



Very-high resolution optical satellite image, capturing small-size vessels of interest.

FISHERIES CONTROL INDIAN OCEAN, ZÉLÉE BANK REEF

Given that it has one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the world, France, in close cooperation with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), is leading the uptake of Copernicus Maritime Surveillance (CMS) services for fisheries control.

In the Indian Ocean, the French EEZ encompasses numerous islands and atolls that host an enormous wealth of biodiversity and serve as a nursery area for marine life. Among them are several endangered marine species that are found nowhere else, making the surrounding ecosystem exceptionally valuable and fragile. However, the abundance of marine life also makes the area vulnerable to Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, which poses a significant threat to this unique biodiversity.

Situated in the Indian Ocean in the Mozambique channel, east of the Comoros archipelago, between Mayotte and the Glorieuses islands, the Banc du Zélée is a submerged reef bank within the EEZ of Mayotte and thus under French jurisdiction. The entire EEZ was declared a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2011 and any activities within this area are subject to strict

access rules. Given the abundance of various commercially valuable species, illegal fishing remains a constant threat.

Its remoteness and size pose a particular challenge when it comes to ensuring continuous presence of patrol assets in the area.

Routine CMS acquisitions support French patrol units in the area, ensuring enhanced detection and interception capabilities through coordination with the French Fisheries Monitoring Centre.

In July 2024, following the delivery of a high-resolution optical image with six non-reporting vessels detected within the Zélée Bank MPA, a French fisheries patrol vessel was dispatched to the area for further investigation.

Given the time needed to reach the area, about ten hours later, the vessels were not present anymore in the MPA upon arrival of the patrol vessel. However, the inspection team found that the vessels moved 20 km eastwards to the Geyser reef and visually detected the presence of a stationary fishing vessel.

The Geyser reef is part of the Îles Éparses (Scattered islands) within the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF) and is included in the Glorieuses Archipelago National Nature Reserve. Within the nature reserve fishing is strictly prohibited.

An inspection led to the interception of a small fishing vessel with eight crew on board and 126 kg of illegally caught fish, 14 fishing lines and 11 harpoons were apprehended.

Although this case focuses on small artisanal fishing vessels (around 10 m LOA¹) their impact can be devastating.

This example highlights how CMS effectively supports French authorities in fisheries control.



CMS helps protecting the rich biodiversity of protected areas in the Indian Ocean.

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If you are interested in using CMS for the purposes of fisheries control, please contact the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), by sending an email to copernicus@efca.europa.eu

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REFERENCES

- 1 Length overall.

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