

Press Release, 19 July 2026

Tara Polaris I: Tara Polar Station leaves for its first scientific expedition from its home port of Lorient.



Tara Polar Station during the 2025 test campaign – Oulu, Finland ©Maéva Bardy – Tara Ocean Foundation

Twenty years after the schooner *Tara* became trapped in the ice in the Arctic, *Tara Polar Station*, Tara Ocean Foundation's second vessel, leaves Lorient, in France, its home port, on its very first expedition (*Tara Polaris I*) to the North Pole. Its aim is to take the pulse of our planet from the Central Arctic Ocean, a true sentinel of the climate.

Following the success of its test campaign, which lasted over seven months – including a drift in the Arctic Ocean and an overwintering period in Finland – *Tara Polar Station* returned in February to Constructions Mécaniques de Normandie (CMN), where it was built, for final adjustments ahead of its grand departure. Since May, the drifting polar station has been back in Lorient, its home port – and that of the schooner *Tara* – to finalise the last preparations ahead of *Tara Polaris I* expedition (2026–2027) departure.

Fabrice Loher, Mayor and President of the Lorient Urban Community

"We are immensely proud to welcome Tara Polar Station to Lorient. This exceptional expedition reaffirms our region's place amongst Europe's leading centres for maritime science and innovation. From Lorient, researchers from all over the world will help us gain a better understanding of the upheavals affecting our Ocean. This journey perfectly illustrates our ambition: to make Lorient the region where tomorrow's maritime solutions are developed, for the benefit of the planet."

Romain Troublé, Chief Executive Officer of the Tara Ocean Foundation

"Over the last three months, the foundation's team and more than 80 scientists from over 30 partner research centres affiliated with the CNRS have been working hard to prepare the vessel and its six laboratories before Tara Polar Station sets sail. We were in a race against time to organise the provisioning, the installation of scientific equipment and the handover between the scientists and the crew. The team rose to the challenge! Of the 18-month expedition, the initial overwintering period will last around nine months, including approximately five of polar night: a real-world test for the ship and its crew. We are ready to continue, in all humility, writing the history of great polar explorations."

19 July marks the start of a voyage to Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, for a refuelling stop to take on HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) supplied by NESTE. *Tara Polar Station* will then call at Tromsø, in Norway, to welcome the first group of the overwintering team on board and begin the handover, followed by a final technical stop in Kirkenes, Norway, for the full crew to come on board as they set out to cross the polar night. *Tara Polar Station* will leave in mid-August to join the *Xue Long*, the Polar Research Institute of China's oceanographic icebreaker, which will clear a path for her. The aim is to become trapped in the ice around 82N 140E in early September, 20 years after *Tara*.

Twelve people (five sailors, six scientists and one ship's correspondent) have agreed, following physical and psychological tests and various trainings, to embark on the nine-month overwintering period – one of the most demanding phases of the expedition, given that the next crew will not arrive until mid-April.



Martin Hertau, Captain

"I've been working as a sailor for 24 years, including 13 years with the Tara Ocean Foundation, where I've taken part in various expeditions such as Tara Oceans, Tara Mediterranean, Tara Pacific, Tara Microbiome and Tara Europa. I set sail on this adventure with Tara Polar Station at the end of August 2024 from Cherbourg to oversee the project as captain, from the completion of construction and commissioning right through to the trial runs in 2025. It's been a real success: the past 17 years have led me here, to set sail for Tara Polar Station's first overwintering. Of course, there is a certain amount of apprehension about facing nine months of confinement, including four and a half months of polar night, with eleven other people, but given what I have experienced over the last decade and the fact that I am following in the footsteps of Fridtjof Nansen and the Fram's crew 130 years ago, and Tara 20 years ago, embarking on such a mission – an adventure aimed at expanding our knowledge – is the experience of a lifetime, the crowning glory... how could I possibly have refused?"



