

MEDITERRANEAN MARINE DEMERSAL RESOURCES: THE MEDITS INTERNATIONAL TRAWL SURVEY (1994-1999).
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Analysis of demersal assemblages off the Tuscany and Latium coasts (north-western Mediterranean)*

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SUMMARY: A four-year time series (1994-1997) of groundfish trawl surveys performed within the European Union Project "MEDITS" (Mediterranean International Trawl Surveys), was analysed to identify and describe the fish assemblages along the continental shelf and slope of Tuscany and Latium (Italy), in the north-western Mediterranean. Cluster analysis was used to group samples with similar species composition in terms of abundance, biomass and frequency of occurrence. Results allowed the identification of four to five broad assemblages along the depth gradient: a strictly coastal group (< 50 m depth), two groups in the upper and lower part of the continental shelf (essentially 50-200 m), an epibathyal group (200-450 m) and a group derived from hauls made at depths greater than 450 m. Each assemblage corresponded to a faunistic association with relatively homogeneous and persistent species composition, biomass and density indices.

Key words: assemblages, cluster analysis, demersal resources, western Mediterranean

INTRODUCTION

The fauna of the Mediterranean basin is characterised by a high biodiversity, i.e. by a high number of species, some endemic to the area, some with a wider geographical distribution and others recently immigrating into the Mediterranean waters (Maurin, 1962; Tortonese, 1987; Fredj *et al.*, 1992). This aspect is mainly due to the geological evolution of the basin and to its ecological and climatic features. The existence of such biological diversity certainly contributes to the health of the Mediterranean fisheries.

Classical stock assessment tools indicate in most cases a general state of overexploitation and overcapacity of the fishing fleets (Caddy and Sharp, 1986). However, monospecific approaches are usually the rule. In the last 15 years there has been a growing perception that it is often ineffective to base fisheries management policies exclusively on single species approaches. High levels of variability in productivity, in abundance, in size and species composition, are not predictable from single species models. However, problems can arise when choosing management options in a multispecies fishery context (Caddy and Sharp, 1986; Brugge and Holden, 1991).

A more holistic approach to resource management is evidently needed. In practice, management

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should be based on ecosystem principles: to maintain the full ensemble of species while sustaining the harvest of desired species (Tyler *et al.*, 1982; Tyler, 1988). Overexploitation alters not only the size of stocks but also the ecosystems through the successive removal of large long-lived species and large-sized specimens to the point where trophic linkages, biodiversity and resilience have all been lowered (Caddy and Sharp, 1986).

The aim of this work is to analyse the structure of demersal assemblages (finfish, crustaceans and cephalopods), on a temporal and spatial scale and to specify the set of species characterising each group and those species responsible for sample groupings. From this perspective, data arising from “MEDITS” trawl surveys carried out in the years 1994-1997 along the Tuscany and Latium coasts, were analysed. Some previous information about fish assemblages in this area has been analysed by Biagi *et al.* (1989) and Abella and Serena (1995a, b).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was carried out within the framework of the Mediterranean International Trawl Surveys Programme (“MEDITS”) (Bertrand *et al.*, 2000, 2002). Four experimental bottom trawl surveys were carried out in the years 1994-1997, in the spring-summer period (essentially from June to July). The investigated area encompassed 36,536 km², comprising the Italian coasts along Tuscany and Latium (Ligurian and Tyrrhenian seas). This area was subdivided into three sub-areas: from Magra River to Elba Island (sub-area 1), from Elba to Giannutri Island (sub-area 2) and from Giannutri to Garigliano River (sub-area 3) (Fig. 1).

In the first survey, each sub-area was fully covered on a random stratified sampling basis according to the following depth strata: stratum A: 10-50 m; stratum B: 50-100 m; stratum C: 100-200 m; stratum D: 200-500 m; stratum E: 500-800 m. The allocation of hauls was proportional to the surface of each

