

Aim of the Project

Project aims to define justified conservation status of the protected habitats and contribute to a comprehensive management system of marine protected areas in Latvia.

Tasks of the Project

- ✓ Development of the quality criteria for evaluation of the protected marine habitats and review of existing definitions and descriptions of habitats.
- ✓ Improvement of the monitoring methodology for assessment of qualitative and quantitative changes as well as influencing factors of benthic habitats, fishes and birds.
- ✓ Identification of potential marine protected sites and development of proposals for new MPAs for the Natura2000 Network.
- ✓ Assessment of the effectiveness of the MPA network within the Latvian marine waters.
- ✓ Development of the management plan for marine protected sites.
- ✓ Assessment of ecosystem services provided by protected benthic habitats.
- ✓ Development of an action plan for limiting invasive marine species.
- ✓ Development of mitigation measures to reduce seabird and marine mammal bycatch in coastal fisheries.

Duration

September 1st, 2020 – August 31st, 2025

Implementors of the Project

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LIFE19 NAT/LV/000973
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Expected Results



Two functional indicators for the evaluation of the quality and species diversity of benthic habitats. Defined descriptions of two marine EU protected habitats – *1170 Stony Reefs* and *1110 Sandbanks*.



Improved monitoring methodology for assessment of qualitative and quantitative changes in benthic habitats.



Mapped marine protected habitats. Developed proposals for new MPAs for the Natura2000 network in Baltic Sea by 4116 km².



Estimated the effectiveness of the network of Natura2000 sites and increased understanding of ecological integrity of habitats and species.



Developed management plan for all MPA according to national legislation.



Developed scientific advice of incorporation of ecosystem services.



Developed action plan for limiting invasive marine species and enhanced its implementation.



Developed action plan for reduction of marine mammal and sea bird bycatch.



Developed scientific advice of management of coastal fishery.

In existing sediment maps and in current studies potential areas have been identified on the seabed of the exclusive economic zone of the Baltic Sea Latvia, where specially protected habitats of European Union importance *1170 Sandbanks* and *1170 Stony Reefs* may be present. These sites are located at a depth of approximately 20 to 45 metres, where marine sediments have a tiled structure, such as areas with sand or rock-covered areas.

Three potential sites within 4116 square kilometres have been selected under the project, where seabed surveys and habitat mapping will take place. The map below shows the places of interest with yellow lines. For information, a blue-line lines presents sites where biodiversity has so far been identified and **Natura2000 marine protected areas** have been identified since 2010.

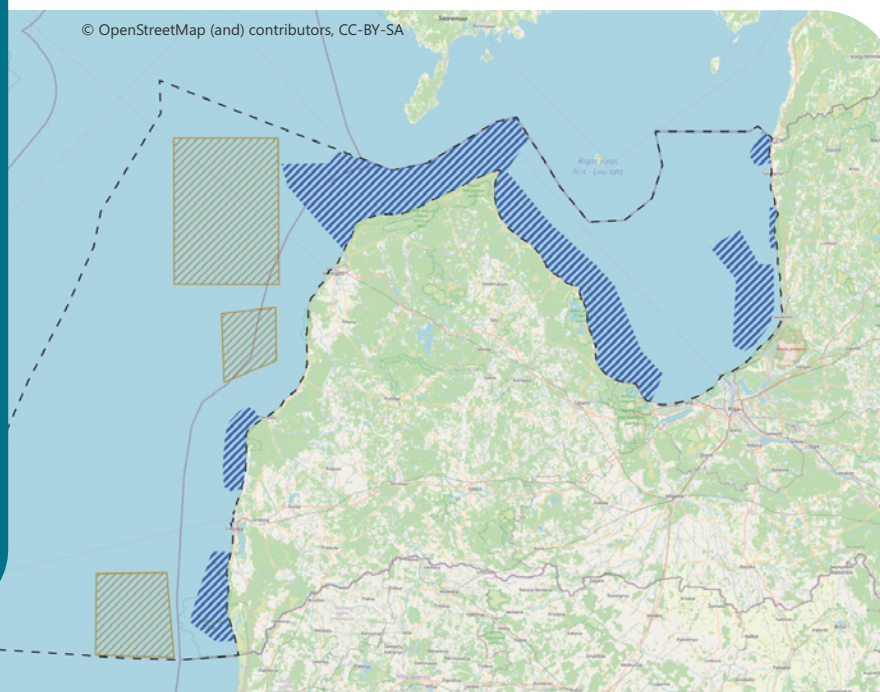


Photo: Juris Aigars

Vertebrata fucoides (Hudson) Kuntze

Vertebrata stands are a living environment for many invertebrate species. Several fish species use these stands as a spawning place. Eutrophication, oil spills and destruction of the living environment are the main threats to *Vertebrata* stands.

Habitat 1170 Stony Reefs

is one of the most prominent and ecologically significant habitat type in the Eastern part of the Baltic Sea and considered as a biodiversity hotspot for attracting invertebrates, fish, birds and plants. Stony Reefs are an area of hard substrate (rocks, boulders and pebbles) surrounded by patches of sand.

Habitat 1110 Sandbanks

Permanently covered by seawater are typically elevated over the surrounding seabed and colonised by a burrowing fauna of worms, crustaceans, bivalve molluscs. Sandbanks are important fish nurseries and feeding grounds, attracting also diving bird species like velvet scoter and long-tail duck.

- Potential marine protected areas
- Existing marine protected areas Natura2000 sites
- Exclusive economic zone of Latvia

0 25 50 100 km