/practices such as *Rahui* in Polynesia,<sup>18</sup> *Tabu* in Fiji or *Bul* in Palau helps to ensure conservation while sustaining communities' livelihoods and

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15. See the website of the Copernicus project: [www.copernicus.eu](http://www.copernicus.eu).

16. Jérôme Aucan, Head of the Pacific Community Center for Ocean Science (PCCOS), Pacific Community-SPC, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, June 21, 2022, *op. cit.*

17. Karina von Schuckmann, Oceanographer, Mercator Ocean International, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, June 21, 2022, *op. cit.*

18. T. Bambridge, F. Gaulme, C. Montet and T. Paulais, *Communs et océans. Le rahui en Polynésie*, Tahiti, Au Vent des îles, 2019.

cultural practices. Mobilizing local traditions, concepts and norms also helps enhancing understanding and respect of the decision to set up off-limits areas that can have adverse effects on local fishermen, for example. The community-based management of marine resources is thus different from mandating an NGO to monitor the EEZ.

This logic of reappropriation is demonstrated by French Polynesia and recent Palau's decision to set up MMAs rather than MPAs. There is a trend going **from MPAs toward the notion of “stewardship” or “care”** (not only protecting environment but applying a holistic approach to manage an area).<sup>19</sup> Of course, these solutions should be economically sustainable.

### ***Building Up a Sustainable Blue Economy***

This raises the question of **how the management of the EEZ can support the economy while ensuring the sustainable conservation of resources**. For example, PICs often trade fishing rights to third countries with large markets. It is estimated that fishing access fees provide between 10-60% of all government revenue for at least six Pacific nations.<sup>20</sup> When a MPA is set up, there is an entry cost: the country needs to fund the entire the design and monitoring process while, in addition, closing the area to fishermen means a lack of economic profit. It is estimated that 5 to 7 years are necessary to make MPAs economically viable and make sure that rebounds in resources will make up for the no-go zones.<sup>21</sup> **While funding schemes exist** (through NGOs, international funds, regional organizations), **they are often not sufficient nor sustainable** to cover the costs for a small-scale economy that relies a lot on the ocean, with limited resources to invest in the proper management of the MPA. Therefore, 65% of MPAs report an inadequate budget for basic management needs, leading to sub-optimal conservation outcomes (moderate protection level).<sup>22</sup>

The example of **Palau** is also telling: the country **heavily relied on tourist arrival fees to sustain its National Marine Sanctuary** (PNMS) that has strictly closed, since 2020, 80% of its EEZ to all forms of extractive activities (the other 20% being accessible to locally-managed fisheries). **However, Beijing decided an embargo on the destination in 2017, and tourism almost stopped during the pandemic, endangering the economy**. Therefore, the government recently announced that **the**

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19. “Importantly, Pacific narratives of maritime territorialization suggest that Pacific peoples do not necessarily understand sovereignty in the same way as the dominant Westphalian model. That model provides that states have exclusive rights to exploit the resources on and in their land territory. In contrast, in the Pacific Islands narratives emphasize ‘stewardship’ and ‘custodianship’ of maritime areas, which implies less emphasis on maritime area as an exclusive resource to be exploited, but instead as one to be conserved.” See R. Strating and J. Wallis, “Maritime Sovereignty and Territorialization: Comparing the Pacific Islands and South China Sea”, *Marine Policy*, No. 141, 2022, pp. 105-110.

20. W. Morgan, “Oceanic Hydro-politics: Exploring Contemporary Geopolitics of the Blue Pacific”, *Regional Outlook Paper*, Griffith Asia Institute, No. 64, 2020.

21. J. Claudet, in “Aires marines protégées : les ambitions européennes contrariées”, *Cultures Monde, France Culture*, June 7, 2022, available at: [www.radiofrance.fr](http://www.radiofrance.fr).

22. “Closing the Financing Gap of Marine Conservation”, Blue Seeds, available at: [www.blueseeds.org](http://www.blueseeds.org).

**area will be turned into a 100% MMA, allowing the state to diversify its options for sustainable development** and reaffirm its sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> As Palau Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, Steven Victor explained during the webinar: “The lesson emerging out of Palau is that **MPAs are not silver bullets**. MPAs alone will not solve the problem of declining ocean biodiversity and must be pursued in tandem with other sustainable practices within the various ocean-related sectors, in the context of the post-COVID economic recovery.” He added that **European technical and financial support would be welcome to meet sustainable development needs**.<sup>24</sup>

**The EU has indeed the capacity and willingness to contribute to closing the financial gap in the Pacific**, as explained in the Pacific Protocol of the 2021 Negotiated Agreement text to replace the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.<sup>25</sup> The EU already contributes financially to a number of initiatives in the region, including through its support to the SPC. Together with UNESCO, the European Commission is for example promoting the international adoption of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes. Europe could step up its engagement in terms of capacity building and expert training by hosting Pacific Islander students in European universities. There is also the need for ocean scientists to come and train local oceanographers, suggested Dr. Aucan. Finally, **to ensure a fairer burden-sharing, the EU should continue to support the Pacific Islands in advocating for more sustainable fishing practices outside of the EEZ**, and the early conclusion of an ambitious treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

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## Europe could step up its engagement in terms of capacity building and expert training

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### ***Ensuring Proper Monitoring and Surveillance***

A key issue is ensuring proper **surveillance** of MPAs or MMAs, enforcing the rules, and more broadly, achieving an efficient **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** in large EEZs. PICs lack resources and equipment to adequately patrol and monitor their maritime territory and enforce protection measures. This is a serious limitation, as an adequate

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23. “We must never again allow foreign intrusion and harmful influences to negatively impact our independence, sovereignty, and way of life”, National Security Strategy of the Republic of Palau, June 2022, p. 7.

