

**2002-2005 Diving for the Environment: Mediterranean Underwater Biodiversity Project  
Environmental monitoring in collaboration with the industry of underwater tourism**

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Biodiversity has a value as an indicator of environmental health. Monitoring is the first step towards natural resource management. The goal of “Diving for the Environment” was to obtain data on the state of the marine biodiversity along the Italian coasts, by the collaboration of recreational scuba divers. On a specially formulated questionnaire, volunteers reported the presence of 61 marine taxa encountered during recreational dives. This research was patronaged by the Italian Ministry of the Environment and supported by ASTOI (Association of Italian Tour Operators), A.DI.SUB (Association of Italian Scuba Diving Agency – IDEA, PADI, PSS, SNSI, SSI) and the popular scientific magazine Quark. During the 4-year study, 3,825 divers have completed 18,757 questionnaires, corresponding to 13,539 diving hours. In the Ligurian and Northern Tyrrhenian seas, data showed a north-south gradient, where the best situations were in the southernmost areas. This condition could be related to the high anthropogenic stress in urban and industrial zones. Divers were willing to take part in monitoring and contributed in scientific terms by collecting considerable amounts of data over short time periods, and in economic terms by decreasing costs. The greatest limitation was the difficulty in obtaining a uniformly distributed sample across time and space.