

## **DIEL RESOURCE UTILIZATION IN *DIPLODUS SARGUS* BENTHIC LARVAE**

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Foraging studies provide fundamental knowledge on the ecology of settlement and post-settlement processes, which in turn are crucial for the replenishment of natural fish populations. In the present work, the foraging ecology of *Diplodus sargus* settlers was studied in an estuarine area in the Ionian Sea, in May 2010. Settlers' diet composition was studied on fish captured every three hours along a 24hour period. Fishes were collected at depths down to 1.5m using handnets and scuba gear. Settlers were subdivided into successive ontogenetic stages and their stomach contents were analysed separately for each ontogenetic stage and sampling time. Harpacticoid copepods (copepodites and adults) were found to be the dominant prey item, while calanoids were also consumed. Other prey items which were consumed sporadically, regardless of ontogenetic stage, were polychaete larvae, amphipods (Gammaridae), tanaidaceans, isopods (*Gnathia*) and mysidaceans. Foraging intensity for all ontogenetic stages was found to be greatest during dusk hours and less during dawn, while it gradually decreased to cessation in the mid time intervals. *D. sargus* settlers tended to select prey items close to the bottom.