

The second week on hold

The second week at sea began for us with waves up to 4 meters high. Cyclone "Belal" had increased to the second strongest level with wind speeds of up to 215 km per hour and hit La Réunion and then Mauritius. Réunion was under curfew and the water and electricity supply was interrupted as a precautionary measure. In the alternative area that RV SONNE had headed for, however, it was comparatively calm, only the swell was clearly noticeable.

As we were southeast of La Réunion in international waters, we were even able to use the time for test stations. On January 15, we were able to use the multicorer to get eight 30 cm long cores from a depth of 4900 m, which the working groups will use for geochemical, sedimentological and micropaleontological investigations. On January 16, the swell had receded sufficiently to allow samples to be taken with the multinet from water depths of up to 250 m (photo). CTD samples were then taken at a water station between the surface and 4900 m depth. Based on the temperature and salinity data, the CTD profiles showed that the deepest water layer consisted of Antarctic Bottom Water (AABW), which only occurs in a few basins of the Indian Ocean as far north as this.

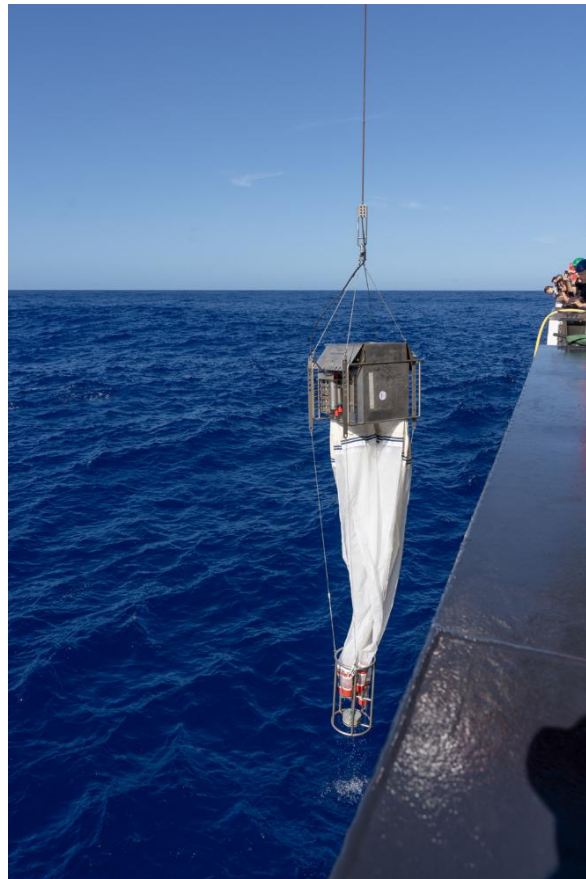


Photo: Multinet at the test station southeast of La Réunion

On January 17, after the cyclone had moved on to the southeast, we steamed back towards La Réunion in the hope that our last container would arrive there promptly with the *Boston Trader* and be unloaded there. However, the port was not yet open due to the problems with the infrastructure caused by the cyclone.

On January 18, we received the message from the German Research Fleet Coordination Centre (*Leitstelle*) in Hamburg that the SO 303 research cruise had been completely cancelled for safety reasons due to the tense situation in the Arabian Sea area. This means that we will not be able to work off Pakistan or take our Pakistani colleagues on board. After the long period of preparation, this is a great disappointment for both sides. We very much regret that our joint research on the Pakistani shelf and the collaboration with our Pakistani colleagues has to be canceled this time and very much hope for an opportunity in the future to resume this trusting collaboration.

We were asked by the *Leitstelle* and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to create an alternative program. However, this alternative program also requires equipment and chemicals that were still on the feeder ship *Boston Trader*. In fact, our remaining hazardous goods container was unloaded from the *Boston Trader* on La Réunion in the late afternoon of January 19, but could not be released by the local port authorities before the weekend, so that it can hopefully finally be picked up by RV SONNE at the beginning of next week.

We spend the waiting time working out the alternative work program and giving scientific lectures. Despite the long wait, everyone on board is highly motivated and looking forward to hopefully finally being able to start work next week.

With best wishes from on board to everyone at home

Birgit Gaye
Chief Scientist