Maxime Geoffroy, Chief Scientist on the Tara Polaris I winter leg, Polar ichthyologist – Memorial University of Newfoundland

"I am a researcher at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada, and I study the ecology of fish and zooplankton at high latitudes. I will be chief scientist for the winter leg of Polaris I. I will coordinate and supervise the scientific teams on board, manage the expedition's scientific programme and prioritise tasks according to local constraints, make operational decisions relating to the scientific aspects of the leg, and liaise with the teams on shore. I will also lead a study on the ecology of fish and zooplankton. Joining the expedition is a unique opportunity, full of challenges and adventures, but one that is well planned and offers us the chance to advance science and our understanding of a remote and fascinating environment. The adventure, the human experience, the connection with nature and the chance to contribute to the scientific programme are what motivate me."



David Monmarché, Second captain

"I've been part of the Tara adventure for 10 years. I've also been a diving instructor for 12 years, including 11 winters spent at an ice-diving school in the French Alps, and I'm a certified cave diving instructor. As second-in-command, I'm responsible for safety and the dives, and I'll be taking part in scientific deployment operations. Joining Tara Polar Station for the winter campaign is a truly enriching human experience and an opportunity to take part in a wide-ranging research programme in the Central Arctic Ocean. Having trained numerous explorers during my winter seasons to prepare them for their journeys to the Arctic, it is now my turn to do the same! In a way, this is the culmination of all those winter seasons and the trials I have taken part in, and an opportunity to be part of this project, from the ship's construction right through to the first Tara Polaris I expedition."



Carole Pire, Sailor-Cook

"I grew up by the sea in Normandy, and after training in culinary arts and hospitality, then working abroad – in England, Jersey, Canada and Japan – I turned to a career at sea at the age of 26. I then sailed on various vessels, ranging from transatlantic sailing ships to the schooner Tara – where I spent nearly six years – which led me to my current role on Tara Polar Station. I am a crew member and head chef responsible for provisions on the Tara Polaris I expedition. I have to ensure complete self-sufficiency for 16 to 18 months. I also serve as a deckhand – taking part in manoeuvres, watch duties and scientific deployments – whilst devoting two to three hours a day to scientific protocols. I have completed training as a ship's firefighter and in the use of firearms to ensure our safety from polar bears on the sea ice. From the design of this unique vessel right through to its departure, it has been a great and stimulating adventure. Following the vessel's trials in the Far North in the summer of 2025, I decided to sign up, inspired by the vessel and the overwintering team. I am delighted to be taking part in the first drift alongside an exceptional crew, in pursuit of a major scientific objective. This expedition represents an important milestone in both my professional and personal life." "Thanks to the joint efforts of the teams on shore and on board at the Foundation, we are setting off under the best possible conditions. Having organised my personal life accordingly, I am setting off with complete peace of mind."



Luc Airiau, Chief Engineer

"I studied merchant shipping in Le Havre, France. I am passionate about the polar regions, where I have mainly sailed to date. I have also worked on research vessels elsewhere in the world. I've been a mechanic on board the polar station since 2025; my responsibilities include power generation, fresh water production, wastewater treatment, and the operation of cold stores and hydraulic systems. I'm in charge of routine maintenance and dealing with unexpected breakdowns. Being part of the Tara Polaris I expedition is a huge personal and technical challenge – it's going to change my life. It's a childhood dream come true, like a trip to the Moon. I've been part of the adventure since the station was completed; the tests were successful, and the team has been put through its paces. Imagining how the station would operate over the course of this year has made me eager to see how things will actually pan out."



Minh-Ly Pham-Minh, Doctor

"I am a general practitioner and I have left the world of conventional medicine behind to venture into the most hostile places on the planet. Here, amidst drifting ice and relentless cold, providing care is not just about administering treatment: it's also about being there for people, showing resilience and, at times, being the only person they can rely on when the nearest emergency services are weeks' drive away. At Tara Polar Station, I am responsible for looking after the crew's overall health: I monitor their physical wellbeing, help maintain their mental balance during long periods of isolation, and coordinate research into how humans adapt to extreme polar conditions. This data contributes to a better scientific understanding of human performance in extreme environments. Setting off on the winter campaign means entering a world that few people ever get to see: the true polar night, where darkness lasts for months and survival depends on collective trust. It is both a privilege and a responsibility: to live alongside researchers who are collecting vital data, whilst bearing direct witness to the speed at which the Arctic environment is changing. This expedition brings together the things that motivate me most: meaningful work alongside dedicated colleagues, the real challenge of operating in extreme conditions, and the opportunity to contribute, through medical care and systematic observations, to a better understanding and protection of our fragile polar ecosystems."



