

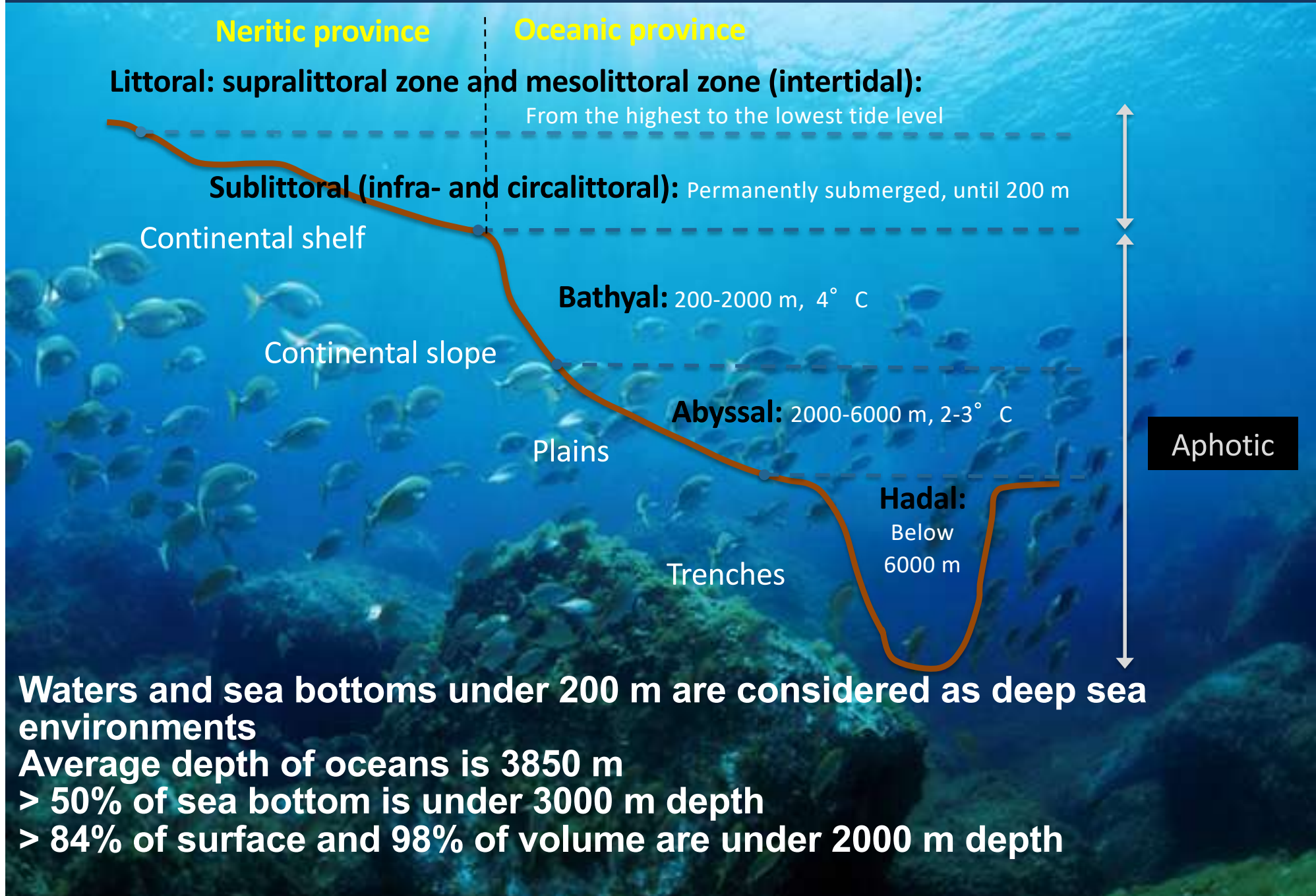
An underwater photograph showing a large school of small, silvery fish swimming in clear blue water above a dark, rocky seabed. Sunlight rays are visible filtering down from the surface.

**GLOBAL CHANGE ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY**  
**a.a. 2023-2024**

**Conservation and Management of Marine Ecosystems**  
**Prof. Stanislao Bevilacqua ([sbevilacqua@units.it](mailto:sbevilacqua@units.it))**