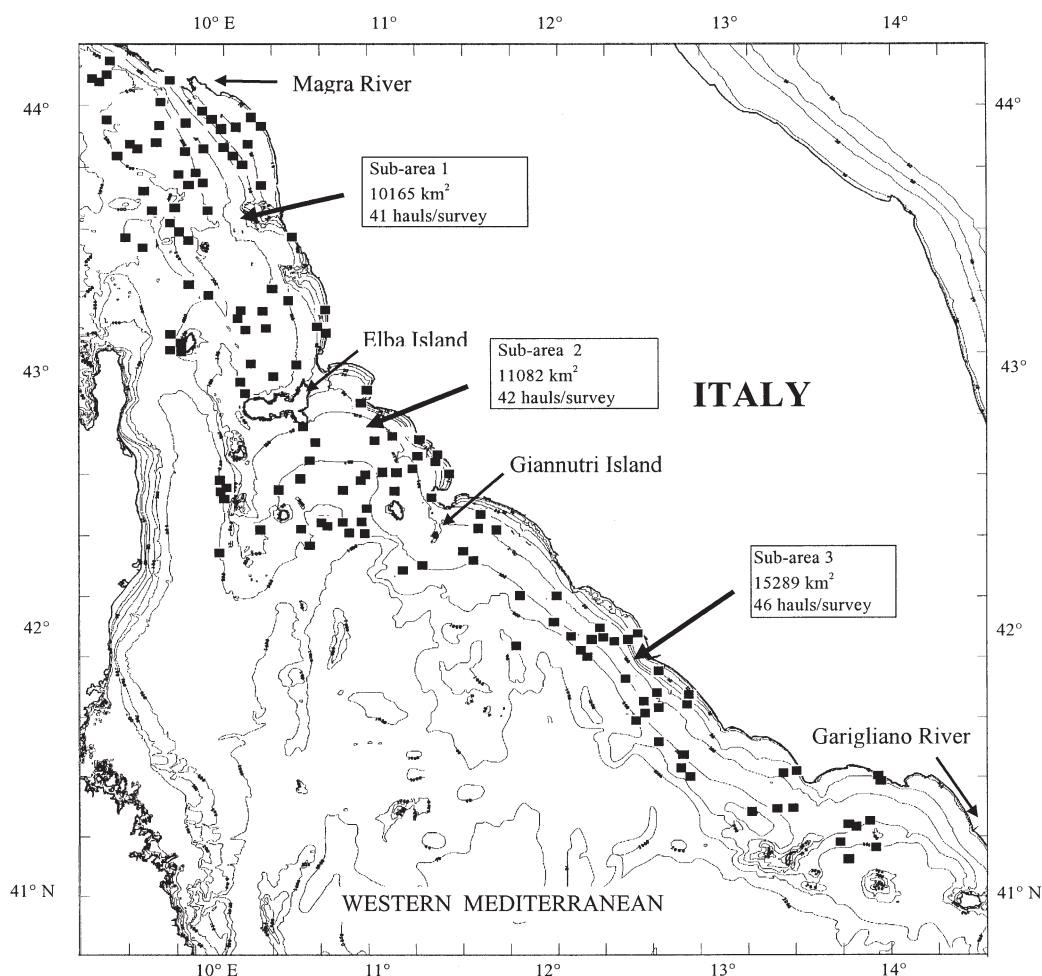


FIG. 1. – Map of the study area with the sampling stations.

bathymetric stratum. The same hauls were replicated in successive surveys. Globally, 129 hauls were made in day time hours in each survey, from 12 to 751 m of mean depth, distributed as follows according to the different depth strata: 18 hauls in stratum A, 18 in stratum B, 36 in stratum C, 33 in stratum D, and 24 in stratum E (Fig. 1).

Haul duration was 30 minutes at depths shallower than 200 m and one hour at depths greater than 200 m. All the surveys were carried out with the same otter bottom trawler and the same type of trawl net, having a cod end with stretched mesh sizes of 10 mm (knot to knot). Further information on the sampling design and on the characteristics of the gear is available in Bertrand *et al.* (2000, 2002).

The species composition of the different taxocenosis (finfish, crustaceans and cephalopods) was studied by analysing abundance and biomass data coming from each survey. Raw catch data (biomass and number of specimens collected) of each haul were converted into abundance (number of specimens/km²) and biomass indices (kg/km²), utilising a specifically developed software (Souplet, 1996). In order to identify faunistic associations, cluster analysis was applied to the abundance and biomass species-stations matrices of each survey; occasional species (those caught only once time in each year) were not considered in this analysis. In addition, the strictly pelagic species (such as anchovy, *Engraulis encrasicolus*, and sardine, *Sardina pilchardus*) were eliminated from the analysis because, in most cases, they were assumed to be captured when the trawl gear was not sampling at the bottom; this could lead to some distortion in grouping the sampling into different assemblages.

Because the survey in 1994 was mostly aimed at standardising and calibrating the sampling gear, cluster analysis was performed using the data sets of the years 1995-1997. To reduce variability and skewness, data transformations were applied: double square root for the abundance data and log(x+1) for the biomass data.

Similarity levels between the stations were calculated through the Bray-Curtis index (Clifford and Stephenson, 1975). A group average fusion strategy, UPGMA, was used as clustering algorithm (Sneath and Sokal, 1973). Species composition of each assemblage was described in terms of percentage contribution of each species at the similarity level of each group. The above mentioned analyses were computed with the PRIMER statistical package (rel. 4.0) (Clarke and Warwick, 1994).

RESULTS

During the four surveys, a total of 253 species (32 Cephalopoda, 47 Crustacea, 21 Condriichthyes and 153 Osteichthyes) were collected (Table 1). Out of these, 165 species (65.6%) occurred in all the three sub-areas (71.0%, 68.1%, 52.4% and 63.8%, respectively for cephalopods, crustaceans, cartilaginous and bony fishes). A total of 194 species (12 exclusive) was collected in sub-area 1, 212 in sub-area 2 (15 exclusive) and 209 in sub-area 3 (9 exclusive).

The number of species caught in each haul ranged from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 44. However, no evident bathymetric trend in number of species by haul was observed. Over the four years, the mean number of species per haul ranged between 20 and 40.

Four major clusters of stations recurrently appeared in the dendrograms calculated for each survey (Figs. 2 and 3). Each cluster was closely associated with bottom depths. Actually, it was possible to identify a group composed of strictly coastal hauls down to 50 m depth, another group derived from most of the hauls carried out on the continental shelf (essentially between 60 and 220 m depth), a third cluster based on the hauls made along the upper part of the continental slope (from 200 to 450 m depth) and the last group from the deepest hauls (mostly deeper than 450-500 m). Regarding the continental shelf group, a further subdivision into two sub-groups could be done: a shallower group, with most hauls taken at depths of less than 130 m, and another with the majority of hauls made at greater depths.

Cluster structure (regarding both biomass and abundance) remained essentially the same in the three years: about 90% of hauls was assigned to the same clusters over the studied period when four groups were retained, about 85% when five groups were considered (Table 2).

Although many species occurred in more than one group, each faunistic association was characterised by its own extent of species composition and catch rates (abundance and biomass) which distinguished them from each other. Moreover, these assemblages remained substantially unchanged over the study period for both data sets (abundance and biomass) (Table 3).

The coastal group was mostly characterised by *Trachurus mediterraneus*, *Diplodus annularis*, *Allotheuthis* spp., *Pagellus erythrinus*, *Arnoglossus later-*

TABLE 1. — List of the species collected during the surveys carried out in the period 1994-1997 off the Tuscany and Latium coasts. Cephalopod species names follow Mangold and Boletzky (1987), crustaceans follow Zariquiey Alvarez (1968) and fishes follow Whitehead *et al.* (1984, 1986).

