

Littoral chalk communities

EUNIS Code: Various including A1.126, A1.2143, A1.441, B3.114 and B3.115

National Marine Habitat Classification for UK & Ireland code: Littoral chalk biotopes (various including LR.HLR.FR.Osm, LR.MLR.BF.Fser.Pid, LR.FLR.CvOv.ChrHap, LR.FLR.Lic.Bli and LR.FLR.Lic.UloUro)

The erosion of chalk exposures on the coast has resulted in the formation of vertical cliffs and gently-sloping intertidal platforms with a range of micro-habitats of biological importance. Supralittoral and littoral fringe chalk cliffs and sea caves support various algal communities unique to this soft rock type. Orange, brownish or blackish gelatinous bands of algae, composed of an assemblage of Haptophyceae species such as *Apistonema* spp., *Pleurochrysis carterae* and the orange *Chrysofila lamellosa*, but other genera and species of Chrysophyceae, Haptophyceae and Prasinophyceae are likely to be present as well. The lower littoral fringe may be characterised by a dense mat of green algae *Enteromorpha* spp. and *Ulva lactuca*. Lower down the shore in the eulittoral the generally soft nature of the chalk results in the presence of a characteristic flora and fauna, notably 'rock-boring' invertebrates such as piddocks, overlain by mostly algal-dominated communities (fucooids and red algal turfs) (Gubbay, 2002). Such coastal exposures of chalk are rare in Europe, with those occurring on the southern and eastern coasts of England accounting for the greatest proportion (57%) (ICES, 2003). Elsewhere, this habitat occurs in France, Denmark and Germany.

See OSPAR Agreement 2008-07 for references