Eric Brossier, Field Engineer – Tara Ocean Foundation

"As a trained engineer, I have specialised in scientific research in the polar regions for over 30 years, particularly with my sailing boat, the Vagabond, and my family crew. I will be working as a field engineer on board Tara Polar Station, with particular responsibility for the rosette, the Helikite and operations on the sea ice. I am also responsible for the dog, and act as a diver and firefighter on board. This will be my fifteenth winter-over; I am looking forward to returning to the Arctic sea ice and will do everything I can to ensure that both interpersonal relationships and technical expertise enable us to collect the scientific data expected by the scientific consortium. The wider team behind the Tara Polaris programme (2026–2046) and the prototype vessel designed for these Arctic expeditions are fascinating and meaningful; it is a privilege to play a part and contribute to the project!"



Julia Regnery, Atmospheric Engineer – Alfred Wegener Institute

"I am a chemist by training and also a passionate polar scientist with wintering experience on Germany's Neumayer Station III in Antarctica and participation in the MOSAiC drift experiment aboard Polarstern in the Central Arctic Ocean in 2019-2020. I am primarily responsible for the atmospheric and the sea ice programs, operating instruments like launching the Helikite and piloting the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV). Embarking on Tara Polar Station is an exciting challenge on a professional and personal level, so I am looking forward to experience and study the Arctic during winter, its least explored season. The Tara Polaris I expedition builds on my passion for working and living in the polar regions and allows me to take part in this unique scientific expedition."



Eric Pelletier, Genomics Researcher – Genoscope/CEA

"I am a biology researcher with a PhD, specialising in environmental genomics and systems biology. My research focuses primarily on studying the biological functions of eukaryotic planktonic organisms and communities within their environment, using genomic, transcriptomic, proteomic and metabolomic data, as well as on modelling the interactions between communities and their environment. My main responsibility will be to implement biological protocols, particularly in the 'omics' field, using samples of snow, ice and seawater. In addition, I will be part of the second-line firefighting team. It's the experience of a lifetime! On the one hand, the scientific questions we'll be tackling are fascinating. From a biological perspective – my field – how does plankton survive during the Arctic night, in the darkness, the extreme cold, and, for some species, in conditions of extreme salinity? How do they colonise the sea ice that forms in autumn? How do they become active again in spring? How do events at the interfaces between the atmosphere, snow, ice and the ocean affect the rest of the water column? And also, how do chemical and biological components transported by the atmosphere influence Arctic sea ice cover? We will be there for the next 20 years, observing the effects of global warming and global changes on this remote region of our planet, with the predicted disappearance of summer sea ice in the central Arctic Ocean. On the other hand, it is also an extreme human experience for us – the 12 of us who will be staying there for nine months, confined to one of the most remote places on our planet. Right from the start of the project, ten years ago, I was excited at the prospect of taking part. As a child, I dreamt of becoming an astronaut, and I think this is the closest thing to that experience that I'll ever have the chance to live through."



Nina Schuback, Biological Engineer – Tara Ocean Foundation

"I am a biological oceanographer with a personal interest in photosynthesis and optics. I will be responsible for managing various scientific instruments and experiments designed to study biological activity in the water, the ice and the atmosphere. Joining the Tara Polar Station for nine months is a fantastic adventure, a unique opportunity and a huge challenge, both personally and scientifically. It will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience to take part in the overwintering with such a great team!"