<p>CEPHALOPODA</p> <p>Fam. Sepiidae <i>Sepia elegans</i> <i>Sepia officinalis</i> <i>Sepia orbignyana</i></p> <p>Fam. Sepiolidae <i>Rossia macrosoma</i> <i>Neorossia caroli</i> <i>Heteroteuthis dispar</i> <i>Stoloteuthis leucoptera</i> <i>Rondeletiola minor</i> <i>Sepietta oweniana</i> <i>Sepiola intermedia</i> <i>Sepiola ligulata</i></p> <p>Fam. Loliginidae <i>Alloteuthis media</i> <i>Alloteuthis subulata</i> <i>Loligo forbesi</i> <i>Loligo vulgaris</i></p> <p>Fam. Ctenopterygidae <i>Ctenopteryx sicula</i></p> <p>Fam. Enoploteuthidae <i>Abralia verany</i></p> <p>Fam. Octopoteuthidae <i>Octopoteuthis sicula</i></p> <p>Fam. Histioteuthidae <i>Histioteuthis bonnellii</i> <i>Histioteuthis reversa</i></p> <p>Fam. Ommastrephidae <i>Illex coindetii</i> <i>Todarodes sagittatus</i> <i>Todaropsis eblanae</i></p> <p>Fam. Onychoteuthidae <i>Ancistroteuthis lichtensteini</i></p> <p>Fam. Octopodidae <i>Bathypolypus sponsalis</i> <i>Eledone cirrhosa</i> <i>Eledone moschata</i> <i>Octopus salutii</i> <i>Octopus vulgaris</i> <i>Pteroctopus tetracirrhus</i> <i>Scaevargus unicolor</i></p> <p>Fam. Ocythoidae <i>Ocythoe tuberculata</i></p>	<p>Fam. Pandalidae <i>Chlorotocus crassicornis</i> <i>Plesionika acanthonotus</i> <i>Plesionika antgai</i> <i>Plesionika edwardsii</i> <i>Plesionika gigliolii</i> <i>Plesionika heterocarpus</i> <i>Plesionika martia</i></p> <p>Fam. Crangonidae <i>Philocheras echinulatus</i> <i>Pontocaris cataphractus</i> <i>Pontocaris lacazei</i> <i>Pontophilus spinosus</i></p> <p>Fam. Nephropidae <i>Nephrops norvegicus</i></p> <p>Fam. Polychelidae <i>Polycheles typhlops</i></p> <p>Fam. Axiidae <i>Calocaris macandreae</i></p> <p>Fam. Palinuridae <i>Palinurus elephas</i> <i>Palinurus mauritanicus</i></p> <p>Fam. Paguridae <i>Pagurus alatus</i> <i>Pagurus prideaux</i></p> <p>Fam. Galateidae <i>Munida intermedia</i> <i>Munida tenuimana</i></p> <p>Fam. Dorippidae <i>Medorippe lanata</i></p> <p>Fam. Geryonidae <i>Geryon longipes</i></p> <p>Fam. Homolidae <i>Paromola cuvieri</i></p> <p>Fam. Portunidae <i>Bathynectes maravigna</i> <i>Liocarcinus depurator</i> <i>Liocarcinus vernalis</i> <i>Macropipus tuberculatus</i></p> <p>Fam. Goneplacidae <i>Goneplax rhomboides</i></p> <p>Fam. Majidae <i>Macropodia longipes</i> <i>Maja crispata</i> <i>Maja squinado</i></p>	<p>Fam. Myliobatidae <i>Myliobatis aquila</i></p> <p>Fam. Chimaeridae <i>Chimaera monstrosa</i></p> <p>OSTEICHTHYES</p> <p>Fam. Clupeidae <i>Alosa fallax</i> <i>Sardina pilchardus</i> <i>Sardinella aurita</i></p> <p>Fam. Engraulidae <i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i></p> <p>Fam. Gonostomatidae <i>Gonostoma denudatum</i></p> <p>Fam. Sternoptychidae <i>Argyropelecus hemigymnus</i> <i>Maurolucus muelleri</i></p> <p>Fam. Photichthyidae <i>Ichthyococcus ovatus</i></p> <p>Fam. Chauliodontidae <i>Chauliodus sloani</i></p> <p>Fam. Stomiidae <i>Stomias boa</i></p> <p>Fam. Argentinidae <i>Argentina sphyraena</i> <i>Glossanodon leioglossus</i></p> <p>Fam. Synodontidae <i>Synodus saurus</i></p> <p>Fam. Chlorophthalmidae <i>Chlorophthalmus agassizii</i></p> <p>Fam. Myctophidae <i>Benthoosema glaciale</i> <i>Ceratoscopelus maderensis</i> <i>Diaphus metopoclampus</i> <i>Diaphus rafinesquei</i> <i>Hygophum benoitii</i> <i>Hygophum hygomii</i> <i>Lampanyctus crocodilus</i> <i>Lobianchia doleini</i> <i>Myctophum punctatum</i> <i>Notoscopelus elongatus</i> <i>Symbolophorus veranyi</i></p> <p>Fam. Paralepididae <i>Notolepis rissoi</i> <i>Paralepis coregonoides</i></p> <p>Fam. Nemichthyidae <i>Nemichthys scolopacea</i></p> <p>Fam. Nettastomatidae <i>Nettastoma melanurum</i></p> <p>Fam. Congridae <i>Conger conger</i> <i>Gnathophipis mystax</i></p> <p>Fam. Ophichthidae <i>Dalophis imberbis</i> <i>Echelus myrus</i> <i>Ophisurus serpens</i></p> <p>Fam. Notacanthidae <i>Notacanthus bonapartei</i></p> <p>Fam. Macroramphosidae <i>Macroramphosus scolopax</i></p> <p>Fam. Syngnathidae <i>Hippocampus guttulatus</i> <i>Hippocampus hippocampus</i></p> <p>Fam. Macrouridae <i>Coelorhynchus coelorhynchus</i> <i>Hymenocephalus italicus</i> <i>Nezumia sclerorhynchus</i> <i>Trachyrhynchus trachyrhynchus</i></p> <p>Fam. Merlucciidae <i>Merluccius merluccius</i></p> <p>Fam. Gadidae <i>Antonogadus megalokynodon</i> <i>Gadiculus argenteus</i></p>	<p><i>Gaidropsarus mediterraneus</i> <i>Micromesistius poutassou</i> <i>Molva dipterygia</i> <i>Molva molva</i> <i>Phycis blennoides</i> <i>Phycis phycis</i> <i>Trisopterus minutus capelanus</i></p> <p>Fam. Moridae <i>Gadella maraldi</i> <i>Lepidion lepidion</i> <i>Mora moro</i></p> <p>Fam. Trachichthyidae <i>Hoplostethus mediterraneus</i></p> <p>Fam. Zeidae <i>Zeus faber</i></p> <p>Fam. Caproidae <i>Capros aper</i></p> <p>Fam. Serranidae <i>Polyprion americanus</i> <i>Serranus cabrilla</i> <i>Serranus hepatus</i></p> <p>Fam. Moronidae <i>Dicentrarchus labrax</i></p> <p>Fam. Apogonidae <i>Epigonus constanciae</i> <i>Epigonus denticulatus</i> <i>Epigonus telescopus</i></p> <p>Fam. Cepolidae <i>Cepola rubescens</i></p> <p>Fam. Pomatomidae <i>Pomatomus saltator</i></p> <p>Fam. Carangidae <i>Trachurus mediterraneus</i> <i>Trachurus picturatus</i> <i>Trachurus trachurus</i></p> <p>Fam. Sciaenidae <i>Umbrina cirrosa</i></p> <p>Fam. Mullidae <i>Mullus barbatus</i> <i>Mullus surmuletus</i></p> <p>Fam. Sparidae <i>Boops boops</i> <i>Dentex dentex</i> <i>Diplodus annularis</i> <i>Diplodus sargus</i> <i>Diplodus vulgaris</i> <i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i> <i>Oblada melanura</i> <i>Pagellus acarne</i> <i>Pagellus bogaraveo</i> <i>Pagellus erythrinus</i> <i>Pagrus pagrus</i> <i>Sarpa salpa</i> <i>Sparus aurata</i> <i>Spondylisoma cantharus</i></p> <p>Fam. Centracanthidae <i>Centracanthus cirrus</i> <i>Spicara flexuosa</i> <i>Spicara maena</i> <i>Spicara smaris</i></p> <p>Fam. Labridae <i>Acantholabrus palloni</i> <i>Lappanella fasciata</i></p> <p>Fam. Trachinidae <i>Trachinus draco</i> <i>Trachinus radiatus</i></p> <p>Fam. Uranoscopidae <i>Uranoscopus scaber</i></p> <p>Fam. Trichiuridae <i>Lepidopus caudatus</i></p> <p>Fam. Scombridae <i>Scomber japonicus</i> <i>Scomber scombrus</i></p>
<p>CRUSTACEA</p> <p>STOMATOPODA</p> <p>Fam. Squillidae <i>Rissoides pallidus</i> <i>Squilla mantis</i></p> <p>DECAPODA</p> <p>Fam. Solenoceridae <i>Solenocera membranacea</i></p> <p>Fam. Aristeidae <i>Aristaeomorpha foliacea</i> <i>Aristeus antennatus</i> <i>Gennadas elegans</i></p> <p>Fam. Penaeidae <i>Funchalia woodwardi</i> <i>Penaeus kerathurus</i> <i>Parapenaeus longirostris</i></p> <p>Fam. Sergestidae <i>Sergestes arcticus</i> <i>Sergestes robustus</i></p> <p>Fam. Pasiphaeidae <i>Pasiphaea multidentata</i> <i>Pasiphaea sivado</i></p> <p>Fam. Alpheidae <i>Alpheus glaber</i></p> <p>Fam. Hippolytidae <i>Ligur ensiferus</i></p> <p>Fam. Processidae <i>Processa mediterranea</i></p>	<p>CHONDRICHTHYES</p> <p>Fam. Hexanchidae <i>Hexanchus griseus</i></p> <p>Fam. Scyliorhinidae <i>Galeus melastomus</i> <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> <i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i></p> <p>Fam. Oxynotidae <i>Oxynotus centrina</i></p> <p>Fam. Squalidae <i>Centrophorus granulosus</i> <i>Dalatias licha</i> <i>Etmopterus spinax</i> <i>Squalus acanthias</i> <i>Squalus blainvilliei</i></p> <p>Fam. Torpedinidae <i>Torpedo marmorata</i> <i>Torpedo torpedo</i></p> <p>Fam. Rajidae <i>Raja asterias</i> <i>Raja batis</i> <i>Raja clavata</i> <i>Raja miraletus</i> <i>Raja montagui</i> <i>Raja oxyrinchus</i></p> <p>Fam. Dasyatidae <i>Dasyatis violacea</i></p>		

