

# Nekton's First Descent: Midnight Zone Has Been Cancelled



Although there are no cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) aboard the expedition's research vessel the DSSV *Pressure Drop*, the decision has been made to cancel the expedition. Nekton and the Seychelles and Maldives governments remain committed to undertaking this important research and the expedition will be rescheduled when the situation allows.

"Due to the unprecedented global situation and overwhelming concerns about the COVID-19 virus, we have made the decision to cancel the expedition. We are very disappointed, but we know it is the right thing to do. We remain fully committed to our work in the Indian Ocean and look forward to resuming our research as soon as the time is right," said Oliver Steeds, Nekton's mission director.

## Taking the Coronavirus Extremely Seriously

"We are taking the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) extremely seriously and are closely monitoring global and local developments. We are following the guidelines of the World Health Organization and the governments of Maldives, Seychelles and the UK. We review the situation on a daily, often hourly, basis," project management said last week.

"We are aware that this is an ongoing, changing situation and we are continuing to work at the invitation and directives of the governments of Seychelles and Maldives. We recognize that as the situation changes, either in the coming days leading up to the expedition or during, we will respond to the directives of Seychelles, the Maldives, WHO and/or the situation aboard as required. We have reviewed the current risks and remain committed to the mission and are currently proceeding under the invitation and direction of the governments of Maldives and Seychelles."

The project management had implemented a strict policy relating to COVID-19 for participants – they were all to be screened before boarding and procedures were established for mitigating and managing symptoms and outbreaks aboard. "We are following the guidelines of the WHO, including those related to vessels, along with recommendations from the US Academic Fleet. We have been in touch with all key partners in Seychelles and the Maldives to develop and implement procedures around the mission and the vessel's Emergency Response Plans. We have a number of medics aboard, a dedicated hospital, additional medical supplies, 24/7 remote medical support and a range of other systems and procedures in place."

## About Nekton

Nekton's mission is to explore and conserve the ocean – aiming to support the protection of at least 30% of the ocean by 2030. It is an independent not-for-profit research institute working in collaboration with the University of Oxford and is a UK registered charity.