

Appendix 1

Marine Habitat types definitions.

**Update of “Interpretation Manual of European Union
Habitats”**

COASTAL AND HALOPHYTIC HABITATS

Open sea and tidal areas

1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time

PAL.CLASS.: 11.125, 11.22, 11.31

1. Definition:

Sandbanks are elevated, elongated, rounded or irregular topographic features, permanently submerged and predominantly surrounded by deeper water. They consist mainly of sandy sediments, but larger grain sizes, including boulders and cobbles, or smaller grain sizes including mud may also be present on a sandbank. Banks where sandy sediments occur in a layer over hard substrata are classed as sandbanks if the associated biota are dependent on the sand rather than on the underlying hard substrata.

“Slightly covered by sea water all the time” means that above a sandbank the water depth is seldom more than 20 m below chart datum. Sandbanks can, however, extend beneath 20 m below chart datum. It can, therefore, be appropriate to include in designations such areas where they are part of the feature and host its biological assemblages.

2. Characteristic animal and plant species

2.1. Vegetation:

North Atlantic including North Sea:

Zostera sp., free living species of the *Corallinaceae* family. *On many sandbanks macrophytes do not occur.*

Central Atlantic Islands (Macaronesian Islands):

Cymodocea nodosa and *Zostera noltii*. On many sandbanks free living species of *Corallinaceae* are conspicuous elements of biotic assemblages, with relevant role as feeding and nursery grounds for invertebrates and fish. *On many sandbanks macrophytes do not occur.*

Baltic Sea:

Zostera sp., *Potamogeton* spp., *Ruppia* spp., *Tolypella nidifica*, *Zannichellia* spp., carophytes. *On many sandbanks macrophytes do not occur.*

Mediterranean:

The marine Angiosperm *Cymodocea nodosa*, together with photophilic species of algae living on the leaves (more than 15 species, mainly small red algae of the *Ceramiales* family), associated with *Posidonia* beds. *On many sandbanks macrophytes do not occur.*

2.2. Animals:

North Atlantic including North Sea:

Invertebrate and demersal fish communities of sandy sublittoral (e.g. polychaete worms, crustacea, anthozoans, burrowing bivalves and echinoderms, *Ammodytes* spp., *Callionymus* spp., *Pomatoschistus* spp., *Echiichtys vipera*, *Pleuronectes platessa*, *Limanda limanda*).

Central Atlantic Islands (Macaronesian Islands):

Fish, crustacean, polychaeta, hydrozoan, burrowing bivalves, irregular echinoderms.

Baltic Sea:

Invertebrate and demersal fish communities of sandy sublittoral (fine and medium grained sands, coarse sands, gravelly sands), e.g. polychaetes: *Scoloplos armiger*, *Pygospio elegans*, *Nereis diversicolor*, *Travisia* sp., e.g. bivalves: *Macoma balthica*, *Mya arenaria*, *Cerastoderma* sp., e.g. crustaceans: *Crangon crangon*, *Saduria entomon*, e.g. fish species: *Platichthys flesus*, *Nerophis ophidion*, *Pomatoschistus* spp., *Ammodytes tobianus*.

Mediterranean:

Invertebrate communities of sandy sublittoral (e.g. polychaetes). Banks are often highly important as feeding, resting or nursery grounds for sea birds, fish or marine mammals.

3. Corresponding categories:

French classification ZNIEFF-MER:

“Biocénose des sables fins de haut niveau”, “Biocénose des sables fins bien calibrés”.

German classification:

“Sandbank der Ostsee (ständig wasserbedeckt)(040202a)”, “Sandbank der Nordsee (ständig wasserbedeckt)(030202a)“.

