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## Press Release

# CITIZEN SCIENCE DIVERS REVEAL 14 YEARS OF MANACLES MONITORING DATA

## But could quarrying license make a mockery of protected status?

Anemone-clad rock pinnacles, forests of slow growing pink sea fan corals, and 50 different species of fishes from bright little black-faced blennies to spotted catsharks are among the finds recorded in one of the UK's first Marine Conservation Zones.

Divers from Seasearch – the volunteer dive project co-ordinated by the Marine Conservation Society - have amassed a huge database of marine species and habitats in UK coastal waters which will be used as evidence for further areas of protection.

One of the areas where surveys have taken place is The Manacles on the eastern side of The Lizard peninsula in Cornwall. Seasearch, in collaboration with the University of Exeter, has now published a report of its findings at the site since 2001.

Report author, Chris Wood, said: “The Manacles is a wonderful example of the huge diversity of life in our coastal waters and has rightly been protected in recognition of this. As divers and lovers of marine life, Seasearch believes it should stay that way.”

In 2013 the government designated the Manacles Rocks and an area around them as one of the first Marine Conservation Zones in England. The designation was made to protect the reefs and areas of soft sediment and especially the pink sea fans, crawfish, sea fan anemones and coralline maerl algae that are found amongst the wide range of life.

Following the designation, however, there has been a proposal to re-open Dean Quarry, located on the shores of the Marine Conservation Zones, to provide stone for the planned Swansea Bay tidal barrage. This would involve the construction of new breakwater and loading jetty in the conservation area to export the stone.

Seasearch concentrated almost 50 additional underwater surveys in the area around the quarry in 2015, and the resulting report has revealed that all designated species and habitats are found adjacent to the quarry and not just on the Manacles rock pinnacles themselves.

### Marine Conservation Society

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Seasearch and the University of Exeter believe that the harbour works would physically damage these protected habitats and be directly contradictory to the rationale behind the conservation zone designation.

Dr Matthew Witt, of the University of Exeter's Environment and Sustainability Institute in Cornwall, said: "While conferring an area with Marine Conservation Zones status does not *de facto* prevent human activity it would seem contrary to the underlying premise of Marine Conservation Zones, to licence activities that produce underwater noise and light pollution, cause physical damage, alter local currents and potentially increase the sediment load in the environment that can smother local habitats".

The report will be launched during a talk by Chris Wood at the 3rd Annual Marine Ecology and Conservation Network meeting at the University of Exeter, Penryn on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

**-ends-**

**Media contacts:**

Chris Wood, Seasearch: 01548 831602 or 07501 670160 e: [chris@wrinklyfish.co.uk](mailto:chris@wrinklyfish.co.uk)  
Dr Matthew Witt, University of Exeter: 01326 259493

Download the full report here - [www.seasearch.org.uk/achievements.html](http://www.seasearch.org.uk/achievements.html)

**Notes to Editors**

**The Marine Conservation Society (MCS)** is the UK charity dedicated to protecting our seas, shores and wildlife. MCS campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the annual Good Beach Guide and the Good Fish Guide as well as involving thousands of volunteers in projects and surveys such as MCS Beachwatch.

[www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org)

**Seasearch** is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers, enabling them to contribute to protecting marine wildlife through recording underwater habitats and the plants and animals they support. Seasearch provides training for volunteer divers and organises dives and survey expeditions. Seasearch is a partnership between the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), The Wildlife Trusts, statutory nature conservation bodies and others, co-ordinated nationally by MCS and co-ordinated and delivered locally in England by Wildlife Trust and MCS local co-ordinators. Details of all Seasearch activities, including training courses and survey dives can be found on the Seasearch website at [www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk)

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