

FISH AGGREGATION DEVICES (FADS) ASSOCIATED FAUNA IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN WATERS

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Man-made, anchored floating objects, known as fish aggregating devices (FADs) may provide research workers with a tool for collecting larval and juvenile fishes that are difficult to collect using conventional methods, providing also measures of recruitment to pelagic fisheries. Several mechanisms have been suggested to explain the association of fishes with floating objects. Four of the more accepted ones are: shelter from predators, food supply, schooling companions and substrate for species undergoing a change from a pelagic to other modes of existence. In Greek waters, ichthyoplankton surveys were carried out in summertime in order to study larval fish aggregations around FADs. Moreover, on a monthly basis experimental fishing took place by encircling the FAD area with a surrounding net, in order to collect fishes that might remain under the unit. In most cases a visual census of all the fishes within the range of visibility from the FADs, ranging between 15 and 30m, was undertaken by divers. The most abundant species in ichthyoplankton samples were *Nauctates ductor*, and *Chromis chromis*. As for FAD aggregations, although pelagic fishes, mainly Carangidae species (*Trachurus* sp., *Caranx crysos*) dominated, total fish abundance, number of species and length range of the species were significantly related to season (recruitment period), resulting in a sequential colonization of the FADs along the study period. This study aims to shed further light on fish aggregations associated with floating objects in order to evaluate the potential of this fishing technique to enhance catches of small scale fisheries.