

## PRESS RELEASE

PARIS, 8 JUNE 2026

### MISSION NEPTUNE INAUGURAL NEPTUNE FORUM

*World Ocean Day — Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris*

On 8 June 2026, World Ocean Day, Mission Neptune held the inaugural edition of the Neptune Forum at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Bringing together more than 500 participants from every continent, 60 high-level speakers, and 5,000 visitors over three days, this landmark event established an unprecedented dialogue between science, diplomacy, exploration and culture in service of a shared ambition: to know the ocean better in order to protect it better.

<b>5 000</b> Visitors – Les Rêves de l'Océan	<b>2 000</b> Spectators Neptune Explorers Dome	<b>500+</b> Participants Neptune Forum	<b>35</b> Countries represented	<b>60+</b> Speakers from around the world
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#### A PLANETARY GATHERING FOR BLUE DIPLOMACY

One year after the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) held in Nice, the Neptune Forum brought together key actors in international ocean governance around the themes of exploration, knowledge and protection. In the opening session, French ministers Monique Barbut<sup>1</sup> and Catherine Chabaud<sup>2</sup> announced the creation of three new marine protected areas (Baie d'Audierne, Guadeloupe, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories), bringing the share of French waters under strong protection to 14.68%. Alongside Ambassador Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, Special Envoy of the President of the Republic for the Oceans, Minister Éléonore Caroit<sup>3</sup> reviewed the commitments made in Nice, reaffirmed France's wholehearted support for Mission Neptune, and issued a direct call to her European counterparts to join the momentum: *"Europe has the means, the science and the partners; what remains is to amplify its voice and its action for the Ocean."* She underlined the need to extend blue diplomacy to African nations and developing coastal states. In closing, Minister Philippe Baptiste<sup>4</sup> called for greater mobilisation in support of fundamental research within a European framework and for strengthened cooperation between oceanographic institutions. *"We are all children of Neptune,"* he concluded.

From Papeete, President Moetai Brotherson announced strengthened protection for Polynesian waters within the world's largest marine protected area (4.8 million km<sup>2</sup>). European Commissioner Costas Kadis presented Ocean Eye, an initiative integrated into the European Ocean Pact, structured around GOOS, Mission Neptune and Mercator Ocean International for the development of the European Digital Twin of the Ocean.

The Forum also brought together the secretaries-general and directors of major UN agencies: Arsenio Dominguez (International Maritime Organization) on the decarbonisation of maritime transport; Leticia Carvalho (International Seabed Authority) on the governance of the common heritage of humankind; Manuel Barange (Food and Agriculture Organization) on illegal fishing, which still accounts for one in every five fish consumed worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> **Monique Barbut**, Minister for Ecological Transition, Biodiversity and International Climate and Nature Negotiations

<sup>2</sup> **Catherine Chabaud**, Minister for the Sea and Fisheries

<sup>3</sup> **Éléonore Caroit**, French Minister Delegate for Francophonie, International Partnerships and French Nationals Abroad

<sup>4</sup> **Philippe Baptiste**, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Outer Space

Julio Cordano, Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the global plastics treaty, and Barbara Pompili, French Ambassador for the Environment, called for an ambitious and legally binding international agreement. Lynda Tabuya<sup>5</sup>, Fijian Minister, et Emelia Arthur<sup>6</sup>, Ghanaian Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, powerfully amplified the voices of African coastal states and Pacific island nations, advocating for more equitable representation in international bodies and for strengthened marine scientific capacity.

## THE STATE OF THE OCEAN : KNOWLEDGE AS AN URGENCY

The Neptune Forum highlighted the publication of the second edition of the Starfish Barometer, presented by Marina Lévy and Pierre Bahurel on behalf of a committee of 29 scientists from 14 countries. The report sets out an alarming picture: more than 80% of the world's coral reefs have experienced bleaching events, global ocean observing capacity is declining, while the ocean continues to absorb 25% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and nearly 90% of excess heat of human origin.

Discussions underlined the strategic importance of a global infrastructure integrating satellites, in-situ observation, deep-sea exploration and artificial intelligence. The ocean can only be protected if it is understood.

Among the innovations presented, Andrew Forrest and the teams of the Minderoo Foundation unveiled the rapid advances of environmental DNA (eDNA): using a simple water sample, this technology makes it possible to identify all species present in an ecosystem. Thousands of kits have already been deployed around the world, opening the way to an unprecedented mapping of global marine biodiversity.

## MISSION NEPTUNE : A ROADMAP IN ACTION

The Neptune Forum marked the first major public presentation of Mission Neptune since its launch in Nice. Four exceptional early-career researchers — the first cohort of Neptune Fellows — were officially introduced to the assembly: Olivia Soares Pereira, Neha Acharya-Patel, Shawnee Traylor and Guillaume Liniger. Over the next two years, these postdoctoral researchers will dedicate their work to four major challenges in ocean knowledge: hydrothermal vents, ocean abundance, carbon sinks, and polar oceans — all scientific frontiers at the heart of Neptune's mission.

Mission Neptune also announced the development of the first Neptune Academic Chairs (Tahiti, Sharjah, Rabat, Paris) and the Neptune Explorers Galleries, designed to bring the general public closer to ocean exploration.

Three inaugural Neptune-labelled expeditions were announced: the OceanX campaign in Palau (spring 2026), exploring the deep seafloor and seamount biodiversity of the Kyushu-Palau Ridge; the Tara Coral expedition (seventeen months from spring 2026) aboard the schooner Tara, dedicated to coral reef resilience in South-East Asia; and Tara Polaris I (eighteen months from summer 2026) aboard the Tara Polar Station, drifting across the central Arctic Ocean to study the sea-ice microbiome, a fragile sentinel of climate change.

## EXPLORATION, CULTURE AND EMOTION : THE OCEAN AS A NARRATIVE

Over three days, the Neptune Forum offered a cultural and scientific programme open to the public under the banner Les Rêves de l'Océan. More than 5,000 visitors were able to discover a photographic exhibition by Prince Hussain Aga Khan in the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, and an immersive Ocean Dreams experience under the Neptune Explorers Dome in the Jardin des Plantes. The film programme brought together some of the most significant works of ocean exploration: *OceanXplorers: Giants of the Deep* with James Cameron, *Deep Rising* by Matthieu Rytz with Jason Momoa — a striking indictment of financial speculation on the deep seabed — and *Mission Blue*, a luminous portrait of Sylvia Earle in service of the ocean. Several world premieres electrified audiences: *Tara Polar Station*, an immersion

<sup>5</sup> Lynda Tabuya, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Republic of Fiji

<sup>6</sup> Emelia Arthur, Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Republic of Ghana

into the heart of the Arctic, and *Abysses, la face cachée des océans*, filmed aboard Ifremer's research vessel *Pourquoi Pas?*.

Explorer Jean-Louis Étienne reminded the audience that the ocean does not yet inspire enough wonder, even as it conditions the future of humanity. Glaciologist and explorer Heidi Sevestre, a voice from the climate frontline, delivered a gripping testimony on the transformation of polar oceans. Jeremy Rifkin made the case for a "Blue Deal" and recalled a truth long overlooked: "*We live on Planet Aqua.*" Several speakers insisted on the necessity of connecting knowledge with emotion in order to mobilise societies at the scale the challenge demands.

*« Taking care of the ocean is a team sport. »*  
*Sylvia Earle, Patron of Mission Neptune*

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Mission Neptune soutient le déploiement opérationnel d'OceanEye, dans le cadre du Pacte européen pour l'océan, en partenariat avec le GOOS et Mercator Ocean International.



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