

Besides the Natural Gas, What about the Biodiversity?

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ABSTRACT

The deep-sea environment is situated beneath 200 m depth and represents the world's largest ecosystem. This region constitutes about 80% of the total Mediterranean waters. Scientific knowledge of the deep-sea diversity is scarce and limited to a few groups of organisms. Deep-sea biodiversity has recently received increased attention and several studies have been undertaken in the Mediterranean since the late 1980s. A total number of 2800 species has been estimated out of which 66% are still undiscovered. Endemism is relatively high and endemic deep-water species constitute about 15% of the total species number at depth ranging from 200 m to 1000 m, and about 20% at 2000 m depth. In the Mediterranean, some habitats are unique and are considered biodiversity hot spots. Recently, a large and rich deep-water coral system has been discovered a few kilometers south of Lebanese territorial waters and was considered of high scientific importance. Very limited scientific information exists from the Lebanese marine environment and the likeliness of the presence of unique habitats is high, given the narrow continental shelf, submarine canyons and the proximity to discovered deep-water coral habitat. The deep-sea ecosystem represents undoubtedly a fragile environment that may be highly affected by the disturbance of any anthropogenic activities. Scientific exploration and mapping are needed in order to detect the presence and location of unique habitats to minimize damage that offshore drilling may cause.