

WRECKS AND REEFS

What are WRECKS AND REEFS?

Any structure placed on the seabed will, given time, provide relatively stable conditions which encourage species which live on hard substrates to colonise. Such structures include wrecks, oil rigs, jetties, and harbour walls. These are all man-made structures, but natural reefs also occur. These may be rocky or biogenic.

Why are rocks and reefs of CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Communities on artificial reefs can be quite different from surrounding areas if the substrate is soft, and may include species not normally found in the vicinity. Wrecks provide hard substrate for larval settlement, a variety of surfaces for attachment, shelter and protection from the impacts of over trawling. Mobile marine species are attracted to wrecks whilst the structure itself is quickly colonised by sessile organisms. Fish group around wrecks (the so-called "wreck effect"). Fish may be attracted to the shelter from waves, current and predators which wrecks offer as well as the abundant food supply that the colonising invertebrates offer. Other larger free-living invertebrates may also feed on the colonists, which in turn attract larger fish. Wrecks act as important nursery areas for many species of fish.

WRECKS AND REEFS IN THE DURHAM AREA

The wreck of the "Eugenia Chandriss" is one of many artificial reefs along the north-east coast. These artificial reefs harbour a rich fauna. The iron structures of the wreck provide a substratum that stand above the scoured and silted areas associated with the coast of the DBAP area, but it is still washed by relatively strong tides which encourages a high diversity of species. This biotope is uncommon in the UK. The wreck supports a thick faunal turf composed of dead-man's fingers, hydroids, hornwrack, sea anemones, bryozoans, solitary and colonial ascidians, spider crabs, sea slugs and brittle stars. This is probably representative of the many wrecks in the area.



STATUS: *There are a few small natural reefs in the sea off the coast of the DBAP area, but there are hundreds of ship wrecks. The installation of artificial reefs is a possible way of increasing the amount of this habitat.*

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Wrecks and reefs are at RISK from:

DAMAGE/ DISTURBANCE FROM DIVERS.

FISHING NETS - fishing vessels come too close to wrecks and fishing equipment is damaged. Such fishing nets and nylon webs may hang over wrecks and "ghost fish".

Wrecks and reefs BENEFIT from:

BEING UNDISTURBED.

FURTHER RESEARCH into the behaviour, life cycles and biology of reef dwellers and the benefit of reefs on commercial fisheries.

MONITORING - the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Marine Life Information Network for Britain and Ireland (MARLIN) are currently jointly conducting a sea life survey. Divers are encouraged to take part.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- The local wrecks and reefs should be the subject of a monitoring programme undertaken by local diving clubs.
- Local diving clubs should follow a code of conduct when divers visit wrecks to protect the associated wildlife.
- The potential for the installation of artificial reefs off the Plan area coast could be investigated.