Barcelona Convention:

“Biocenosis of fine sands in very shallow waters (III. 2. 1.) with facies with *Lentidium mediterraneum* (III. 2. 1. 1.)”, “Biocenosis of well sorted fine sands (III. 2. 2.) with associations with *Cymodocea nodosa* on well sorted fine sands (III. 2. 2. 1.) and with *Holophila stipulacela* (III. 2. 2. 2), the latter considered determinant habitat in C. B.”, “Biocenosis of coarse sands and fine gravels mixed by the waves (III. 3. 1.) with association with rhodolithes (III. 3. 1. 1), considered determinant habitat in the C. B.”, “Biocenosis of coarse sands and fine gravels under the influence of bottom currents (also found in the Circalittoral) (III. 3. 2.). It is possible to find a facies and an association which are determinant habitats for C. B.: the maërl facies (= Association with *Lithothamnion corallioides* and *Phymatoliton calcareum*), also found as facies of the biocenosis of coastal detritic (III. 3. 2. 1), and the association with rhodolithes (III. 3. 2. 2.)”, “Biocenosis of infralittoral pebbles (III. 4. 1.) with facies with *Gouania wildenowi* (III. 4. 1. 1.), small teleostean which lives among pebbles.”

Nordic classifications:

Vegetationstyper i Norden, Pålsson (ed.) 1994:

“*Zostera marina*-typ (4.4.1.1)”, “*Ruppia maritima*-typ (4.4.1.2)”, “Chara-typ (6.3.3.1)”, “Potamogeton pectinatus (6.3.2.2)”.

Kustbiotoper i Norden, Nordiska Ministerrådet 2001:

“Sandbottnar (7.7.1.2; 7.8.1.2; 7.8.4.2; 7.8.5.2; 7.8.6.7; 7.8.6.8; 7.8.6.9; 7.8.7.9; 7.8.7.10; 7.8.7.11; 7.9.1.1.; 7.9.2.1; 7.9.3.1; 7.9.4.1).”

HELCOM classification:

“Sublittoral gravel bottoms. Banks with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.4.2.3)”, “Sublittoral sandy bottoms. Banks with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.5.2.4)”.

The National Marine Habitat Classification for Britain and Ireland Version 03.02:

Relevant types within “Sublittoral coarse sediments (SCS), Sublittoral sands (SSA) and Sublittoral macrophytes communities (SMP)”.

EUNIS classification:

Relevant types within “A4.4, A4.55, A4.1, A4.2, A4.51, A4.5, A4.53, A4.1, A4.2, A4.51, A4.5, A4.53, A4.4, A4.55, A7.32, A4.51, A4.53, A4.552, 4.521, A4.521, A4.513, A6.22, A4.51, A4.141, A4.13, A8.13”.

4. Associated habitats:

Sandbanks can be found in association with mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (1140), with *Posidonia* beds (1120) and reefs (1170). Sandbanks may also be a component part of habitat 1130 Estuaries and habitat 1160 Large shallow inlets and bays.

5. Literature:

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- RAVANKO, O. (1968).** MACROSCOPIC GREEN, BROWN AND RED ALGAE IN THE SOUTHWESTERN ARCHIPELAGO OF FINLAND. *ACTA BOT. FENNICA* 79: 1-50.
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1120

*** Posidonia beds (*Posidonia oceanica*)**

PAL.CLASS.: 11.34

- 1) Beds of *Posidonia oceanica* (Linnaeus) Delile characteristic of the infralittoral zone of the Mediterranean (depth: ranging from a few dozen centimetres to 30 - 40 metres). On hard or soft substrate, these beds constitute one of the main climax communities. They can withstand relatively large variations in temperature and water movement, but are sensitive to desalination, generally requiring a salinity of between 36 and 39‰.
- 2) Plants: *Posidonia oceanica*.
Animals: Molluscs- #*Pinna nobilis*; Echinoderms- *Asterina pancerii*, *Paracentrotus lividus*; Fish- *Epinephelus guaza*, *Hippocampus ramulosus*.
- 5) **Belsher, T. et al (1987)**. *Livre rouge des espèces menacées de France - tome 2, espèces marines et littorales menacées*, Ed. F. de Beaufort. Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle - Paris.

