

PRESS RELEASE



UNDER THE POLE IN ANTARCTICA, POLITICAL ADVANCES, ACTIVISM: THE MESOPHOTIC ZONE COMES OUT OF THE SHADOWS.



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pour les sciences océaniques
au service du développement durable

A few weeks before Under The Pole's departure for Antarctica, as part of their DEEPLIFE scientific program — endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development — Emmanuelle and Ghislain Bardout take stock of their international advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening knowledge and protection of the mesophotic zone, shedding light on this still little-known area located between 30 and 200 meters deep.

A year of major victories lies ahead in 2026.

A historic victory at the crossroads of science and activism.

Scientific discoveries on the mesophotic zone have recently led to a historic breakthrough in Fourni, Greece, with the adoption of two ministerial decrees protecting 450 km² of coralligenous habitats and banning destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling.

This victory is the result of a collaboration between Under The Pole, The (NGO) Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, environmental activists, environmental activist Camille Étienne and the local community of Fourni, including its fishermen. Driven by strong local engagement and a powerful wave of collective mobilization on social media, this milestone demonstrates how scientific discoveries can translate into concrete political action for ocean protection.

An international motion led by Under The Pole.

Alongside its expeditions, Under The Pole Carries out local, national and international advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening knowledge and protection of the mesophotic zone. A motion they championed on mesophotic ecosystems was officially adopted at the World Conservation Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - the world's leading authority on nature conservation (uniting governments, scientists and civil society to develop and promote global standards and policies for protecting biodiversity).

For the first time, the global community recognizes the importance of this zone, which hosts exceptional biodiversity and plays a crucial role in ocean resilience. This achievement is the result of over two years of work and a citizen mobilization campaign launched three months ago across Under The Pole's social media platforms. A victory that marks a new turning point: the mesophotic zone is coming out of the shadows.

Exploring the Antarctic Mesophotic Zone.

For the first time, Under The Pole is setting out to explore Antarctica to study mesophotic biodiversity under extreme conditions. This expedition, conducted in collaboration with the Malizia Explorer team, led by offshore sailor Boris Herrmann, is part of the DEEPLIFE program, which aims to study, raise awareness of, and protect the marine animal forests of the mesophotic zone.

Beyond the exploration and science, the expedition also carries a strong advocacy and awareness mission: a dedicated campaign will be launched to highlight the importance of protecting Antarctic mesophotic ecosystems, with the support of influencers and public figures on board, amplifying the message to global audiences. At the same time, the shore-based team will engage primary school students with dedicated educational journals distributed in classrooms throughout January.

The mesophotic zone is beginning to speak to the world.

The release of the book *Du fond des océans les montagnes sont plus grandes*, by french author Corinne Morel Darleux, published by Libertalia in early October, marks an important milestone in raising public awareness of the mesophotic zone. Drawing on the work of Under The Pole and inspired by her month spent aboard their sailing vessel in April 2025, this essay blends poetry, politics, and marine biology to reveal the beauty and fragility of this still little-known realm. At the crossroads between a logbook and an activist narrative, it becomes a genuine extension of scientific work, offering a deeply human perspective on what this space tells us about our relationship with the Ocean.

*DEEPLIFE

The DEEPLIFE program is dedicated to the study and preservation of Marine Animal Forests (MAFs) across the world's ocean basins — from polar to tropical regions, and from shallow waters (0–30 m) to mesophotic depths (30–200 m). This 10-year program, endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, brings together explorers and scientists who contribute to advancing the knowledge essential for ocean conservation.

The scientific component of DEEPLIFE is led by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and co-managed by an international scientific consortium, fostering co-design and co-leadership of actions, joint data and sample analysis, open-access dissemination of results, and collaborative research funding.

Our Antarctic expedition is part of the DEEPLIFE program. Lorenzo Bramanti, as DEEPLIFE's Scientific Co-Director and an experienced diver, will be on board throughout the three-month expedition to ensure the successful implementation of scientific protocols.

Since data collection in the mesophotic zone remains a technical challenge, we aim to optimize all our sampling and data acquisition so that the results can benefit the widest possible audience. Therefore, ahead of each mission, we establish — in addition to the DEEPLIFE framework — specific collaborations with other researchers. Accordingly, the table below lists, in order of appearance:

- The scientific leadership of DEEPLIFE
- The DEEPLIFE consortium scientists involved in the Antarctic mission
- The ad hoc collaborations with researchers outside the DEEPLIFE consortium, specific to our Antarctic expedition.

UNDER THE POLE

Under The Pole is an organization founded in 2008 by Emmanuelle and Ghislain Bardout, dedicated to the understanding and preservation of the oceans. Its work is structured around scientific diving expeditions across the globe, awareness and education initiatives for schools and the general public, and advocacy efforts within institutional and policy-making spheres.

Our vision: Underwater exploration — a prodigious source of inspiration and an essential tool for advancing ocean knowledge — is a powerful driver for their protection.

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