

# Life BaHAR for Natura 2000

LIFE 12 NAT/MT/000845

## Conservation Under Water

### The Natura 2000 network

**N**atura 2000 is a network of protected areas throughout the EU; It was created in 1992 under the Habitats Directive, with the long term aim of protecting Europe's most vulnerable and threatened species and habitats. Sustainable ecological and economical management is the primary focus of this network covering around 20% of the total land area of the EU.

### The Maltese Context

**T**o date the Maltese Islands have 39 Natura 2000 sites; out of which 34 are terrestrial and 5 are marine. Whereas the land sites cover approximately 13.5% of the Maltese land area, the marine protected areas only occupy 1.63% of the waters around the Maltese Islands up to 25 nautical miles.

Due to limited scientific information, the existent 5 marine areas were based primarily on the presence of *Posidonia* beds (Neptune grass) which is considered as a priority habitat since it sustains a high biodiversity. However besides *Posidonia* beds there are other habitats which merit designation as marine Natura 2000 sites. This leads us to the scope of the Life BaHAR for N2K project

### The Life BaHAR project

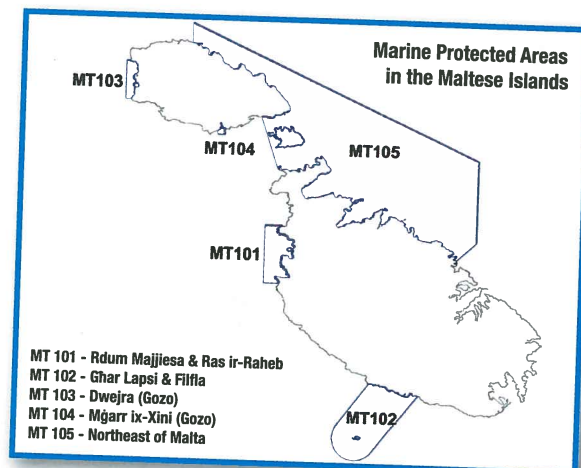
**T**his EU funded project which started in October 2013, will be investigating 3 particular ecologically important habitats, namely: underwater sandbanks, reefs and caves, with the aim of fulfilling EU sufficiency targets by extending the existing marine Natura 2000 sites and designation of new ones based on latest data gathered.

Life BaHAR for N2K aims to address data gaps and similar limiting issues, which are currently restricting further protection of marine biodiversity around the Maltese waters.

This project is being coordinated by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority which is also carrying out certain actions of

the project in collaboration with four associated beneficiaries: the Ministry of Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, the University of Malta and Fundación Oceana.

The project budget is of 2.6 million euro, 50% of which is co-financed by the EU LIFE funding programme set up to help implement and develop environmental projects within the EU. With the help of this initiative, the Maltese Islands will have an adequately coherent network of marine protected areas



Limiting Factor	Description	Life BaHAR Action
Lack of scientific data on marine habitats.	Costs involved and specialised skills and equipment have restricted data gathering for the past years.	Provide a comprehensive assessment of location, extent and conservation status of protected marine habitats.
Insufficiency of marine Natura 2000 designated sites.	Only 1.63% of all the Fisheries Management Zone is presently covered by Natura 2000 sites.	Site selection for new sites and updates to existing ones.
Lack of coordination between stakeholders.	Activities on the sea are not coordinated often giving rise to conflicts.	Stakeholders will be invited to contribute towards conservation. Scientific data will be centralised.
Damage to habitats through human activities.	These are mainly related to fishing gears, anchoring and infrastructural developments.	Identification of threats and impacts on ecologically important habitats.
Lack of conservation measures.	In view of this, management measures cannot be carried out.	Establish conservation objectives on which to set up management measures through Management Plans or Conservation orders.
Lack of awareness of marine Natura 2000 sites and marine habitats and species.	A general lack of awareness on marine Natura 2000 sites, their establishment and benefits is recognised as one of the key issues in the Maltese Islands.	Dissemination of knowledge through a tailor-made awareness raising strategy.