**Deep sea ecosystems**

# The deep sea





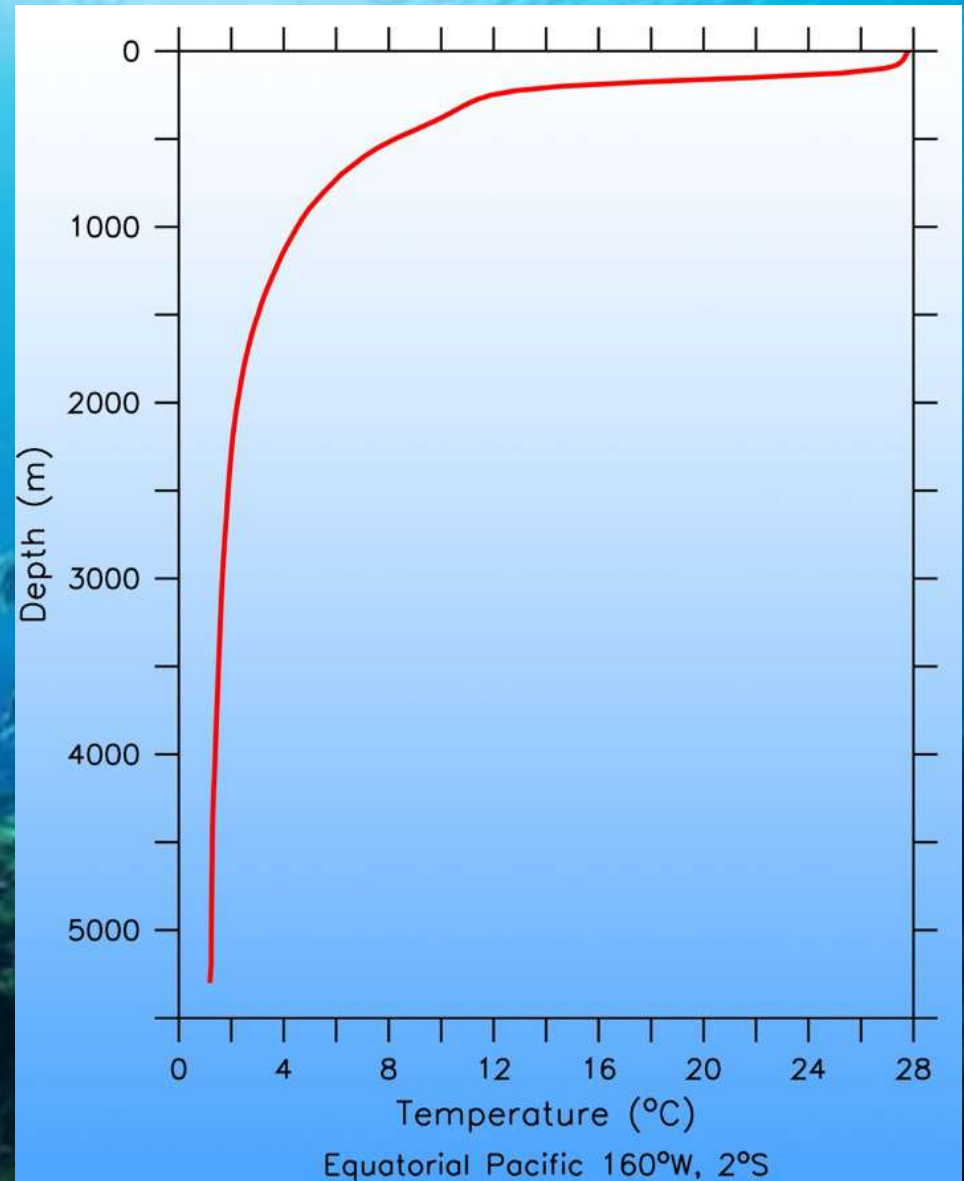
# Main environmental features

Temperature  $< 4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-1.9^{\circ}\text{C}$ )  
Temperature  $>$  in the  
Mediterranean Sea (about  
 $12^{\circ}\text{C}$ )

Salinity: constant 34.8 (2000 m)  
34.65 ( $> 6000$  m)

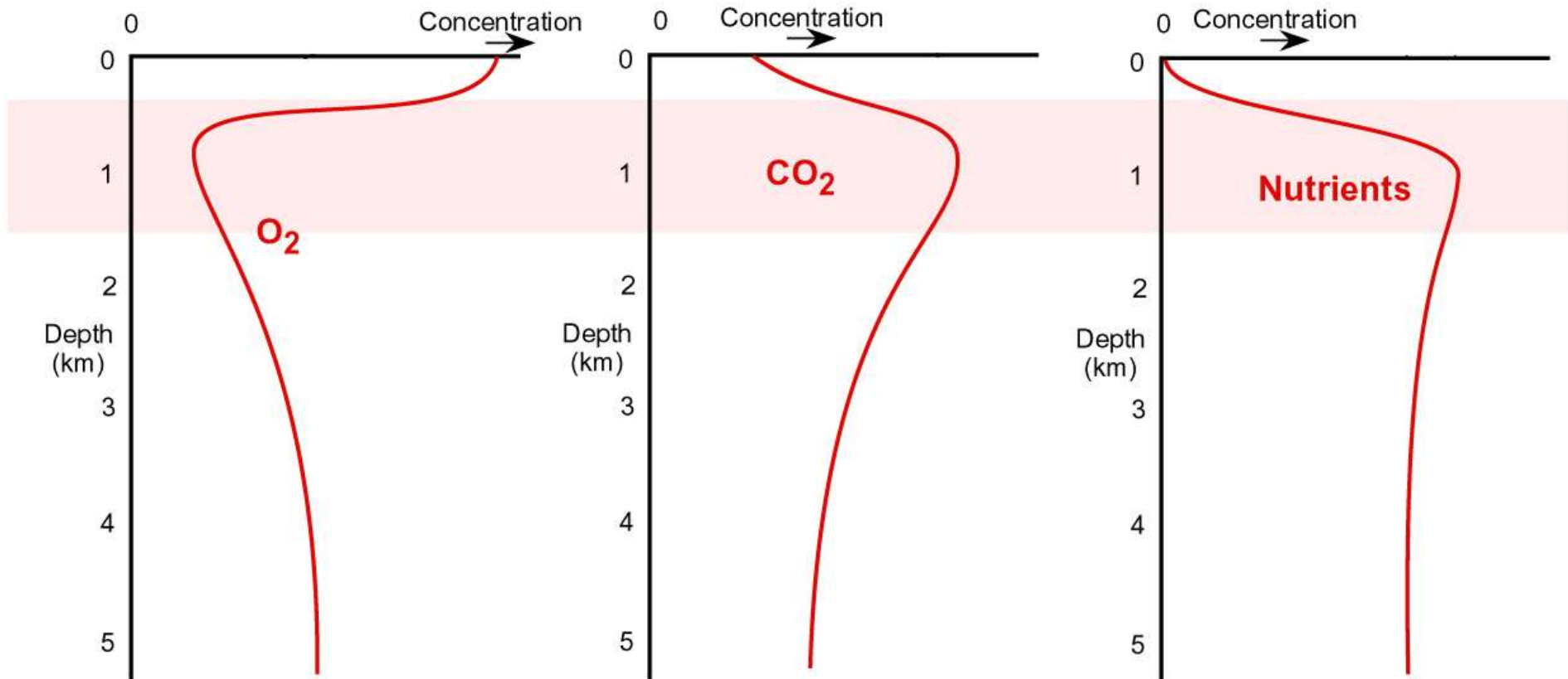
Hydrostatic pressure: very  
high, influence on metabolism  
( $> 200$  atm)

