

Tropic Seamount: Morocco's Deep-Sea Treasure Holds Promise amid Challenges



In a groundbreaking discovery off the coast of Morocco's Laayoune, the submerged Tropic Seamount has ignited bold aspirations for transforming the nation into a global economic powerhouse. This underwater volcano, nestled 200 kilometers (124 miles) offshore, is seen as a potential reservoir of unprecedented wealth, laden with rare minerals crucial to modern industries.

At the heart of Tropic Seamount lies one of the world's largest concentrations of phosphate, a strategic resource pivotal to Moroccan economy. This discovery has bolstered hopes of catalyzing economic growth, ramping up exports, and significantly expanding employment opportunities across the nation.

Researchers estimate that Tropic's vast depths, ranging from 1,000 to 4,000 meters (3,200 to 13,100 feet), harbor an immense trove of rare earth minerals, including tellurium, cobalt, nickel, lead, vanadium, and lithium. These minerals, vital for technologies ranging from electric vehicle batteries to solar energy and smartphones, could position Morocco as a key player in global markets hungry for sustainable resources.

The sheer mineral density in Tropic Seamount surpasses any terrestrial site

by an astonishing 50,000-fold, marking it not only as a strategic asset but also a potential gamechanger in global supply chains. Experts project the reserves to encompass approximately two billion tons, equivalent to ten times the current global lithium reserves.

While the prospects seem promising, exploiting Tropic's riches presents formidable challenges. Deep-sea mining demands cutting-edge and costly technologies, potentially hindering commercial viability. Moreover, a portion of Tropic's territory falls within a disputed zone between Morocco and Spain, raising geopolitical uncertainties that could impede exploration and extraction efforts.

Environmental concerns also loom large, with fears about the ecological impact of seabed mining on marine ecosystems. Morocco, lacking prior experience in deep-sea mineral extraction, faces a steep learning curve that could delay or complicate the exploitation of this newfound resource.

Despite the hurdles, the allure of Tropic's riches has not gone unnoticed on the international stage. Reports from Spanish news outlet *Vozpópoli* indicate Portugal's recent involvement alongside Spain and Morocco in exploring the potential of Tropic's rare mineral deposits. These deposits, notably cobalt, hold the promise of producing up to 277 million electric vehicles, underscoring their critical importance in the global transition towards sustainable energy solutions.

Portugal has dispatched a marine exploration mission, spearheaded by the oceanographic research vessel NI Mario Ruivo, to investigate the waters near the Canary Islands, a move spurred by Portuguese interests in the region, part of which falls under their sovereign control.

Tropic Seamount dates back to the Cretaceous period, boasting concentrations unparalleled in any terrestrial deposits. With its summit depth at 970 meters (almost 3,200 feet), the site represents a substantial reservoir of essential metals and industrial raw materials, reinforcing its potential to reshape global supply dynamics.