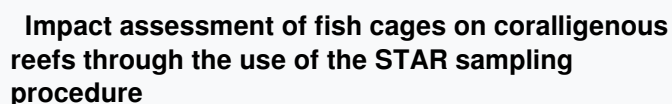


Vol 20, No 3 (2019)



LUIGI PIAZZI, ENRICO CECCHI, MARIA FRANCESCA
CINTI, PATRIZIA STIPCICH, GIULIA CECCHERELLI

doi: [10.12681/mms.20586](https://doi.org/10.12681/mms.20586)

To cite this article:

PIAZZI, L., CECCHI, E., CINTI, M. F., STIPCICH, P., & CECCHERELLI, G. (2019). Impact assessment of fish cages on coralligenous reefs through the use of the STAR sampling procedure. *Mediterranean Marine Science*, 20(3), 627–635. <https://doi.org/10.12681/mms.20586>

Supplementary Data

Impact assessment of fish cages on coralligenous reefs through the use of the STAR sampling procedure

Luigi PIAZZI, Enrico CECCHI, Maria Francesca CINTI, Patrizia STIPCICH
and Giulia CECCHERELLI

Mediterranean Marine Science, 2019, 20 (3)

Table S1. The main steps used to apply STAR procedure.

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| 1. vertical substrate (85-90°) at around 35 m depth was selected in each sampling site; |
| 2. the sampling design expected to characterize a site consisted of 3 areas about 4 m ² in size, 10 m apart; |
| 3. 10 photographic samples (0.2 m ² in surface) were collected in each area as replicates; |
| 4. thickness of the calcareous layer was measured through a hand-held penetrometer with 6 replicated measures per each area; |
| 5. size (mean height), necrosis and epibiosis (percentage) of erect anthozoans were assessed through an RVA approach; |
| 6. percent cover of the conspicuous taxa/morphological groups and sediment was evaluated for each sample through ImageJ software; |
| 7. the overall Sensitivity Level (SL) was calculated by multiplying the value of the SL of each taxon/group for its class of abundance and then summing up all the final values. The cover value of each taxon/morphological group was divided in eight classes of abundance: 1) 0<%<0.01; 2) 0.01<%<0.1; 3) 0.1<%<1; 4) 1<%<5; 5) 5<%<25; 6) 25<%<50; 7) 50<%<75; 8) 75<%<100); |
| 8. richness (α -diversity), i.e. the mean number of the taxa/groups per photographic sample, was calculated; |
| 9. β -diversity was evaluated through PERMDISP analysis as the mean distance of all photographic samples from centroids; |
| 10. ESCA, ISLA and COARSE indices were calculated. |

Table S2. Sensitivity Level (SL) of the main taxa/morphological groups in the coralligenous assemblages for ESCA index (from Piazzì *et al.*, 2017a).