Substrate: hard bottoms  
uncommon, mostly incoherent



# Main environmental features

In the photic zones oxygen is produced by macroalgae and plants, that consume carbon dioxide and nutrients.  $O_2$  decreases with depth due to decline of photosynthetic activity and oxidation of organic matter, whereas  $CO_2$  and nutrients increase due to respiration and increased solubility (high P and low T). Min of  $O_2$  and max of  $CO_2$  and nutrients is achieved at about 1000 m. Below this threshold, nutrients remain stable,  $O_2$  slightly increases due to oxygenation from the surface through currents, and  $CO_2$  slightly decreases due to reduced respiration rates (rarefaction of organisms)





# Matter and energy

## Falling animal carcasses

1. Marine mammals (e.g., whales)
2. Fish
3. Large invertebrates (e.g., cephalopods)

## Falling detritus from plants

1. Macroalgae (e.g., *Sargassum*)
2. Marine plants
3. Terrestrial plants

## Currents

1. Particulate organic matter (POM)
2. Dissolved organic matter (DOM)

## POM falling from the photic zone

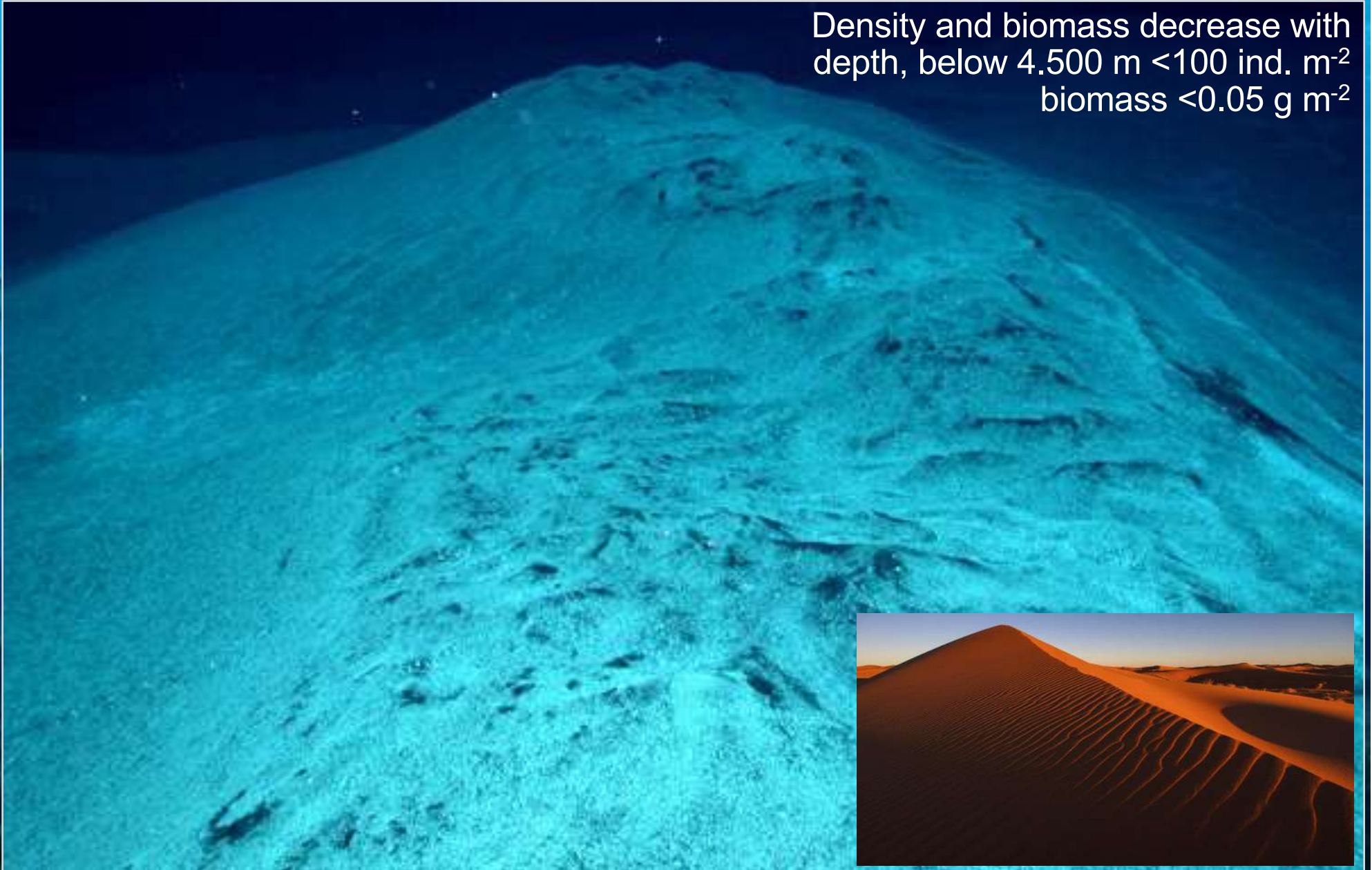
1. Dead or dying small organisms
2. Fecal pellets
3. Moults (hard structures of zooplankton)

## Marine snow

Marine snow is mostly organic matter, with some inorganic components. It is made up of aggregates of particles held together polysaccharid matrices (originated from decay of organic matter and exudations of marine organisms). Aggregates grow when falling, until several cms, and could take days or weeks before reaching the ocean floor, depending on their size.