TABLE 1 (Cont.). — List of the species collected during the surveys carried out in the period 1994-1997 off the Tuscany and Latium coasts.

Fam. Gobiidae	<i>Centrolophus niger</i>	<i>Trigla lyra</i>	<i>Microchirus variegatus</i>
<i>Aphia minuta</i>	Fam. Sphyracnidae	<i>Trigloporus lastoviza</i>	<i>Monochirus hispidus</i>
<i>Deltentosteus quadrimaculatus</i>	<i>Sphyracna sphyracna</i>	Fam. Peristediidae	<i>Solea impar</i>
<i>Gobius geniporus</i>	Fam. Mugilidae	<i>Peristedion cataphractum</i>	<i>Solea lascaris</i>
<i>Gobius niger</i>	<i>Liza ramada</i>	Fam. Citharidae	<i>Solea vulgaris</i>
<i>Lesueurigobius friesii</i>	<i>Liza saliens</i>	<i>Citharus linguatula</i>	Fam. Cynoglossidae
<i>Lesueurigobius suerii</i>	Fam. Scorpaenidae	<i>Lepidorhombus boscii</i>	<i>Symphurus ligulatus</i>
<i>Pomatoschistus marmoratus</i>	<i>Helicolenus dactylopterus</i>	<i>Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis</i>	<i>Symphurus nigrescens</i>
Fam. Callionymidae	<i>Scorpaena elongata</i>	<i>Psetta maxima</i>	Fam. Balistidae
<i>Callionymus maculatus</i>	<i>Scorpaena notata</i>	<i>Scophthalmus rhombus</i>	<i>Balistes carolinensis</i>
<i>Callionymus risso</i>	<i>Scorpaena porcus</i>	Fam. Molidae	<i>Mola mola</i>
<i>Synchiropus phaeton</i>	<i>Scorpaena scrofa</i>	Fam. Bothidae	<i>Diplecogaster bimaculata</i>
Fam. Blenniidae	Fam. Triglidae	<i>Arnoglossus imperialis</i>	Fam. Lophiidae
<i>Blennius ocellaris</i>	<i>Aspitrigla cuculus</i>	<i>Arnoglossus laterna</i>	<i>Lophius budegassa</i>
Fam. Bythitidae	<i>Aspitrigla obscura</i>	<i>Arnoglossus rueppelli</i>	<i>Lophius piscatorius</i>
<i>Bellottia apoda</i>	<i>Eutrigla gurnardus</i>	<i>Arnoglossus thori</i>	
Fam. Ophidiidae	<i>Lepidotrigla cavillone</i>	<i>Bothus podas</i>	
<i>Benthocometes robustus</i>	<i>Lepidotrigla dieuzeidei</i>	Fam. Soleidae	
Fam. Centrolophidae	<i>Trigla lucerna</i>	<i>Buglossidium luteum</i>	