- 1) Downstream part of a river valley, subject to the tide and extending from the limit of brackish waters. River estuaries are coastal inlets where, unlike 'large shallow inlets and bays' there is generally a substantial freshwater influence. The mixing of freshwater and sea water and the reduced current flows in the shelter of the estuary lead to deposition of fine sediments, often forming extensive intertidal sand and mud flats. Where the tidal currents are faster than flood tides, most sediments deposit to form a delta at the mouth of the estuary.
Baltic river mouths, considered as an estuary subtype, have brackish water and no tide, with large wetland vegetation (helophytic) and luxurious aquatic vegetation in shallow water areas.
- 2) Plants: Benthic algal communities, *Zostera* beds e.g. *Zostera noltii* (*Zosteretea*) or vegetation of brackish water: *Ruppia maritima* (= *R. rostellata* (*Ruppieteae*)); *Spartina maritima* (*Spartinetea*); *Sarcocornia perennis* (*Arthrocnemetea*). Both species of fresh water and brackish water can be found in Baltic river mouths (*Carex* spp., *Myriophyllum* spp., *Phragmites australis*, *Potamogeton* spp., *Scirpus* spp.).
Animals: Invertebrate benthic communities; important feeding areas for many birds.
- 3) Corresponding categories
German classification : "D2a Ästuare (Fließgewässermündungen mit Brackwassereinfluß u./od. Tidenhub eingeschlossen werden", "050105 Brackwasserwatt des Ästuare an der Nordsee", "050106 Süßwasserwatt im Tideeinfluß des Nordsee".
- 4) An estuary forms an ecological unit with the surrounding terrestrial coastal habitat types. In terms of nature conservation, these different habitat types should not be separated, and this reality must be taken into account during the selection of sites.
- 5) **Brunet, R. et al.** *Les mots de la géographie-dictionnaire critique*. Ed. Reclus.
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1140

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide

PAL.CLASS.: 14

- 1) Sands and muds of the coasts of the oceans, their connected seas and associated lagoons, not covered by sea water at low tide, devoid of vascular plants, usually coated by blue algae and diatoms. They are of particular importance as feeding grounds for wildfowl and waders. The diverse intertidal communities of invertebrates and algae that occupy them can be used to define subdivisions of 11.27, eelgrass communities that may be exposed for a few hours in the course of every tide have been listed under 11.3, brackish water vegetation of permanent pools by use of those of 11.4.

Note: Eelgrass communities (11.3) are included in this habitat type.

- 1) Lagoons are expanses of shallow coastal salt water, of varying salinity and water volume, wholly or partially separated from the sea by sand banks or shingle, or, less frequently, by rocks. Salinity may vary from brackish water to hypersalinity depending on rainfall, evaporation and through the addition of fresh seawater from storms, temporary flooding of the sea in winter or tidal exchange. With or without vegetation from *Ruppia maritima*, *Potamogeton*, *Zostera* or *Chara* (CORINE 91: 23.21 or 23.22).
 - Flads and gloes, considered a Baltic variety of lagoons, are small, usually shallow, more or less delimited water bodies still connected to the sea or have been cut off from the sea very recently by land upheaval. Characterised by well-developed reedbeds and luxuriant submerged vegetation and having several morphological and botanical development stages in the process whereby sea becomes land.
 - Salt basins and salt ponds may also be considered as lagoons, providing they had their origin on a transformed natural old lagoon or on a saltmarsh, and are characterised by a minor impact from exploitation.

- 2) Plants: *Callitriche* spp., *Chara canescens*, *C. baltica*, *C. connivens*, *Eleocharis parvula*, *Lamprothamnion papulosum*, *Potamogeton pectinatus*, *Ranunculus baudotii*, *Ruppia maritima*, *Tolypella n. nidifica*. In flads and gloes also *Chara* ssp. (*Chara tomentosa*), *Lemna trisulca*, *Najas marina*, *Phragmites australis*, *Potamogeton* spp., *Stratiotes aloides*, *Typha* spp.
Animals: Cnidaria- *Edwardsia ivelli*; Polychaeta- *Armandia cirrhosa*; Bryozoa- *Victorella pavidata*; Rotifera - *Brachionus* sp.; Molluscs- *Abra* sp., *Murex* sp.; Crustaceans- *Artemia* sp.; Fish- *Cyprinus* sp., *Mullus barbatus*; Reptiles- *Testudo* sp.; Amphibians- *Hyla* sp.

- 3) Corresponding categories
 German classification : "0906 Strandsee", "240601 Brackwassensee im Ostseeküstenbereich".