# A desert?

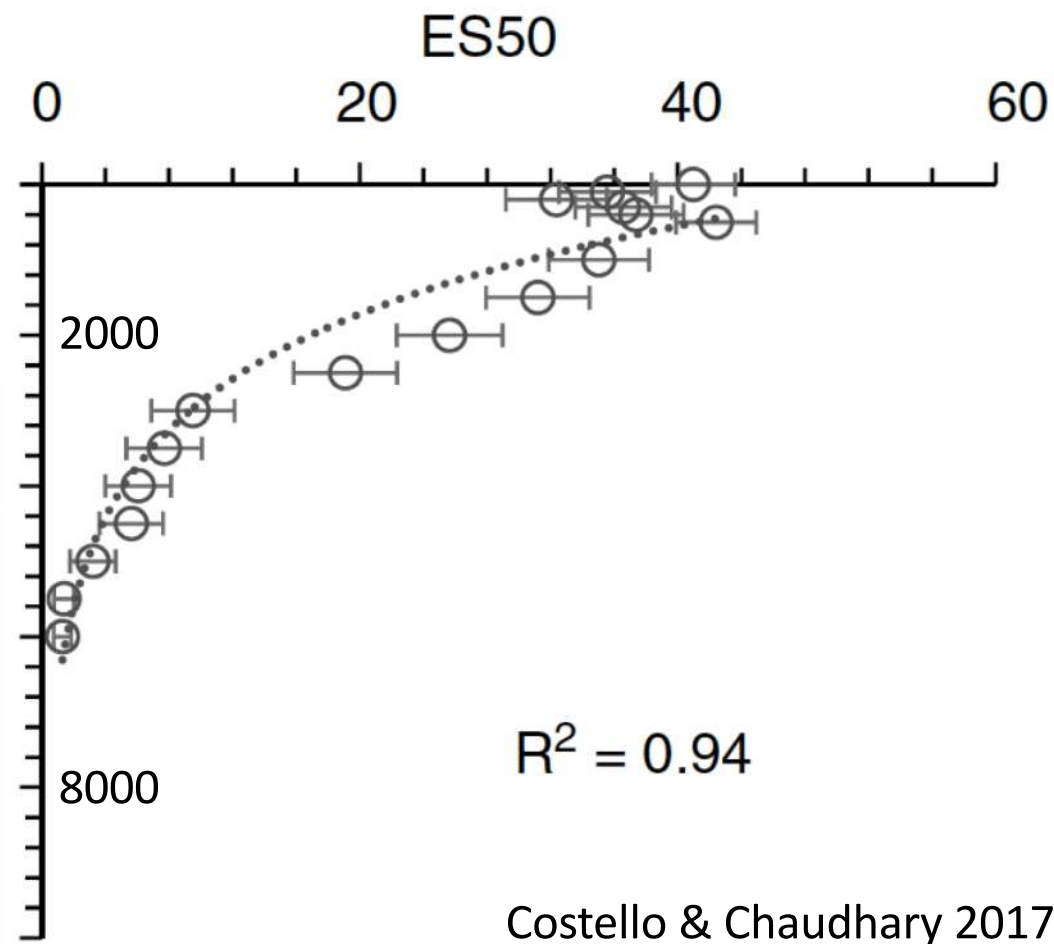
Density and biomass decrease with depth, below 4.500 m <100 ind. m<sup>-2</sup>  
biomass <0.05 g m<sup>-2</sup>



Azoic theory of Forbes, half of 19th century



# Stability-Time hypothesis



Sanders (1968) proposed a general model which he called the Stability-Time Hypothesis. This model says that physical instability in an environment prevents the establishment of diverse communities. However, if physically stable conditions persist for a long period of time, speciation and immigration will cause species diversity to increase gradually. Thus, high diversity in the deep sea is a result of the great long-term stability of that environment. Basic to his view is the idea that each species must occupy an increasingly narrow, specialized niche.

However...

- 1) Feeding behaviour are quite general: many are detritivorous, or filter-feeders, and some predator
- 2) In most cases species rely on different type of food
- 3) Large areas and rarefaction decrease competition (Dayton and Hessler, 1972)

# Heterogeneity

## Habitat

mud flats, sea mounts, volcanos, trenches, canyons

## Hydrodynamism

Currents: there are areas of intense hydrodynamism

Eddies: cyclons 50-200 km with high energy flow

## Variability:

interannual variations in conditions

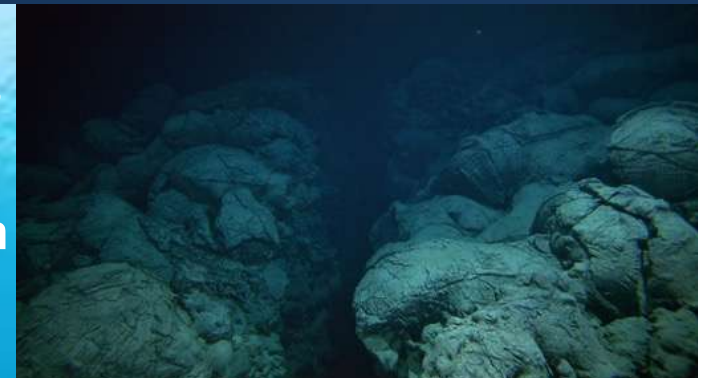
## Sea bottom perturbation:

resuspension of sediments in slope areas

bioturbation (microscale and small scale)