Taxa/Groups	SL
Algal turf	1
Hydrozoans (e.g. <i>Eudendrium</i> spp.)	2
<i>Pseudochlorodesmis furcellata</i>	2
Perforating sponges (e.g. <i>Cliona</i> spp.)	2
Dictyotales	3
Encrusting sponges	3
Encrusting bryozoans	3
Encrusting ascidians (also epibiotic)	3
Encrusting Corallinales, articulated Corallinales	4
<i>Peyssonnelia</i> spp.	4
<i>Valonia</i> spp., <i>Codium</i> spp.	4
Sponges prostrate (e.g. <i>Chondrosia reniformis</i> , <i>Petrosia ficiformis</i>)	5
Large serpulids (e.g. <i>Protula tubularia</i> , <i>Serpula vermicularis</i>)	5
<i>Parazoanthus axinellae</i>	5
<i>Leptogorgia sarmentosa</i>	5
<i>Flabellia petiolata</i>	6
Erect corticated terete Ochrophyta (e.g. <i>Sporochnus pedunculatus</i>)	6
Encrusting Ochrophyta (e.g. <i>Zanardinia typus</i>)	6
Azooxantellate individual scleractinians (e.g. <i>Leptopsammia pruvoti</i>)	6
Ramified bryozoans (e.g. <i>Caberea boryi</i> , <i>Cellaria fistulosa</i>)	6
<i>Palmophyllum crassum</i>	7
Arborescent and massive sponges (e.g. <i>Axinella polypoides</i>)	7
<i>Salmacina-Filograna</i> complex	7
<i>Myriapora truncata</i>	7
Erect corticated terete Rodophyta (e.g. <i>Osmundea pelagosae</i>)	8
Bushy sponges (e.g. <i>Axinella damicornis</i> , <i>Acanthella acuta</i>)	8
<i>Eunicella verrucosa</i> , <i>Alcyonium acaule</i>	8
Erect ascidians	8
<i>Corallium rubrum</i> , <i>Paramuricea clavata</i> , <i>Alcyonium coralloides</i>	9
Zooxantellate scleractinians (e.g. <i>Cladocora caespitosa</i>)	9
<i>Pentapora fascialis</i>	9
Flattened Rhodophyta with cortication (e.g. <i>Kallymenia</i> spp.)	10
<i>Halimeda tuna</i>	10
Fucales (e.g. <i>Cystoseira</i> spp., <i>Sargassum</i> spp.), <i>Phyllariopsis brevipes</i>	10
<i>Eunicella singularis</i> , <i>Eunicella cavolini</i> , <i>Savalia savaglia</i>	10
<i>Aedonella calveti</i> , <i>Reteporella grimaldii</i> , <i>Smittina cervicornis</i>	10

Table S3. Descriptors used to calculate ESCA index $EQR = ((EQR_{SL} + EQR_{\alpha} + EQR_{\beta}) \times 3^{-1})$. Individual EQRs were calculated as the ratios of the values of the three descriptors to the values of the same descriptors of the reference location for the north-western Mediterranean Sea.

Descriptor	Calculation method
α -diversity	The α -diversity of the assemblages was evaluated as the number of taxa/morphological group per sample
β -diversity	The β -diversity was evaluated based on the spatial heterogeneity of assemblages as calculated by PERMDISP analysis (Primer 6+ PERMANOVA)
Sensitivity Level	The total Sensitivity Level of photographic sample (SL_{sa}) was calculated as the mean of values of all the samples. The Sensitivity Level of each sample was obtained by multiplying the sensitivity value of each taxa/groups (see Table S2) for its class of abundance (from 1 to 8), and finally adding values of all taxa/groups present in the sample

Table S4. Scores of the Integrated Sensitivity Level (ISL) for the main taxa/morphological groups in the coralligenous assemblages, as obtained combining the values of sensitivity to disturbance (DSL) and of sensitivity to stress (SSL) (Montefalcone *et al.*, 2017). In the case of alien species, the ISL score is put to -1 *a priori*.