24. Steven Victor, Minister, Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, Republic of Palau, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, June 21, 2022, *op. cit.*

25. The EU “support[s] concrete measures aimed at strengthening ocean governance and the conservation and sustainable management of living marine resources including fisheries”, including “cooperation on research, design and implementation of conservation and management measures, marine spatial planning and the establishment of marine protected areas and marine sanctuaries, in line with international law, based on the best available science, and taking into account indigenous and local communities’ knowledge.”, *Negotiated Agreement text initialed by the EU and OACPS chief negotiators on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021*, European Union, p. 168, available at: [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu).

surveillance of EEZs is key to discouraging predatory moves and abusive claims by some states. As the former Chief of French Navy Adm. Prazuck reminded: “What is not protected is looted, what is looted is disputed”.<sup>26</sup>

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) coordinates several schemes to assist the PICs through technical expertise, information sharing, monitoring activities, regional surveillance operations and staff training.<sup>27</sup> In particular, France, alongside its partners of the Pacific QUAD (the United States, Australia and New Zealand) is regularly patrolling the EEZ of PICs that request assistance to deter IUU fishing. That was the case in Papua New Guinea (among others) in 2022.<sup>28</sup> French capabilities in the Pacific will be reinforced this year with the permanent deployment of two new patrol vessels; one based in New Caledonia and the other in French Polynesia. These patrol ships will carry out surveillance and sovereignty missions.

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At the latest France-Oceania Summit, President Macron also underlined the need “to use appropriate technologies, in particular satellite images, in order to reinforce maritime surveillance of EEZs and preparedness for natural disasters” and announced the **creation of a network of coastguards** for the South Pacific for information sharing, operational cooperation and training, to counter “predatory” behavior.<sup>29</sup> French and European contributions would also be welcome in the Northern Pacific: during the webinar, Minister Victor called for setting up arrangements for French vessels that are proceeding through Palau waters to help support EEZ surveillance.<sup>30</sup>

**The EU also has a long experience in helping to build its partners’ maritime capacities.** Through the European Development Fund, several programs on fostering maritime security through capacity-building activities, information-sharing and operational coordination in the Western Indian Ocean have been conducted, such as MASE (Program to Promote Regional Maritime Security, 2012-2018) and **CRIMARIO** (Critical Maritime Routes, Indian Ocean) (2015-2019), which has been extended to Southeast Asia in 2020 and soon, to the Pacific. It has led to the creation of several information-sharing and coordination centers.<sup>31</sup> An information sharing and incident management tool, **IORIS** (Indian Ocean Regional Information Sharing

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26. Audition de l’amiral Christophe Prazuck, chef d’état-major de la marine, Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées, Assemblée Nationale, July 26, 2017, available at: [www.assemblee-nationale.fr](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr).

27. See the website of the FFA: [www.ffa.int](http://www.ffa.int).

28. “PNG and France Are Partners to Fight Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing”, *PacNews*, March 29, 2022, available at: [www.pasifika.news](http://www.pasifika.news).

29. “France, South Pacific Nations to Combat ‘Predatory’ Fishing as China Extends Reach”, Reuters, July 19, 2021, available at: [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

30. Steven Victor, Minister, Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, Republic of Palau, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, June 21, 2022, *op. cit.*

31. C. Bueger, “Effective Maritime Domain Awareness in the Western Indian Ocean”, *Policy Brief*, ISS, No. 104, June 2017, p. 2.

platform), was launched in 2018.

Keeping that in mind, **a French and/or European participation in the initiatives recently launched by the US** (the Partners in the Blue Pacific Initiative)<sup>32</sup> **and by the QUAD**, or the US, Japan, Australia, India, (the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness)<sup>33</sup> **would be useful** to avoid overlaps, share best practices and support truly multilateral and participatory schemes. Only multilateral, inclusive schemes will be able to provide public good without playing into great powers rivalry or arousing tensions that Pacific Islands want to avoid.

## Conclusion

Setting up an MPA or MMA is about conservation of biodiversity, but also about reinforcing one's sovereignty over maritime territory; it is therefore a very complex geopolitical object, with multiple layers and players. Depending on the perspective, these conservation or management schemes can be perceived either as ocean grabbing (implying asymmetries and dispossession) or ocean commoning (stressing the relations between a resource and a community, with rights and duties).<sup>34</sup> For this reason, **there is a need for a knowledge-based, participatory approach, as well as the sustainable commitment of resources and building of partnerships to ensure a management solution is deemed as efficient, fair and legitimate.**

**Ocean governance needs bridges** between the local and global levels, between oceanographers, anthropologists, decision-makers, fishermen, NGOs and regional organizations. Further, it requires bridges **between key players for ocean governance, such as the EU and Pacific Islands countries.** In this respect, interdependence and complementarity between the two regions are indeed greater than usually thought.

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32. "Statement by Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States on the Establishment of the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP)", White House, June 24, 2022, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

33. "FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit 2022", White House, May 23, 2022, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

34. E. Fache, P.-Y. Le Meur and E. Rodary, "The New Scramble for the Pacific: A Frontier Approach", *op. cit.*

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