## Resources:

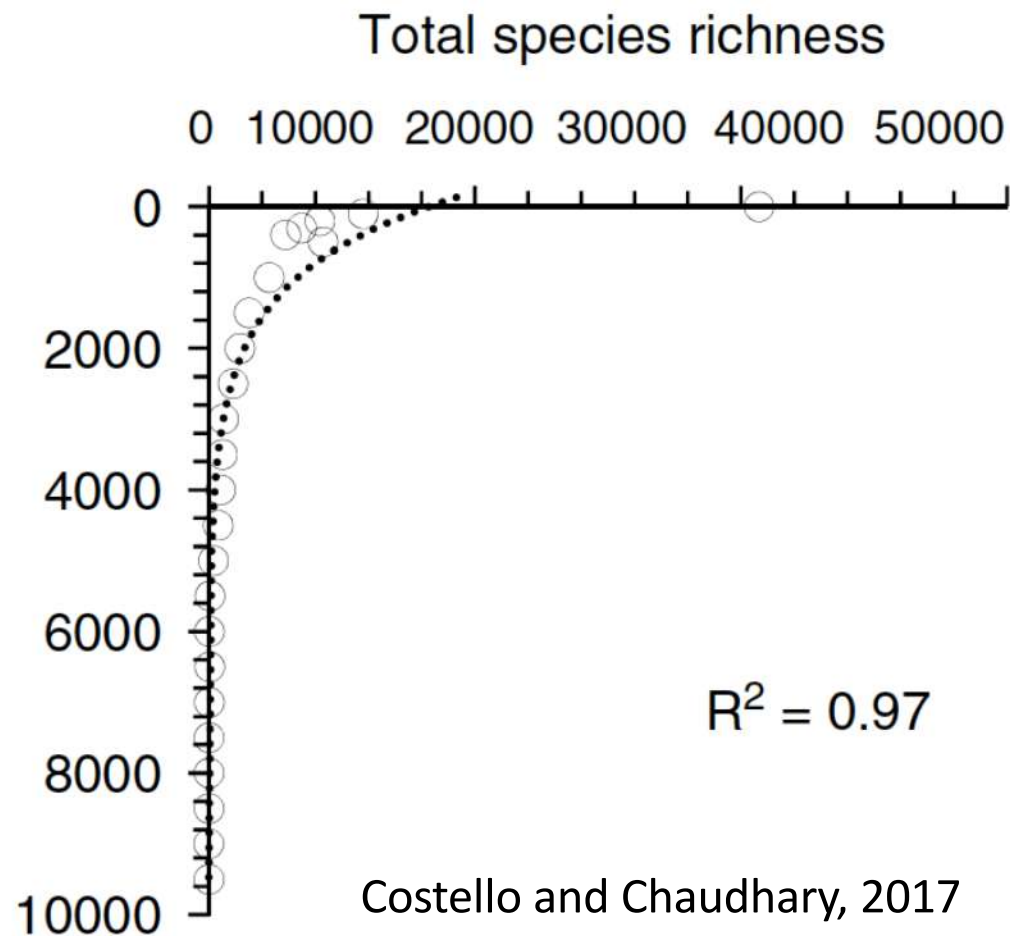
food is heterogeneously distributed





# Biodiversity

Biodiversity in the deep sea is lower than in shallower environments. However, we explored only the 1% of this system, and there could be many species still to be discovered.



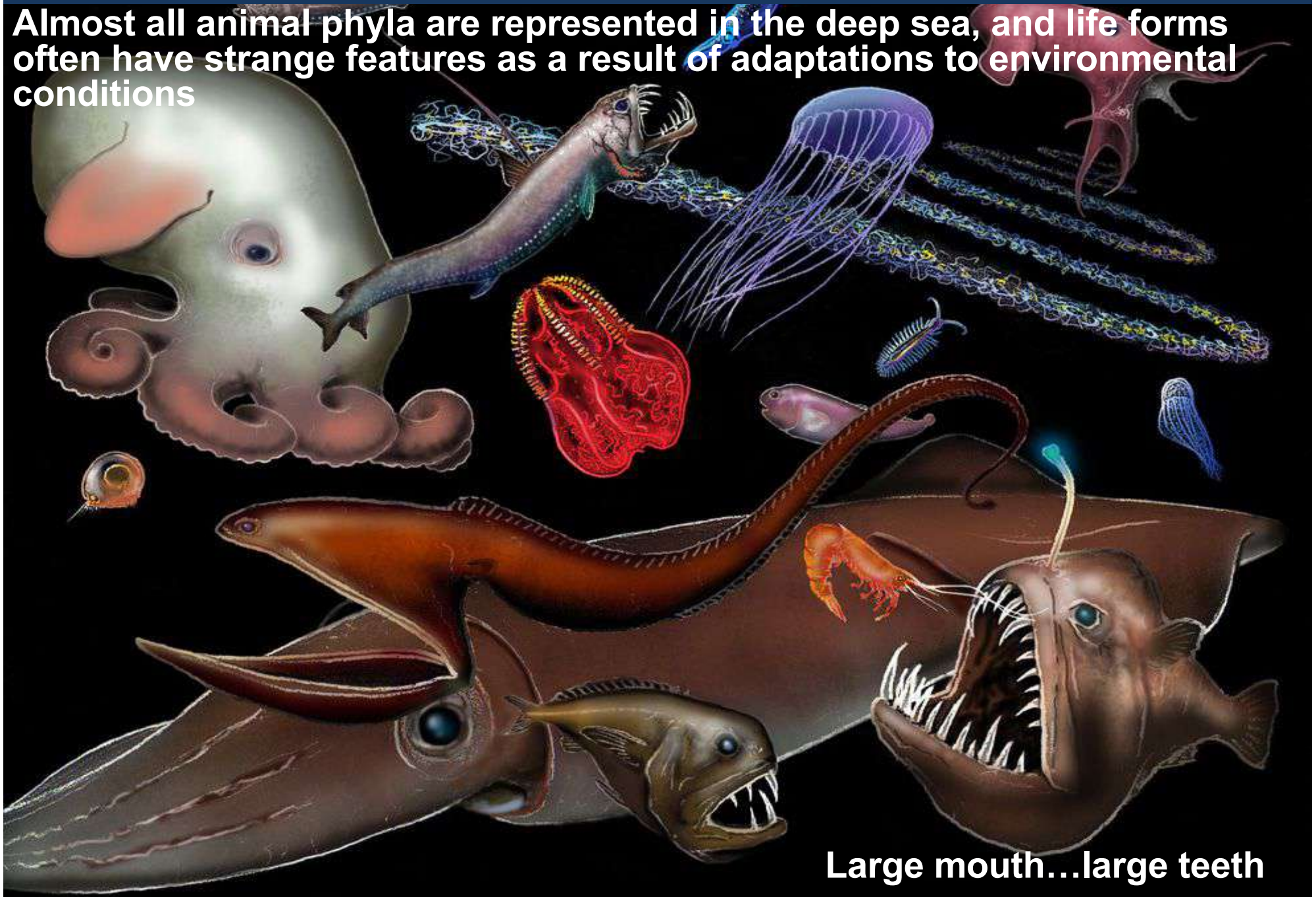
Species richness decline from the surface to the deeper areas. However, information is geographically restricted to some areas of the Atlantic, Pacific and Southern Ocean. Very few studies in the Mediterranean

Dominant macrobenthic taxa: polychaetes, cumaceans, tanaidacea, amphipods, isopods, gastropods, bivalves, scaphopods, oligochaetes, pogonophora, chitons, aplacophora

Dominant meiofauna: nematods, harpacticoid copepods, ostracods

# Strange guys

Almost all animal phyla are represented in the deep sea, and life forms often have strange features as a result of adaptations to environmental conditions



