



CAN-003- Protected Habitats Dorset Reef-Au

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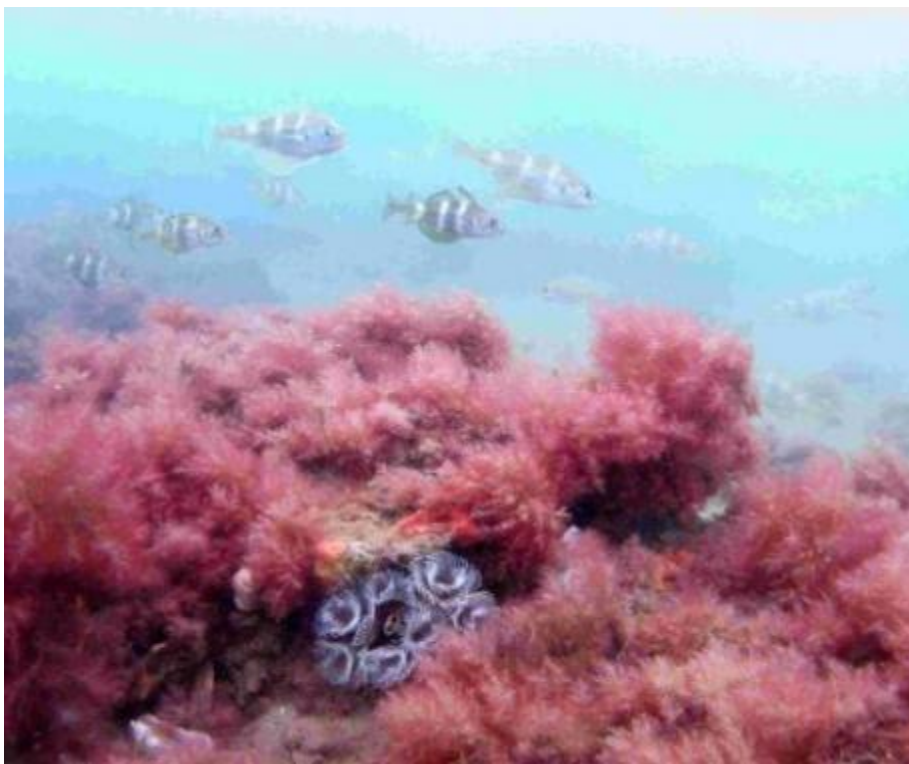
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Reefs off Dorset coast set to become protected habitats

12:30pm Saturday 15th September 2012 in News By Joanna Davis



PRESERVING SEALIFE: Dorset reef habitat with shoal of bib and fanworms

REEFS off the Dorset coast are to become protected habitats for marine life.

More than 330 sq kms of reef from Portland to Studland will become the 37th Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in English territorial waters.

The SAC status means the reefs – teeming with marine life such as corals and brightly coloured sponges – will be preserved and protected from damaging human activities.

Natural environment minister Richard Benyon announced the reef's SAC status.

He said: "We are delighted by this long-awaited announcement.

"This is official recognition of the high, indeed international, value of reef habitats on Dorset's seabed and the site will make a significant contribution to the network of marine protected areas around the UK."

The reefs are more than half the size of the New Forest National Park.

They are home to many different marine species, including pink sea fans, cup corals and reef-building mussels.

Peter Tinsley, living seas manager at the Dorset Wildlife Trust, said the Dorset wildlife charity is 'delighted' with the announcement.

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He added: “The importance of the site was initially highlighted by the work of hundreds of volunteer divers recording seabed species and habitats through Seasearch, coordinated in Dorset by Dorset Wildlife Trust. “Subsequent detailed survey work, particularly DWT’s DORIS seabed mapping project, has confirmed the extent and quality of reef habitats between Portland and Studland.”

Mr Tinsley said there is an ‘impressive’ variety of marine life living in the reef.

“From extremely tide-swept hard-rock ledges and cliffs off Portland and St Albans Head, with brightly colored sponges and corals, to low-lying shale ledges, riddled with boring paddocks or carpeted with brittle stars.

“Depths range from the seaweed-rich shallow waters to deep scoured holes, over 100m deep, off [Portland Bill](#),” he added.

Mr Tinsley said the condition of the reef is currently ‘very good’, because of the sensitive fishing methods used by the local fishermen.

He added: “This designation should now ensure that condition remains good – great news for the creatures living there and for those making a living from the site.

“It is recognition, too, that our underwater landscapes and habitats are as worthy of protection as those on land.”

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