- 4) Saltmarshes form part of this complex.

- 5) **Bamber et al. (1992)**. On the ecology of brackish lagoons in Great Britain. *Aquatic conservation: marine and freshwater ecosystems*, 2, 65-94.
Barnes, R.S.K. (1988). The faunas of landlocked lagoons: chance differences and problems of dispersal. *Estuarine and Coastal Shelf Science*, 26, 309 - 18.
Munsterhjelm, R. (1995). The aquatic macrophyte vegetation of flads and gloes, S coast of Finland. *Acta Bot. Fennica* (in print).
Palmer, M.A., Bell, S.L., Butterfield, I. (1992). A botanical classification of standing waters: Applications for conservation and monitoring. *Aquatic conservation: marine and freshwater ecosystems*, 2, 125-143.

1160

Large shallow inlets and bays

PAL.CLASS.: 12

- 1) Large indentations of the coast where, in contrast to estuaries, the influence of freshwater is generally limited. These shallow ¹ indentations are generally sheltered from wave action and contain a great diversity of sediments and substrates with a well developed zonation of benthic communities. These communities have generally a high biodiversity. The limit of shallow water is sometimes defined by the distribution of the *Zosteretea* and *Potametea* associations. Several physiographic types may be included under this category providing the water is shallow over a major part of the area: embayments, fjards, rias and voes.
- 2) Plants: *Zostera* spp., *Ruppia maritima*, *Potamogeton* spp. (e.g. *P. pectinatus*, *P. praelongus*), benthic algae.
Animals: Benthic invertebrate communities.
- 3) Corresponding categories
German classification : "B31 naturnaher Boddengewässerkomplex", "B32 Boddengewässerkomplex, geringe Belastung", "A2a Flachwasserzonen der Nordsee (Meeresarme u. -buchten, incl. Seegrasswiesen)".
- 5) **Luther, (1951).** Verbreitung und Ökologie der höheren Wasserpflanzen im Brackwasser der Ekenäs-Gegend in Süd-Finnland. I. Allgemeiner Teil. ABF 49, 1-232. II Spezieller Teil. ABF 50, 1-370.

¹ National experts consider inappropriate to fix a maximum water depth, since the term 'shallow' may have different ecological interpretations according to the physiographic type considered and geographical location.

PAL.CLASS.: 11.24, 11.25

1. Definition of the habitat:

Reefs can be either biogenic concretions or of geogenic origin. They are hard compact substrata on solid and soft bottoms, which arise from the sea floor in the sublittoral and littoral zone. Reefs may support a zonation of benthic communities of algae and animal species as well as concretions and corallogenic concretions.

Clarifications:

- “*Hard compact substrata*” are: rocks (including soft rock, e.g. chalk), boulders and cobbles (generally >64 mm in diameter).
- “*Biogenic concretions*” are defined as: concretions, encrustations, corallogenic concretions and bivalve mussel beds originating from dead or living animals, i.e. biogenic hard bottoms which supply habitats for epibiotic species.
- “*Geogenic origin*” means: reefs formed by non biogenic substrata.
- “*Arise from the sea floor*” means: the reef is topographically distinct from the surrounding seafloor.
- “*Sublittoral and littoral zone*” means: the reefs may extend from the sublittoral uninterrupted into the intertidal (littoral) zone or may only occur in the sublittoral zone, including deep water areas such as the bathyal.
- Such hard substrata that are covered by a thin and mobile veneer of sediment are classed as reefs if the associated biota are dependent on the hard substratum rather than the overlying sediment.
- Where an uninterrupted zonation of sublittoral and littoral communities exist, the integrity of the ecological unit should be respected in the selection of sites.
- A variety of subtidal topographic features are included in this habitat complex such as: Hydrothermal vent habitats, sea mounts, vertical rock walls, horizontal ledges, overhangs, pinnacles, gullies, ridges, sloping or flat bed rock, broken rock and boulder and cobble fields.

2. Examples for typical reef species

2.1 Reef vegetation:

North Atlantic including North Sea and Baltic Sea:

A large variety of red, brown and green algae (some living on the leaves of other algae).