Large mouth...large teeth

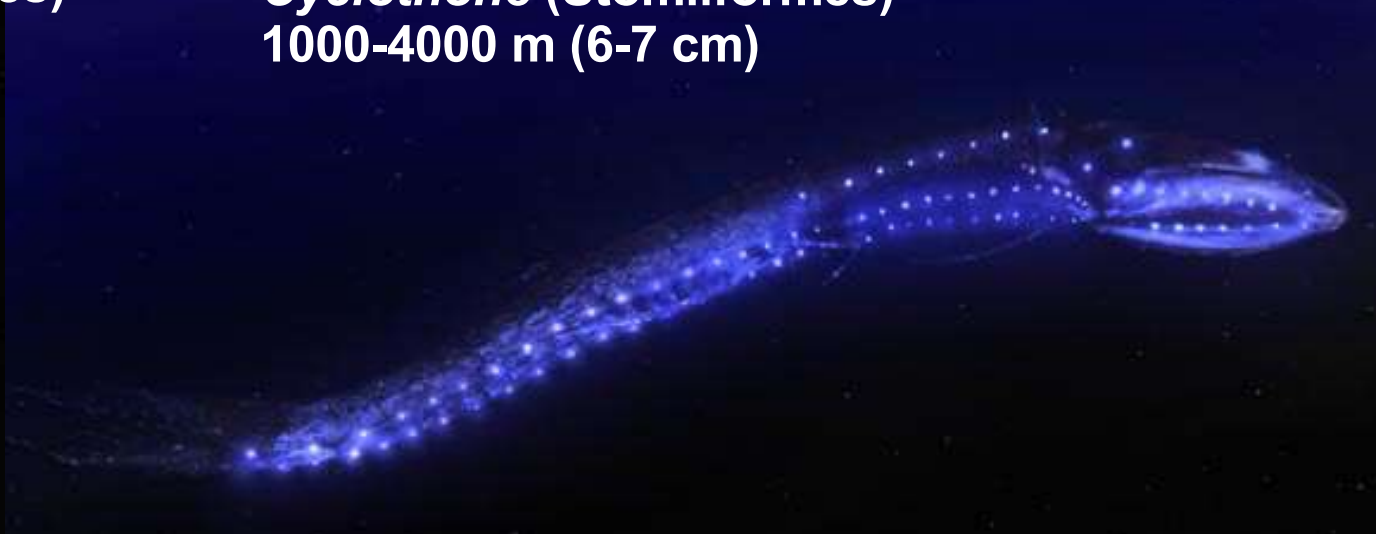


# Further adaptations

*Melanocetus* (Lophiiformes)  
100-4500 m (18 cm)

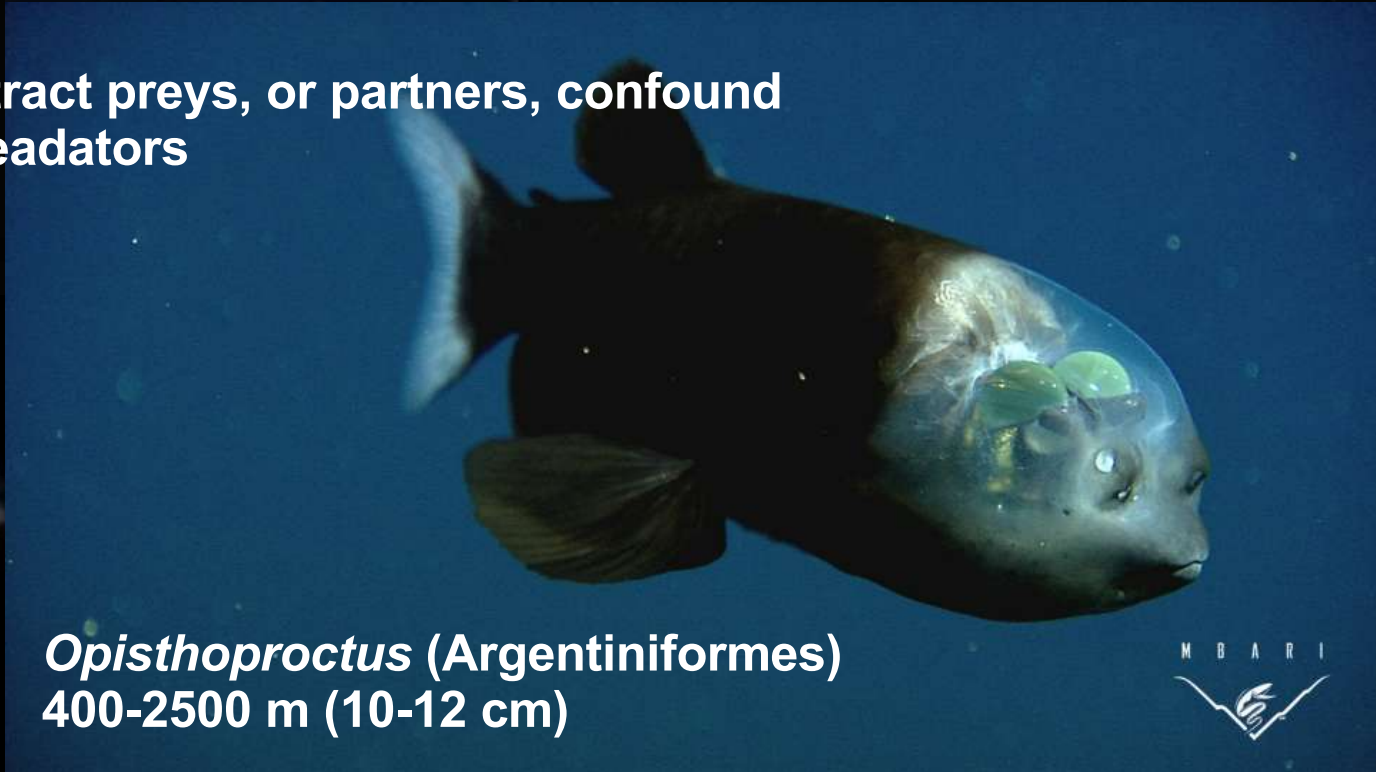


*Cyclothone* (Stomiiformes)  
1000-4000 m (6-7 cm)