Taxa/Groups	DSL	SSL	ISL
Alien species (e.g. <i>Caulerpa cylindracea</i> , <i>Womersleyella setacea</i>)	na	na	-1
Algal turf	6	0	0
Small hydroids	7	1	0
<i>Pseudochlorodesmis furcellata</i>	8	1	1
Siphonous with vesicle-like thallus (<i>Valonia</i> spp., <i>Codium</i> spp.)	8	2	1
Encrusting sponges	8	3	1
Dictyotales	8	3	2
Encrusting Corallinales	8	4	2
Encrusting Ochrophyta (e.g. <i>Zanardinia typus</i>)	6	6	2
<i>Peyssonnelia</i> spp.	8	4	2
Perforating sponges (e.g. <i>Cliona</i> spp.)	9	2	2
Large hydroids (e.g. <i>Eudendrium</i> spp.)	11	1	2
Encrusting bryozoans	11	2	2
Encrusting ascidians (also epibiotic)	10	2	2
Erect corticated Ochrophyta (e.g. <i>Nereia filiformis</i> , <i>Sporochnus</i>	9	6	3
<i>Flabellia petiolata</i>	8	6	3
<i>Palmophyllum crassum</i>	7	8	3
Erect corticated Rhodophyta (e.g. <i>Botryocladia</i> spp., <i>Osmundea pelagosa</i>)	9	9	4
Macroforaminifera (e.g. <i>Miniacina miniacina</i>)	11	6	4
Sponges prostrate (e.g. <i>Chondrosia reniformis</i> , <i>Petrosia ficiformis</i>)	12	4	4
<i>Parazoanthus axinellae</i>	12	4	4
Stolonifera (e.g. <i>Cornularia cornucopiae</i>)	12	6	4
Flattened Rhodophyta with cortication (<i>Kallymenia</i> spp., <i>Acrodiscus vidovichii</i>)	9	10	5
<i>Halimeda tuna</i>	9	10	5
Laminariales (e.g. <i>Phyllariopsis brevipes</i>)	10	10	5
Bushy sponges (e.g. <i>Axinella damicornis</i> , <i>Acanthella acuta</i>)	13	7	5
<i>Leptogorgia sarmentosa</i>	16	4	5
Azooxantellate solitary scleractinians (e.g. <i>Leptopsammia pruvoti</i>)	15	4	5
Bivalve molluscs	15	5	5
Large serpulids (e.g. <i>Protula tubularia</i> , <i>Serpula vermicularis</i>)	14	5	5
<i>Salmacina-Filograna</i> complex	13	6	5
Ramified bryozoans (e.g. <i>Caberea boryi</i> , <i>Cellaria fistulosa</i>)	14	5	5
Fucales (e.g. <i>Sargassum</i> spp., <i>Cystoseira</i> spp.)	10	11	6
Arborescent and massive sponges (e.g. <i>Axinella polypoides</i> , <i>Sarcotragus</i>	16	6	6
Actinians	15	7	6
<i>Eunicella cavolini</i>	16	7	6
Azooxantellate colonial scleractinians (e.g. <i>Phyllangia americana</i>)	16	5	6
Vermetids	16	5	6
Erect ascidians	15	7	6

<i>Alcyonium acaule</i>	16	8	7
<i>Alcyonium coralloides</i>	16	9	7
<i>Corallium rubrum</i>	17	8	7
<i>Eunicella verrucosa</i>	16	7	7
<i>Paramuricea clavata</i>	16	8	7
Zooxantellate individual scleractinians (e.g. <i>Balanophyllia europea</i>)	15	9	7
<i>Myriapora truncata</i>	17	6	7
<i>Pentapora fascialis</i>	17	8	7
<i>Savalia savaglia</i>	16	11	8
Zooxantellate colonial scleractinians (e.g. <i>Cladocora caespitosa</i>)	17	9	8
<i>Eunicella singularis</i>	16	12	9
<i>Aedonella calveti</i> , <i>Reteporella grimaldii</i> , <i>Smittina cervicornis</i>	17	12	9

Table S5. Criteria for the assignment of quality scores to each descriptor for each replicate in COARSE index. ECR= encrusting coralline algae, NCEA= non calcified encrusting algae, EA= encrusting animals. L = the maximum height found in literature for each species. The necrosis is evaluated as the mean percentage of necrosis of each individual colony.

Layer	Descriptor	score 3	score 2	score 1
BASAL	% cover (cover x score / 100)	ECR	NCEA, EA	Turf, sediment
	Penetration	<1	>1	0
	Borer marks	absent	occasional	common
INTERMEDIATE	Species Richness (SR)	SR >8	8 > SR > 5	SR < 5
	Erect calcified organisms	ECO > 3	1 < ECO ≤ 3	ECO ≤ 1 2
	Sensitivity of bryozoans	<i>S. cervicornis</i> , <i>R. grimaldii</i>	<i>P. fascialis</i> , <i>A. calveti</i>	<i>M. truncata</i>
ERECT	% cover	% > 25	25 > % > 5	% < 5
	Maximum height(MH)	MH > 0.6xL	0.6xL > MH > 0.3xL	MH < 0.3xL
	Necrosis (N)	N < 10%	75% > N > 10%	N > 75%