Atlantic (Cantabric Sea, Bay of Bizcay): *Gelidium sesquipedale* communities associated with brown algae (*Fucus*, *Laminaria*, *Cystoseira*), and red algae (Corallinaceae, Ceramiceae, Rhodomelaceae).

Central Atlantic Islands (Macaronesian Islands) and Mediterranean:

Cystoseira/Sargassum beds with a mixture of other red algae (*Gelidiales*, *Ceramiales*), brown algae (*Dictyotales*) and green algae (*Siphonales*, *Siphonocladales*).

2.2. Examples for typical reef animals:

2.2.1 Examples for animals forming biogenic reefs:

North Atlantic including North Sea:

Polychaetes (e.g. *Sabellaria spinulosa*, *Sabellaria alveolata*, *Serpula vermicularis*), bivalves (e.g. *Modiolus modiolus*, *Mytilus sp.*) and cold water corals (e.g. *Lophelia pertusa*).

Atlantic (Gulf of Cádiz): Madreporarians communities: *Dendrophyllia ramea* community (banks), *Dendrophyllia cornigera* community (banks); white corals communities (banks), (*Madrepora oculata* and *Lophelia pertusa* community (banks). *Solenosmilia variabilis* community (banks). Gorgonians communities: Facies of *Isidella elongata* and *Callogorgia verticillata* and *Viminella flagellum*; Facies of *Leptogorgia* spp.; Facies of *Elisella paraplexauroides*; Facies of *Acanthogorgia* spp. and *Paramuricea* spp. *Filigrana implexa* formations.

Central Atlantic Islands (Macaronesian Islands):

Warm water corals (*Dendrophyllia*, *Anthiphatas*), serpulids, polychaetes, sponges, hydrozoan and bryozoan species together with bivalve molluscs (*Sphondyllus*, *Pinna*).

Baltic Sea: Bivalves (e.g. *Modiolus modiolus*, *Mytilus sp.*, *Dreissena polymorpha*).

Mediterranean: Serpulid polychaetes, bivalve molluscs (e.g. *Modiolus sp.* *Mytilus sp.* and oysters). Polychaetes (e.g. *Sabellaria alveolata*).

South-West Mediterranean: *Dendropoma petraeum* reefs (forming boulders) or in relation with the red calcareous algae *Spongites* spp or *Litophyllum lichenoides*. *Filigrana implexa* formations. Gorgonians communities: Facies of holoaxonia gorgonians (*Paramuricea clavata* “forest”, *Eunicella singularis* “forest”), mixed facies of gorgonians (*Eunicella* spp, *P. clavata*, *E. paraplexauroides*, *Leptogorgia* spp). Facies of *Isidella elongata* and *Callogorgia verticillata*; Facies of scleroaxonia gorgonians (*Corallium rubrum*). Madreporarians communities: *Cladocora caespitosa* reefs, *Astroides calycularis* facies. Madreporarians communities: *Dendrophyllia ramea* community (banks); *Dendrophyllia cornigera* community (banks); white corals communities (banks): *Madrepora oculata* and *Lophelia pertusa* community (banks).

West Mediterranean: Polychaetes (exclusively *Sabellaria alveolata*).

2.2.2 Examples for non reef forming animals:

North Atlantic including North Sea:

In general sessile invertebrates specialized on hard marine substrates such as sponges, anthozoa or cnidaria, bryozoans, polychaetes, hydroids, ascidians, molluscs and cirripedia (barnacles) as well as diverse mobile species of crustaceans and fish.

Central Atlantic Islands (Macaronesian Islands):

Gorgonians, hydrozoans, bryozoan and sponges, as well as diverse mobile species of crustacean, molluscs (cephalopoda) and fish.

Baltic Sea: Distribution and abundance of invertebrate species settling on hard substrates are limited by the salinity gradient from west to east. Typical groups are: hydroids, ascidians, cirripedia (barnacles), bryozoans and molluscs as well as diverse mobile species of crustaceans and fish.

Mediterranean: Cirripedia (barnacles), hydroids, bryozoans, ascidians, sponges, gorgonians and polychaetes as well as diverse mobile species of crustaceans and fish.

