The potential of fisheries reserves as a tool for biodiversity conservation. The case of the 25 Nautical Mile Fisheries Management Zone around Malta.

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Introduction

Fisheries reserves (FRs) are spatially bounded areas where the harvesting of fishery resources is restricted in some way by regulating gear, species targeted, or fishing period (closed fishing areas), or by forbidding setline (no-take zones), and are designed to protect populations of commercially important species from overexploitation. However, such measures may also protect vulnerable and ecologically important habitats, especially if significant areas of such habitats are included. Even if the primary intention of the reserve is not habitat protection, we illustrate this using the 25 Nautical Mile Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) around Malta as a case study.

Since 1971, Malta has managed a 25-NM Exclusive Fishing Zone covering an area of 1,050 km²; for which Malta became a member of the European Union in 2004, was then transferred to a Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) around Malta as a case study.

Because of these potential threats, we argue that the single most important shallow-water reserve habitats in the Mediterranean Sea and consequently have been lost in the EU’s ‘Habitat Directives’ as a priority habitat whose protection receives Special Areas of Conservation to be designated. More recently, this system has been advised by Mediterranean EU states as a mechanism of the ecological status of coastal water bodies in the implementation of the EU’s ‘Water Framework Directive’.

Deep water coral beds

Very recently (2003-2006), deep-water coral assemblages of the Lophelia pertusa-Medularia spp.-Anomonefalis laytica and the Anomalophasis sp.-donax beds were discovered at depths of 395-320 m within the FMZ. Rowe et al. (July 2004) on Madeira was located about 24 NM west of Malta (PSD unexploited area). On the other side, the Mediterranean Sea (the Strait of Sicily, Mediterranean Sea), Malta: Independent Consultants; 10pp”.

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The presence of rhodoliths qualify the sites for inclusion in national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest as protected by the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Bern Convention (Strasbourg, 1979). The concentration of the infralittoral rhodolith beds in the Mediterranean Sea (Dimkeh & Schembri, 2005) and the presence of dead corals and associated macrobenthic species from the Maltese Islands – The Mediterranean Natural Heritage (2005: 99-106. Malta: APS Bank Publications)

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