TABLE 2. — Characteristics of the clusters in terms of depth ranges and number of stations.

A) Considering 4 groups	Biomass data			Abundance data		
	1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
Group 1				Group 1		
Depth range (m)	12-67	12-47	12-47	Depth range (m)	12-67	12-47
N° of stations	19	18	18	N° of stations	19	18
Stations always present in this group: 18 (94.7%)				Stations always present in this group: 18 (94.7%)		
Group 2				Group 2		
Depth range (m)	62-195	62-275	62-218	Depth range (m)	62-275	62-249
N° of stations	52	56	56	N° of stations	55	56
Stations always present in this group: 51 (91.0%)				Stations always present in this group: 52 (92.9%)		
Group 3				Group 3		
Depth range (m)	202-413	202-428	202-505	Depth range (m)	202-413	202-434
N° of stations	27	27	31	N° of stations	24	27
Stations always present in this group: 27 (87.1%)				Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)		
Group 4				Group 4		
Depth range (m)	393-751	454-751	513-751	Depth range (m)	393-751	454-751
N° of stations	31	28	24	N° of stations	31	28
Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)				Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)		
B) Considering 5 groups						
Group 1				Group 1		
Depth range (m)	12-67	12-47	12-47	Depth range (m)	12-67	12-47
N° of stations	19	18	18	N° of stations	19	18
Stations always present in this group: 18 (94.7%)				Stations always present in this group: 18 (94.7%)		
Group 2a				Group 2a		
Depth range (m)	62-131	62-123	62-131	Depth range (m)	62-123	62-133
N° of stations	31	30	28	N° of stations	28	31
Stations always present in this group: 27 (87.1%)				Stations always present in this group: 26 (78.8%)		
Group 2b				Group 2b		
Depth range (m)	131-195	131-275	133-218	Depth range (m)	118-275	118-249
N° of stations	21	26	28	N° of stations	27	25
Stations always present in this group: 19 (67.9%)				Stations always present in this group: 20 (74.1%)		
Group 3				Group 3		
Depth range (m)	202-413	202-428	202-505	Depth range (m)	202-413	202-434
N° of stations	27	27	31	N° of stations	24	27
Stations always present in this group: 27 (87.1%)				Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)		
Group 4				Group 4		
Depth range (m)	393-751	454-751	513-751	Depth range (m)	393-751	454-751
N° of stations	31	28	24	N° of stations	31	28
Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)				Stations always present in this group: 24 (77.4%)		

