

## The suitability of the marine biotic index (AMBI) to new impact sources along European coasts



In recent years, several benthic biotic indices have been proposed to be used as ecological indicators in estuarine and coastal waters. One such indicator, the AZTI Marine Biotic Index (AMBI), was designed to establish the ecological quality of European coasts. The index examined the response of soft-bottom benthic communities to natural and man-induced disturbances in coastal and estuarine environments. It has been successfully applied to different geographical areas and under different impact sources, with increasing user numbers in European marine waters (Baltic, North Sea, Atlantic and Mediterranean). The AMBI has been used also for the determination of the ecological quality status (EcoQ) within the context of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD). In this contribution, 38 different applications including six new case studies (hypoxia processes, sand extraction, oil platform impacts, engineering works, dredging and fish aquaculture) are presented. The results show the response of the benthic communities to different disturbance sources in a simple way. Those communities act as ecological indicators of the 'health' of the system, indicating clearly the gradient associated with the disturbance.

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