3. Corresponding categories:

German classification:

„Benthal der Nordsee mit Hartsubstrat (010204)“, „Riffe der Nordsee (010204a)“, „Benthal der Flachwasserzone der Nordsee mit Hartsubstrat, makrophytenarm (030204)“, „Benthal der Flachwasserzone der Nordsee mit Hartsubstrat, makrophytenreich (030206)“, „Miesmuschelbank des Sublitorals der Nordsee (030207)“, „Austernbank des Sublitorals der Nordsee (030208)“, „Sabellaria-Riff des Sublitorals der Nordsee (030209)“, „Felswatt der Nordsee (050104)“, „Miesmuschelbank des Eulitorals der Nordsee (050107)“;

„Benthal der Ostsee mit Hartsubstrat (020204)“, „Riffe der Ostsee (020204a)“, „Benthal der Flachwasserzone der Ostsee mit Hartsubstrat, makrophytenarm (040204)“, „Benthal der Flachwasserzone der Ostsee mit Kies- und Hartsubstrat, makrophytenreich (040206)“, „Miesmuschelbank des Sublitorals der Ostsee (040207)“, „Vegetationsreiches Windwatt mit Hartsubstrat (060203) (Ostsee)“.

Barcelona Convention:

“Biocenosis of supralittoral rock (I.4.1.)”, “Biocenosis of the upper mediolittoral rock (II.4.1.)”, “Biocenosis of the lower mediolittoral rock (II.4.2.)”, “Biocenosis of infralittoral algae (III.6.1.)”, “Coralligenous (IV.3.1.)”, “Biocenosis of shelf-edge rock (IV.3.3)”, “Biocenosis of deep sea corals present in the Mediterranean bathyal (V.3.1.)”.

The National Marine Habitat Classification for Britain and Ireland Version 03.02:

“Littoral rock and other hard substrata (biotopes beginning with LR)”, “Infralittoral rock and other hard substrata (biotopes beginning with IR)”, “Circalittoral rock and other hard substrata (biotopes beginning with CR)”, “Littoral biogenic reefs (biotopes beginning with LBR)” and “Sublittoral biogenic reefs (biotopes beginning with SBR)”.

EUNIS classification :

Relevant types within “A1.1, A1.1/B-ELR.MB, A1.2, A1.2/B-MLR.MF, A1.3, A1.3/B-SLR, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6, A2.8, A3.1, A3.2, A3.2/M-III.6.1.(p), A3.2/H-02.01.01.02.03, A3.2/H-02.01.02.02.03, A3.3, A3.4, A3.5, A3.6, A3.6/B-MCR.M, A3.7, A3.8, A3.9, A3.A, A3.B, A3.C, A4.6, A5.1, A5.6”, A6.2, A6.3.

HELCOM classification:

“Sublittoral soft rock reefs of the photic zone with little or no macrophyte vegetation (2.1.1.2.3)”, “Hydrolittoral soft rock reefs with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.1.1.3.3)”, “Sublittoral solid rock reefs of the photic zone with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.1.2.2.3)”, “Hydrolittoral solid rock reefs with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.1.2.3.3)”, “Sublittoral stony reefs of the photic zone with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.2.2.3)”, “Stony reefs of the hydrolittoral zone with or without macrophyte vegetation (2.2.3.3)”.

Trilateral Wadden Sea Classification (von Nordheim et al. 1996):

“Sublittoral (old) blue mussel beds (03.02.07)”, “Sublittoral oyster reefs (03.02.08)”, “Sublittoral sabellaria reefs (03.02.09)”, “Eulittoral (old) blue mussel beds (05.01.07)”, “Benthic zone, stony and hard bottoms, rich in macrophytes, incl. artificial substrates (03.02.06)”, “Benthic zone, stony and hard bottoms, few macrophytes (03.02.04)”.

Nordic classification (Kustbiotoper i Norden, Nordiska Ministerrådet 2001):

”Klippbottnar (7.7.1.3; 7.7.2.3; 7.7.3.3; 7.7.4.3; 7.7.5.3; 7.8.1.3; 7.8.2.3; 7.8.3.4; 7.8.4.3; 7.8.5.3; 7.8.6.13; 7.8.7.16)”, ”Sublittorale samfund på sten- och klippebund (7.9.1.2)”, ”Sublittorale samfund på stenbund (7.9.2.2; 7.9.3.2)”.

