



## Promoting tropical sea science in the western Indian Ocean

*Human impact on marine habitats and resources is leading to a decrease in biodiversity and depleted fish stocks in oceans and coastal areas. Maintaining the integrity of the marine environment, including reefs, is of major interest to western Indian Ocean states, among which Réunion is the only and furthest outermost region from continental Europe. In Réunion, the main themes of sea science include biodiversity and ecology, environment monitoring and utilisation, as well as fish resources and aquaculture.*

In order to increase its presence on the international stage, including through the region's International Cooperation Partner Countries (ICPC), the European action in the western Indian Ocean needs to be more visible and more evident — a clear aim of the 'RUN sea science' project (RUN stands for Réunion, an abbreviation used in air transport). There are more than 100 programmes on biodiversity in the Indian Ocean, but hardly any of them are steered by European institutions.

The development of aquaculture is a very competitive sector between Réunion and other countries of the region. Réunion's regional council is making a substantial integration effort with the region's ICPC countries, principally through its regional cooperation programme. The 'RUN sea science' project aims to significantly strengthen the regional cooperation policy action of the local government.

In order to meet the scientific and political stakes, the 'RUN sea science' project wishes to improve and develop the research capacities and capabilities of Réunion. This is being achieved in the field of sea sciences by improving regional S & T potential, enhancing human and material resources and developing strategic partnerships and scientific dissemination.

The project defined four major strategic objectives:

- enhance the local critical mass and skills of researchers in sea science;
- increase the visibility of the teams at regional, EU and international levels;



- unlock the technological gaps' that limit activities in Réunion;
- support the creation of a sea science pole of excellence in Réunion.

The sea science pole of excellence, called the 'Regional marine pole', is being set up on the island by the 'RUN sea science' research network. It is funded by the SF and additionally supported via the 2008 RegPot programme call, on the initiative of the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) — a French public research institute set up on Réunion 18 years ago. It currently has a staff of 35 scientists.

In order to accomplish the strategic objectives, the IRD and its local partners (Université de La Réunion and the research institutes ARDA, ARVAM, BRGM and Ifremer) have established the following specific actions.

- Reinforce the S & T capacities of Réunion through: upgrading the research equipment necessary for the development of research activities in the sea science field, including genetics, otolithometry, environmental studies, aquaculture and bi-logging; recruitment of researchers from Réunion, in order to maintain the pool of local qualified researchers in sea sciences; improvement of the S & T experience and knowledge of local researchers through short trainings held by EU and ICPC partner institutions.
- Develop strategic partnerships and communication with EU and ICPC sea science institutions: actions at international level, such as the 2009 Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (Wiomsa) conference at Réunion as well as thematic workshops and visits to Réunion, by sea science experts from EU and ICPC countries.
- Information and dissemination: various communication initiatives including a website, booklet and documentary movie, presenting the research activities and the application of technology in sea science in Réunion.

### Project title

Improvement of the tropical sea science research potential in the western Indian Ocean, and of the technology capacities in Réunion Island (RUN sea science)

### Programme & call

'Research Potential' (RegPot) programme, call: FP7-REGPOT-2008-1

'Unlocking and developing the research potential in the EU's convergence regions and outermost regions'

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### Project website

<http://run-sea-science.fr/rubrique26>