Attract preys, or partners, confound predators

*Opisthoproctus* (Argentiniformes)  
400-2500 m (10-12 cm)



# Living fossils

*Latimeria chalumnae* (Coelacanthiformes)  
150-700m (140-165 cm)



Believed extinct since 65 millions years ago  
(Madascar 1938)



# Visitors from the surface



*Physeter macrocephalus* (0-2200 m, 18 m)



*Somniosus microcephalus* (0-2000 m, 7 m)

In some cases, animal living in shallow waters may visit deep sea for feeding

Others prefer conditions of deeper waters, but could occasionally frequent the surface or going more deeper



# Big...strange guys

*Xenophyophores* (>6 km, 10 cm)



*Architeuthis dux* (200-1000 m, 10-13 m)



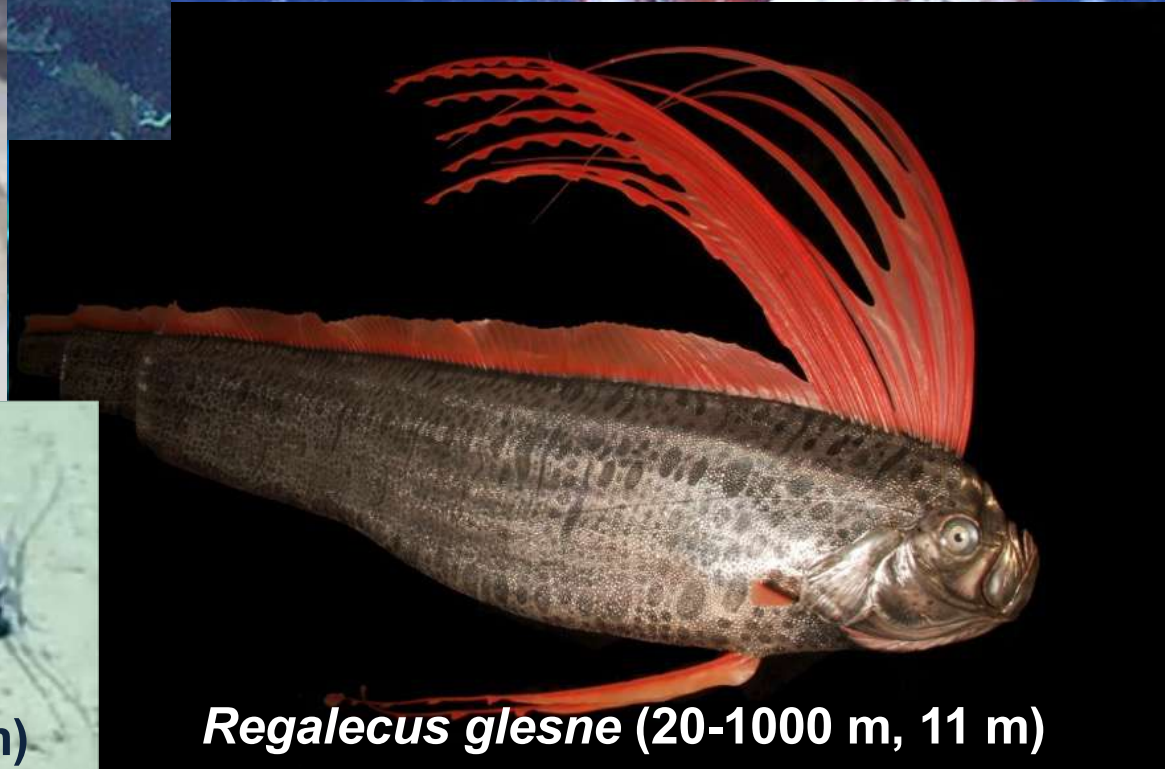
Invertebrate



*Macrocheira* (150-300 m, 5 m)



*Bathynomus* (300-2500 m, 15 cm)



*Regalecus glesne* (20-1000 m, 11 m)



# Abyssal gigantism

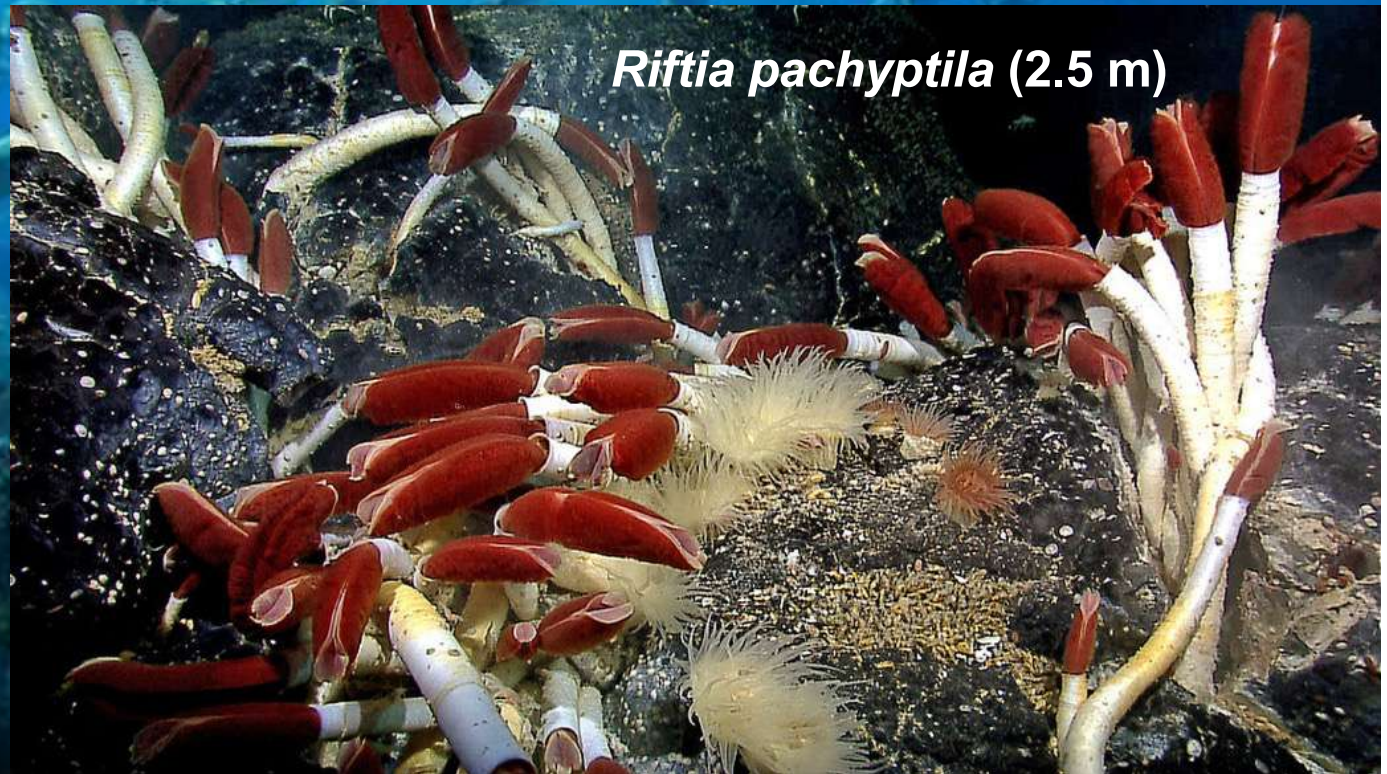
Late sexual development and continuous growth