4. Associated habitats:

Reefs can be found in association with “vegetated sea cliffs” (habitats 1230, 1240 and 1250) “sandbanks which are covered by sea water all the time” (1110) and “sea caves” (habitat 8830). Reefs may also be a component part of habitat 1130 “estuaries” and habitat 1160 “large shallow inlets and bays”.

5. References:

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1. Definition of the habitat

Submarine structures consist of sandstone slabs, pavements, and pillars up to 4 m high, formed by aggregation of carbonate cement resulting from microbial oxidation of gas emissions, mainly methane. The formations are interspersed with gas vents that intermittently release gas. The methane most likely originates from the microbial decomposition of fossil plant materials.

The first type of submarine structures is known as “bubbling reefs”. These formations support a zonation of diverse benthic communities consisting of algae and/or invertebrate specialists of hard marine substrates different to that of the surrounding habitat. Animals seeking shelter in the numerous caves further enhance the biodiversity. A variety of sublittoral topographic features are included in this habitat such as: overhangs, vertical pillars and stratified leaf-like structures with numerous caves.

The second type are carbonate structures within “pockmarks”. “Pockmarks” are depressions in soft sediment seabed areas, up to 45 m deep and a few hundred meters wide. Not all pockmarks are formed by leaking gases and of those formed by leaking gases, many do not contain substantial carbonate structures and are therefore not included in this habitat. Benthic communities consist of invertebrate specialists of hard marine substrata and are different from the surrounding (usually) muddy habitat. The diversity of the infauna community in the muddy slope surrounding the “pockmark” may also be high.

2. Characteristic species:

“Bubbling reefs”

Plants: If the structure is within the photic zone, marine macroalgae may be present such as *Laminariales*, other foliose and filamentous brown and red algae.

Animals: A large diversity of invertebrates such as Porifera, Anthozoa, Polychaeta, Gastropoda, Decapoda, Echinodermata as well as numerous fish species are present. Especially the polychaete *Polycirrus norwegicus* and the bivalve *Kellia suborbicularis* are associated species of the “bubbling reefs”.

“Pockmarks”

Plants: Usually none.

Animals: Invertebrate specialists of hard substrate including Hydrozoa, Anthozoa, Ophiuroidea and Gastropoda. In the soft sediment surrounding the pockmark Nematodae, Polychaeta and Crustacea are present.

3. Associated habitats:

“Bubbling reefs” can be found in association with the habitat types “sandbanks, which are covered by sea water all the time (1110)” and “reefs (1170)”.

4. Geographical distribution and regional varieties:

Shallow water examples of “bubbling reefs” colonised by macroalgae and/or animals are observed in Danish waters in the littoral and sublittoral zone from 0 to 30 m water depth. They are present in the northern Kattegat and in the Skagerrak and follow a NW SE direction parallel to the Fennoscandian fault line.

“Pockmarks” are found in many areas of the European shelf seas. Deep water examples of pockmarks with benthic fauna communities exists at approximately 100 m water depth in the UK part of the North Sea as depressions in areas of predominantly muddy seabed. Examples of extensive areas with pockmarks are found on the Galician coast (Spain) at the bottom of Rias at a more shallow water depth compared to the pockmarks in the North Sea. Present emission of gas has been reported, as well as other inactive pockmarks filled by more modern sediments. Another difference with the “bubbling reefs” of the Danish coast is that gas stocks are closer to the present bottom surface.

5. Corresponding categories:

HELCOM classification:

All subtypes under “Bubbling reefs (2.10)”

EUNIS:

Relevant types under A3.C.

6. Literature :

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Other rocky habitats

8330

Submerged or partially submerged sea caves

PAL.CLASS.: 12.7, 11.26, 11.294

- 1) Caves situated under the sea or opened to it, at least at high tide, including partially submerged sea caves. Their bottom and sides harbour communities of marine invertebrates and algae.