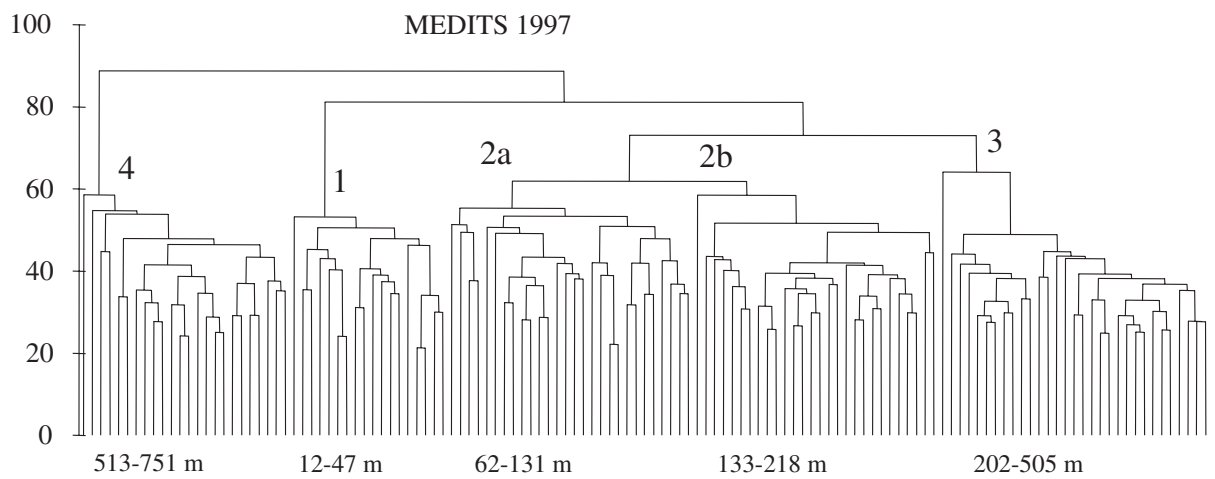
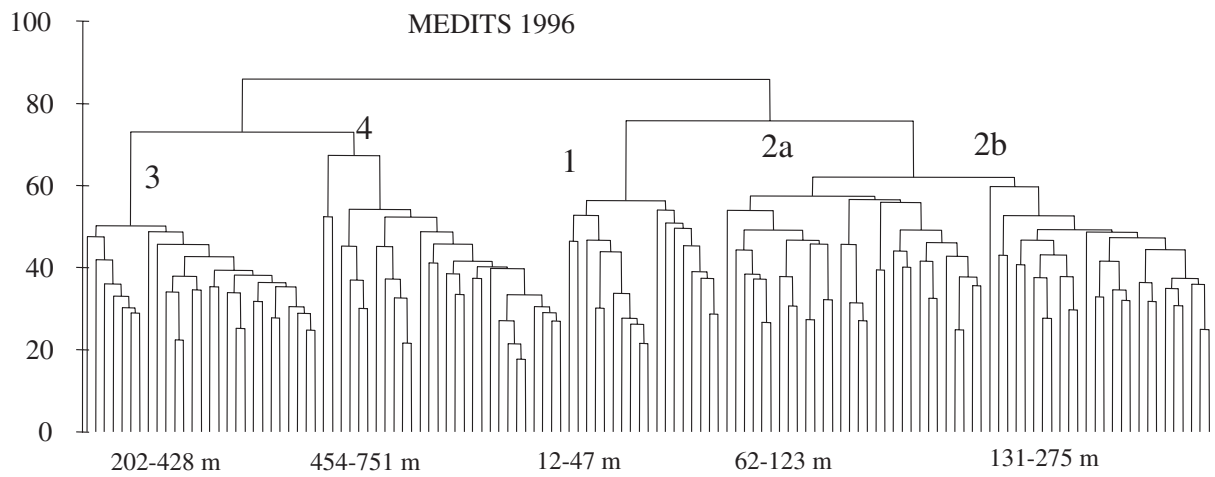
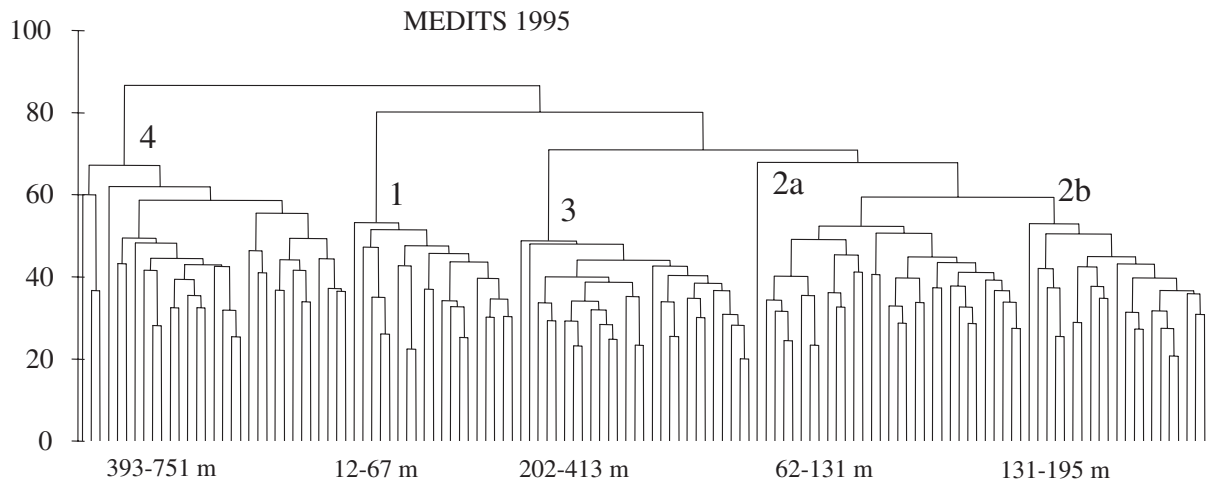


FIG. 2. – Dendrograms showing the groups of stations of each survey. Biomass data. Depth ranges within each major group are presented.