Sébastien Devrient, On-board Correspondent

"I am a Swiss documentary filmmaker, mountain guide and photographer who has spent more than twenty years exploring and documenting some of the most remote environments on the planet. My mission at Tara Polar Station is to capture the human, scientific and environmental dimensions of this unprecedented Arctic drift through film, photography and storytelling. Joining the station during the polar winter offers a unique opportunity to observe and share one of the most extreme and fragile environments on our planet. I accepted this mission because I am curious, I love exploration, and I believe these stories deserve to be shared."



Hugo Sellet, Oceanographic Engineer – Tara Ocean Foundation

"I am an oceanographic engineer and have been working in the field of physical oceanography for six years. Throughout my career, I have specialised in the use and development of autonomous platforms (underwater drones, surface drones, aerial drones), whilst continuing to work with traditional instrumentation. On board, my job involves deploying instruments when everything is running smoothly, but also troubleshooting and repairing them using only the resources available when they malfunction. You need to be versatile and combine practical skills with mechanical design, electronics, programming, network management and data analysis. Sailing aboard the Tara Polar Station during the winter campaign represents the ultimate test of human ingenuity and resilience: it means serving as a vital lifeline for Arctic climate science whilst inspiring future generations to find their purpose, to align themselves with the planet's needs and to prove once again that we must act now. I accepted this mission because it perfectly combines my passion for problem-solving in challenging conditions with an urgent global issue, whilst forging deep and lasting bonds as we live and work together to better understand the Arctic climate on which we all depend."



Örkki, Guard dog on board the Tara Polar Station

"Örkki is a Finnish dog, originally from Lapland. He is five months old. 300 kg of dry dog food has been stockpiled for the entire expedition. As well as keeping watch out for bears, Örkki will also be a companion to the whole crew and will thus contribute to the well-being on board."

The Tara Polaris I consortium (2026–2027) brings together 34 laboratories from 30 institutions, representing 12 countries, with Marcel Babin, a polar oceanographer at the CNRS, Laval University and the Sorbonne, serving as its Scientific Director:

The French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) (15 laboratories), Laval University, the University of Maine, the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), the Swiss Polar Institute (SPI), Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), the University of Manitoba, the French Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission (CEA)-Genoscope, Sorbonne University, the Arctic University of Norway (UiT), the Paul-Émile-Victor French Polar Institute (IPEV), the Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM-CSIC), the Free University of Brussels (ULB), Aarhus University, the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), the Weizmann Institute of Science, the University of Victoria (UVic), Friedrich Schiller University Jena (FSU), Ohio State University (OSU), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), the University of Washington (UW), the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH Zurich), the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), Kyoto University, the University of Perpignan Via Domitia (UPVD), the University of Bergen (UiB), Paris-Saclay University and the University of Grenoble Alpes (UGA).

The *Tara Polar Station* is a real human, technical and scientific challenge. It is also a financial challenge for **the Tara Ocean Foundation, which is seeking additional sources of funding to ensure its operational roll-out – namely, 10 Tara Polaris expeditions planned over 20 years**. Members of the public can therefore make a donation via the foundation's website and play their part in this extraordinary adventure to protect the Central Arctic Ocean.

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Media Kit

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À propos

Headquartered in France, the Tara Ocean Foundation is a pioneering nonprofit organization dedicated to ocean conservation. Based on the deep conviction that the Ocean is essential to life on Earth, for over 20 years the Tara Ocean Foundation has helmed a transformational movement to protect ocean life. Exploring the Ocean and sharing scientific discoveries to inspire collective awareness is at the heart of our mission.

The Foundation conducts scientific expeditions, in partnership with leading international research laboratories, to study marine biodiversity and understand the impacts of climate change and pollution. We raise awareness among citizens - from younger generations to political decision-makers. With United Nations Special Observer status, the Tara Ocean Foundation is a key stakeholder for international governance, such as the Global Plastics Treaty and the High Seas Treaty.

Exploring and protecting our living Ocean is more vital than ever. Together, let's defend life. Let's protect the Ocean. Discover more at <https://fondationtaraocean.org/> and on [video](#).

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