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## Oceana discovers one of the most important and threatened deep-sea coral reefs of the Mediterranean in the Alboran Sea

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**A large part of the reef has been lost through the use of different fishing gear such as bottom trawling and longline fishing, but there are still extensive areas of white coral at a depth of over 300 meters**

**July 19, 2010**

**Madrid**

**Contact:** Marta Madina ( [mmadina@oceana.org](mailto:mmadina@oceana.org) )

### Deep-sea coral reefs have already disappeared from most of the Mediterranean.

Oceana has discovered large colonies of white coral and a wealth of associated fauna in Spanish waters of the Alboran Sea (Western Mediterranean), with greater abundance at depths between 300 and 500 meters. The finding took place during the 2010 expedition of the research catamaran, the *Oceana Ranger*, as part of [LIFE+ INDEMARES](#) project. Given this habitat's importance for numerous species and its poor state of conservation, Oceana is requesting measures to protect it.

Findings such as the coral reef of Santa María di Leuca in Italy or the canyons of Creus and Palamós in Catalonia have increased hope in the possible existence of yet to be discovered deep-sea coral reefs. This new reef found in Alboran is one of the most important ones in the Mediterranean, but also of the most threatened ones. This is because most of the colonies are dead or are endangered by the fishing activities that go on in the area.

Live colonies of [deep-sea coral](#) coexist with large expanses of dead coral. The coral that still survives suffers accelerated deterioration that is threatening one of this sea's richest ecosystems. White coral is intertwined with black coral, whip coral, glass sponges and other species that dwell at these depths to make up a habitat of great importance to species such as redfish, roughy, red seabream, etc.

It is believed that half of the white coral reefs in the Atlantic have disappeared, and in the Mediterranean, the situation seems to be worse. Most of the research conducted to date has only found dead coral that must have formed large reefs at the bottom of the sea long ago.

Oceana has sounded the alarm to increase the size and number of marine protected areas in order to prevent the heavy retreat of the most vulnerable ecosystems in the Mediterranean such as the coral reefs, the maërl beds, coralligenous communities, forests of laminarian and fucoid algae, etc.

LIFE+ INDEMARES project is aimed at contributing to the protection and sustainable use of the marine biodiversity of the Spanish seas by studying 10 marine areas to garner information about their natural value, and eventually, propose them to be part of the marine Natura 2000 Network.

The Mediterranean continues to suffer a large number of threats due to the high number of human activities that take place there; destructive fishing, seacoast destruction, shipping, polluting spills, exploitation of gas and oil or climate change are taking their toll on this sea that still shelters a rich biodiversity and some of the most spectacular ecosystems on the planet.

**"It is painful to see that there is a greater volume of dead than live coral. If the living colonies that we have found are already spectacular in and of themselves, you would have to imagine what these magnificent reefs attained before they deteriorated"**, declares Ricardo Aguilar, Director of Research for Oceana Europe.

Ignacio Torres, Director of Studies and Projects at Biodiversity Foundation, pointed out that *"these findings confirm the relevance and good opportunity of the INDEMARES Project. The information that is currently being collected will serve to improve the marine resources protection and sustainable use, being this one the spirit leading the activities of all project members"*.

Coral reefs are considered as habitats of Community interest by [the Habitats Directive](#) whereby the Member States, Spain being one of them, must create marine protected areas to conserve them. The recent evaluation of the compliance status of the said directive for the marine environment has made the noticeable lack of protection for these places abundantly clear. It is therefore urgent and necessary to protect them immediately. The LIFE+ INDEMARES project is aimed at complying with this requirement by identifying valuable areas to be included in the Natura 2000 Network.

Coordinated by Biodiversity Foundation, the project will have a participatory approach, and will include all of the relevant institutions in management, research and conservation in marine environments: Environmental, Rural and Marine Affairs Ministry (through the Secretary General of Sea Affairs), the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO), the Spanish Council for Scientific Research, ALNITAK, the Coordinator for the Study of Marine Mammals, OCEANA, the Society for the Study of Cetaceans in the Canary Archipelago, SEO/BirdLife and WWF Spain.

The project actions will be carried out from January 1st, 2009 to December 31st, 2013. The total budget is € 15.4 million, and the European Commission will co-finance 50% of the project.

[Onboard log of the Oceana Ranger's 2010 Expedition](#)

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