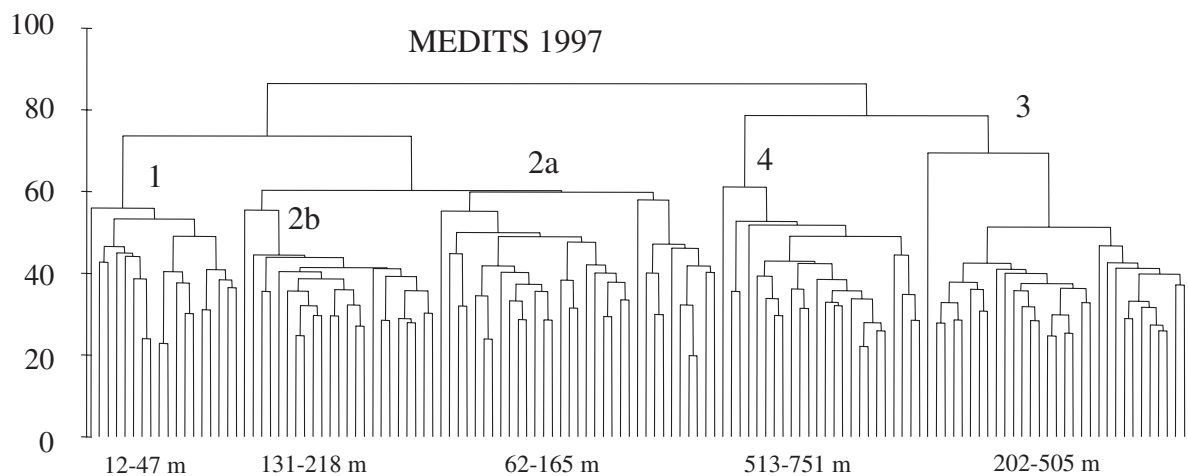
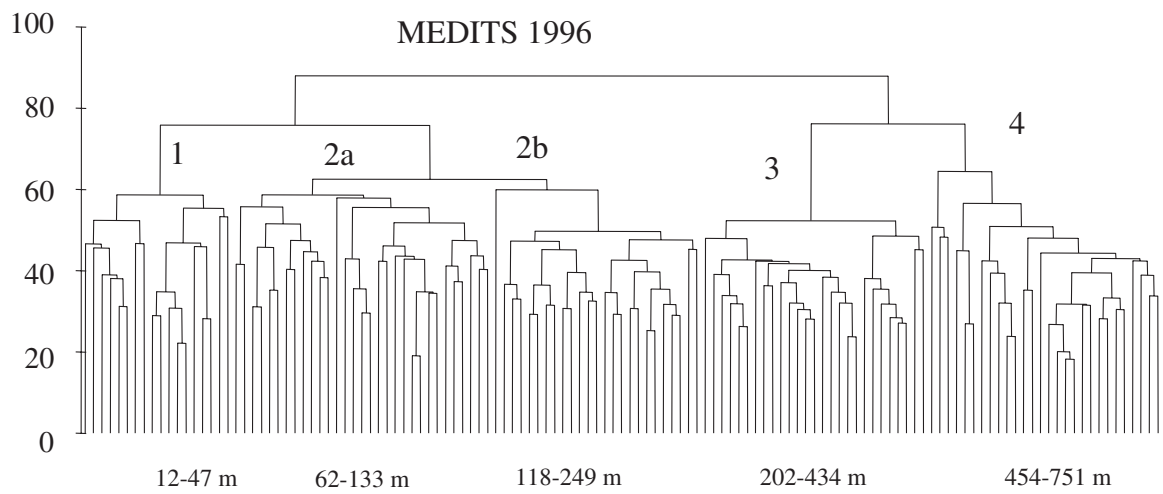
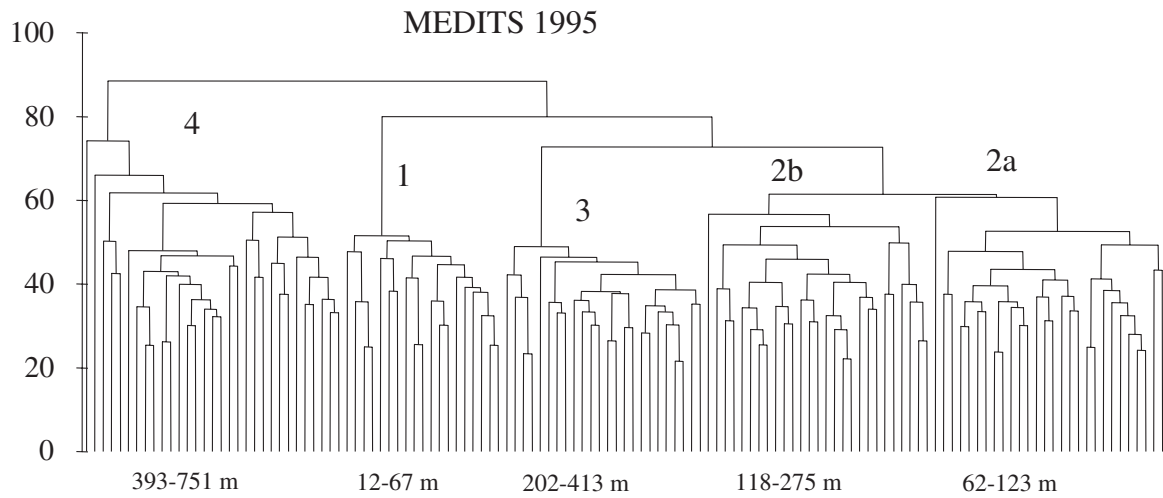


FIG. 3. – Dendrograms showing the groups of stations of each survey. Abundance data. Depth ranges within each major group are presented.

TABLE 3. – The eight most important species, in terms of percentage contribution to the group similarity, listed for each group resulting from the cluster analysis. Biomass and abundance data.

Group 1	Biomass % Sim	kg/km ²	Species	Abundance % Sim	kg/km ²
<i>D. annularis</i>	8.0	39.6	<i>T. mediterraneus</i>	10.8	1549.9
<i>Alloteuthis</i> spp.	7.7	4.4	<i>Alloteuthis</i> spp.	10.1	1671.1
<i>P. erythrinus</i>	7.6	12.6	<i>D. annularis</i>	9.3	1226.1
<i>A. laterna</i>	6.9	1.6	<i>S. flexuosa</i>	8.2	1737.8
<i>T. mediterraneus</i>	6.8	34.4	<i>P. erythrinus</i>	6.6	422.7
<i>T. lucerna</i>	5.3	2.1	<i>A. laterna</i>	5.8	119.9
<i>L. vulgaris</i>	5.2	3.5	<i>M. barbatus</i>	5.4	909.7
<i>M. barbatus</i>	4.7	28.6	<i>T. lucerna</i>	5.3	169.3
Group 2a					
<i>M. merluccius</i>	12.2	29.4	<i>M. merluccius</i>	12.2	2108.1
<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	6.8	13.5	<i>T. trachurus</i>	10.0	2549.7
<i>Alloteuthis</i> spp.	6.6	2.0	<i>T. m. capelanus</i>	6.8	1175.1
<i>T. m. capelanus</i>	6.3	10.5	<i>I. coindetii</i>	6.1	156.7
<i>T. trachurus</i>	6.2	15.0	<i>Alloteuthis</i> spp.	5.9	458.7
<i>I. coindetii</i>	5.3	12.2	<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	5.6	141.0
<i>A. laterna</i>	4.6	1.2	<i>L. cavillone</i>	4.0	237.9
<i>L. cavillone</i>	3.5	3.3	<i>S. hepatus</i>	3.9	294.9
Group 2b					
<i>M. merluccius</i>	10.3	80.8	<i>M. merluccius</i>	13.5	8821.1
<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	6.6	16.7	<i>T. m. capelanus</i>	11.0	1956.6
<i>T. m. capelanus</i>	6.6	14.7	<i>C. aper</i>	6.0	1012.3
<i>I. coindetii</i>	5.6	6.7	<i>I. coindetii</i>	6.0	219.9
<i>C. aper</i>	5.1	6.8	<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	5.5	174.1
<i>T. trachurus</i>	4.8	8.1	<i>A. sphyraena</i>	4.7	509.1
<i>A. sphyraena</i>	4.8	2.2	<i>T. trachurus</i>	4.3	1305.9
<i>P. longirostris</i>	4.4	3.5	<i>M. scolopax</i>	4.3	788.0
Group 3					
<i>N. norvegicus</i>	7.4	11.4	<i>G. a. argenteus</i>	12.4	8675.8
<i>G. a. argenteus</i>	7.0	20.2	<i>S. oweniana</i>	6.6	831.3
<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	6.4	19.9	<i>M. merluccius</i>	5.7	4493.4
<i>M. merluccius</i>	6.3	42.6	<i>P. blennoides</i>	5.3	478.4
<i>P. blennoides</i>	5.9	7.6	<i>C. agassizi</i>	5.2	854.7
<i>M. poutassou</i>	5.0	7.4	<i>N. norvegicus</i>	4.9	225.8
<i>S. oweniana</i>	4.5	2.6	<i>P. longirostris</i>	4.4	166.4
<i>P. longirostris</i>	4.5	1.8	<i>E. cirrhosa</i>	4.2	97.8
Group 4					
<i>G. melastomus</i>	11.9	51.1	<i>H. italicus</i>	10.0	747.8
<i>P. blennoides</i>	9.9	9.3	<i>P. blennoides</i>	9.3	738.1
<i>H. italicus</i>	6.7	1.8	<i>P. martia</i>	8.0	348.5
<i>E. spinax</i>	6.6	5.1	<i>G. melastomus</i>	7.6	316.1
<i>N. norvegicus</i>	6.2	7.3	<i>N. norvegicus</i>	6.8	249.5
<i>P. martia</i>	5.7	2.7	<i>L. crocodilus</i>	5.6	282.8
<i>N. sclerorhynchus</i>	5.7	6.0	<i>N. sclerorhynchus</i>	5.2	294.2
<i>A. foliacea</i>	5.0	7.2	<i>E. spinax</i>	4.7	93.7

