

Maerl beds

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National Marine Habitat Classification for UK & Ireland code : SS.SMp.Mrl

“Maerl” is a collective term for several species of calcified red seaweed (e.g. *Phymatolithon calcareum*, *Lithothamnion glaciale*, *Lithothamnion corallioides* and *Lithophyllum fasciculatum*) which live unattached on sediments. In favourable conditions, these species can form extensive beds, typically 30% cover or more, mostly in coarse clean sediments of gravels and clean sands or muddy mixed sediments, which occur either on the open coast or in tide-swept channels of marine inlets, where it grows as unattached nodules or ‘rhodoliths’. Maerl beds have been recorded from a variety of depths, ranging from the lower shore to 30m depth. As maerl requires light to photosynthesize, depth is determined by water turbidity. In fully marine conditions the dominant species is typically *P. calcareum*, whilst under variable salinity conditions such as sealochs, beds of *L. glaciale* may develop. Maerl beds have been recorded off the southern and western coasts of the British Isles, north to Shetland, in France and other western European waters.

See OSPAR Agreement 2008-07 for references