

Available MSc Project: Kelp forest mapping

Title: Kelp Forest Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Condition in South Africa

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Project background:

Kelp forests occur along c. 25% of the world's coastline. Dominating shallow temperate reefs in upwelled regions of the world, they form highly diverse systems and host a number of valuable species that contribute to global fisheries. South African kelp forests occur along the entire west coast and parts of the south coast. These habitats support a number of valuable inshore resources such as rock lobster, abalone, kelp and linefish, some of which are overexploited. A cooling of coastal waters is thought to have expanded the kelp's distribution on the south coast, while other regions have experienced a shift in ecosystem state, primarily due to a shift in the West Coast rock lobster, but possibly also linked to anthropogenic effects such as overfishing.

In the 2011 National Biodiversity Assessment, the mapping of South African kelp forest habitat and assessment of ecosystem condition was identified as a national research priority and has been prioritised by the National Marine Ecosystem Committee. Using available data, this project aims to provide a habitat map of South African kelp forests and assess the condition of these ecosystems, where there are available data. If possible, additional data will be collected to fill in the gaps with regards to habitat mapping.

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