na and *Mullus barbatus*. These species presented high catch rates, especially in the case of *T. mediterraneus* and *D. annularis*, with, respectively, about 34 and 40 kg and 1,550 and 1,226 specimens per square kilometre.

In the shallower group of the continental shelf assemblage (group 2a), the aforesaid species were partially substituted by *Merluccius merluccius*, *Eleudone cirrhosa*, *Illex coindetii*, *Trachurus trachurus*, and *Trisopterus minutus capelanus*. The biomass in

this group was quite fairly distributed among these species, while the highest abundance values were registered for *T. trachurus* and *M. merluccius*.

Group 2b was dominated by *M. merluccius*, both in terms of biomass and abundance. Other important species were *E. cirrhosa*, *T. m. capelanus*, *Capros aper* (especially in terms of abundance), *Illex coindetii*, *Argentina sphyraena* and *T. trachurus*.

Species characterising Group 3 were *Gadiculus a. argenteus*, *M. merluccius*, *Phycis blennoides* and

Micromesistius poutassou, together with *Nephrops norvegicus*, *E. cirrhosa* and *Sepietta oweniana* (particularly important in terms of abundance). This group had the highest number of species in comparison to the others, essentially due to the fact that this depth range is a border line, being the upper bathymetric limit for some species and the lower for others.

The deepest group was characterised by *Galeus melastomus* with biomass index of about 51 kg/km², *P. blennoides*, *Nezumia sclerorhynchus* and *Hymenocephalus italicus*, *Etmopterus spinax*, *Plesionika martia*, *Aristaeomorpha foliacea* and *N. norvegicus*. In this last group most of the biomass caught corresponded to species or specimens without any commercial value.

DISCUSSION

One of the results of the "MEDITS" programme was its important contribution to the faunistic knowledge of the investigated areas. However, in most cases, the fact that one species was collected only in one sub-area does not always indicate a particular restricted geographic distribution. Generally, this aspect concerned species with a wide geographical distribution but only occasionally caught because of their low abundance and/or their reduced availability to the gear. In some cases, however, the presence of a species in only one sub-area is certainly due to its pattern of distribution. Particularly interesting is the case of the cephalopod *Bathypolypus sponsalis*, which was recorded in small numbers (less than 30 specimens per survey in the depth range 300-600 m) only in sub-area 1. This is in agreement with observations during ten years of national trawl surveys, which revealed its presence only north of the Island of Elba (Belcari, 1999). *B. sponsalis* is present in Atlantic and Mediterranean waters, but in the Italian Seas it shows an unhomogeneous distribution (Lumare, 1970, Würtz, 1979; Jereb *et al.*, 1989; Mannini and Volpi, 1989; D'Onghia *et al.*, 1993).

The spring-summer fish assemblages identified fit well in the general picture that the main biogeographic contours on continental shelves and slopes are strongly aligned with depth (Fager and Longhurst, 1968; Tyler *et al.*, 1982; Overholtz and Tyler, 1985; Abelló *et al.*, 1988; Biagi *et al.*, 1989; Mahon and Smith, 1989; Sánchez *et al.*, 1998; Demestre *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, our results show a substantial agreement with previous works carried

out in sub-sectors of the same area but with distinct sampling protocol and gear (Biagi *et al.*, 1989; Abella and Serena, 1995 a and b).

Classificatory analysis of trawl data encompassing a period of three years indicated a high degree of spatial consistency in the clustering pattern of stations and in the species composition that characterise each cluster.

Persistence, i.e. the ability of an assemblage to maintain its species composition over time, is an important requirement for assemblage validity and, in addition, is an essential issue for management purposes (Pimm and Hyman, 1987; Tilman, 1996). The identification of such biological units, named by some authors APU (Assemblage Production Unit, Tyler *et al.*, 1982), is basic to select a set of species that, due to their relative importance, might play an important role in the trophic relationships of the whole community. In a further step, functional trophic links among those species should be identified, so hence biological interactions (e.g. predator-prey relationships) would be incorporated in fishery management, based on a Multispecies Virtual Population Analysis (MSVPA, Helgason and Gislason, 1979; Pope, 1979; Daan and Sissenwine, 1991).

The present work should be seen as a useful data source to identify the appropriate spatial scale for a multispecies fishery study. Thus, this definition of broad geographic areas, characterised by a relatively homogeneous and persistent biological composition, represents the first step to deal with before trying to incorporate an ecosystem approach into practical fishery management advice.

A natural evolution of the present work should analyse assemblage structure by examining size spectrum composition. Moreover, theoretical studies indicate that for exploited systems, multiple equilibrium states of community structure are possible and, therefore, changes in structure are unlikely to be reversible. There is thus an important need to monitor the structure of faunistic assemblages over the time.

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