

The history of the European native oyster



An in-depth history of the European native oyster in Northern Irish waters has been absent from international and regional peer-reviewed publications. The knowledge of historical losses and a need to recover ecosystems for habitat and biodiversity purposes are primary drivers in an urgency to restore *Ostrea edulis*. However, a comprehensive record of *O. edulis* in Northern Ireland is required to assist with this work. The authors compiled a list of relevant references from grey material, rare historical archives, library collections, government reports and peer-reviewed publications. Archival reviews have been tabulated into a timeline, which documents site location, exploitation, sites of significant interest and socio-economic histories of the coastal communities who relied on the oyster. The reference material identified four distinctive phases of exploitation whereby harvesting transits from personal use to commercialization, collapse and then restoration. The study revealed that *O. edulis* harvests in the early 1800s in Northern Ireland were predominantly destined for export to supply collapsing stocks throughout Britain. Fishing was intense with the fishery closed by 1903. However, the species has proved to be extremely resilient with small artisanal fisheries still in existence today. This research will offer habitat managers guidance in relation to site selection and anthropogenic pressures when restoring the European flat oyster to the iconic historical beds of the Northern Irish Sea loughs.

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Obtenir le document : EDP Sciences

Mots clés : Historical ecology, site-selection, exploitation, management

Thème (issu du Text Mining) : MILIEU NATUREL, INFORMATION - INFORMATIQUE

Date : 2024-10-16

Format : text/xml

Source : <https://doi.org/10.1051/alr/2024012>

Langue : Anglais

Télécharger les documents : <https://www.alr-journal.org/10.1051/alr/2024012/pdf>

Permalien : <https://www.documentation.eauetbiodiversite.fr/notice/the-history-of-the-european-native-oyster0>

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