

Press Release

Saya De Malha Expedition Successfully Concludes, Collecting Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and Debris from Outer Islands

The Ministry for Fisheries and the Blue Economy, Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), and the Seychelles Coast Guard are pleased to announce the successful completion of the third expedition of the vessel *Saya De Malha*. The expedition aimed to collect fish aggregating devices (FADs) and other debris from the beaches and reefs of the outer islands.

Beginning on November 13, 2023, a crew of 20 individuals embarked on the expedition from the Seychelles Coast Guard base. After spending 29 days at sea, the team returned to Port Victoria on Monday, December 11, 2023. The crew consisted of Coast Guard personnel, an SFA technician and observer, a representative from the Island Conservation Society, four Seychelles Maritime Academy students, and a lecturer. This expedition provided an excellent opportunity to enhance the skills of our young seafarers and gather valuable scientific information.

The campaign primarily focused on the southern atolls of Seychelles, including Providence, Cerf, Cosmoledo, and Aldabra. Efforts were concentrated on removing stranded FADs and debris from beaches and reefs in these areas. Upon revisiting locations where FADs had been previously recovered, it was found that only a few FADs had become stranded during the intervening period.

In total, the crew successfully recovered 7 intact FADs and 5 others that were significantly damaged. Additionally, they retrieved 8 satellite buoys and various FAD debris from the visited atoll locations. Notably, the crew also cleared 6.1 tons of waste from Aldabra Atoll.

Despite encountering adverse weather conditions that hindered operations at Aldabra and other locations for over a week, the crew considers the campaign highly successful.

"It was a very successful journey. Despite facing difficulties in mooring near certain islands, such as Cosmoledo in the initial days, the crew's morale remained high. We stayed on course and achieved our objectives," stated an SFA Technician.

During the expedition, the crew diligently recorded information about the recovered FADs, including their GPS locations, conditions, the habitats from which they were collected, and the materials they were composed of. Whenever available, details of the satellite tracking buoys, such as make, serial number, and vessel markings, were also documented. This data will be compiled and analysed to assess the impact of these FADs on the ecosystem and their contributions to marine debris in the respective locations they were found.

The returned FADs are currently stored at Providence Port, where further data collection and sorting will take place. Subsequently, they will be made available for recycling or proper disposal.

"We are proud of the successful completion of the Saya De Malha expedition and commend the efforts of all involved. The Ministry for Fisheries and the Blue Economy remains steadfast in our commitment to facilitating and continuing with such valuable programs. As we move forward, we will continue to learn and identify new and more effective ways to better manage recovery missions. Protecting our marine environment and ensuring sustainable practices are at the forefront of our efforts," stated Minister for Fisheries and the Blue Economy, Minister Jean-Francois Ferrari.