Escaping predation through increasing size

**Kleiber's rule:** basal metabolism is proportional to body mass. Metabolism (and therefore energy consumption) slows down as body mass increase. So large organisms are more energetically efficient. This depends on heat dissipation, circulation, and proportion of structural and reserve mass.

**Bergmann's rule:** species of larger size are found in colder environments, and species of smaller size are found in warmer regions. This due to low surface area-to-volume ratio, which decrease heat dissipation.

Trophic reasons  
(optimal foraging,  
higher productivity of  
endosymbionts)





# Scavengers

Deposit feeders, Filter-feeders, Predators



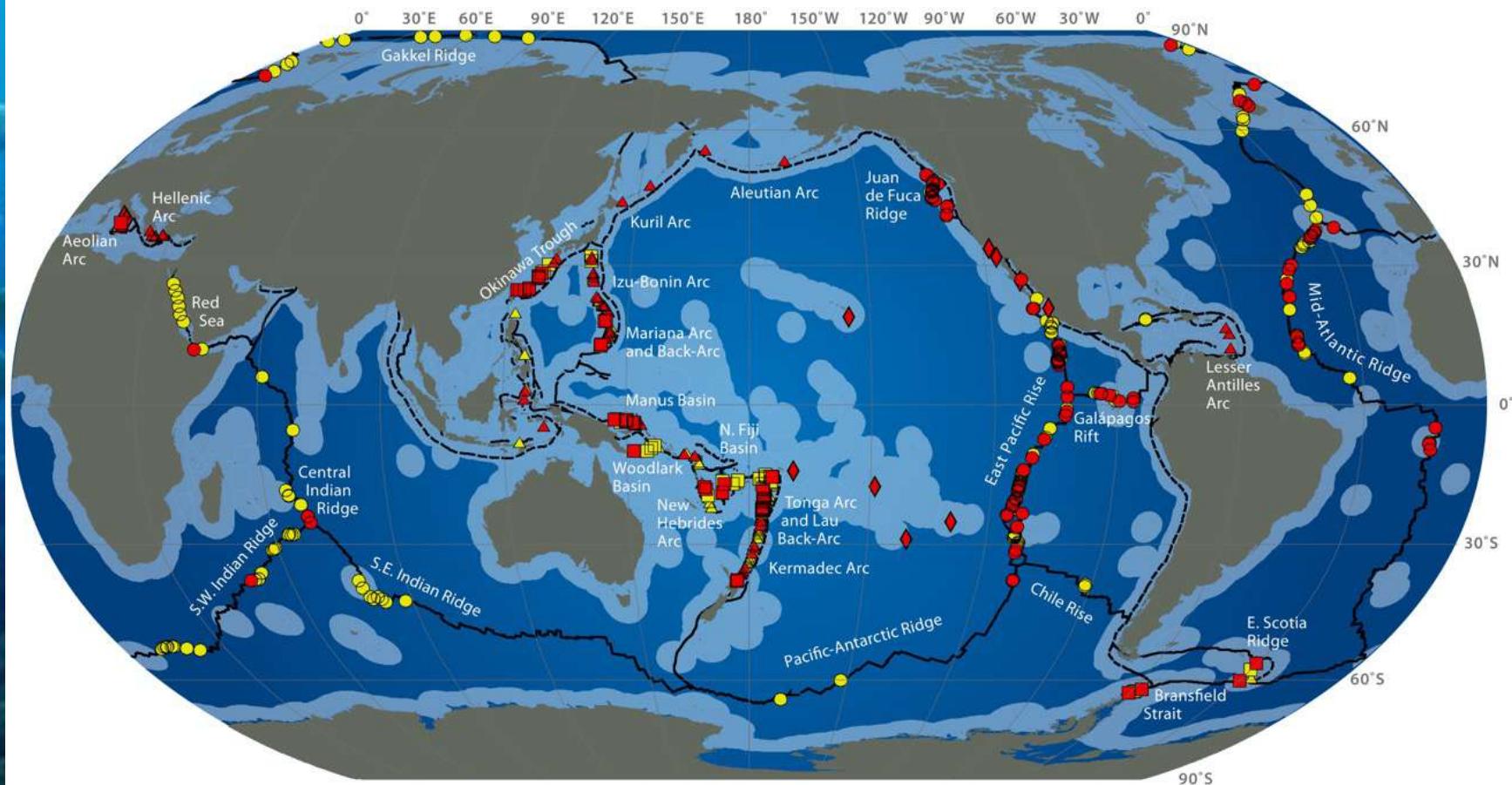


# Hydrothermal vents

First discovered at Galapagos in 1977

Typical of areas of intense tectonic activity. High temperature (100-350° C), often at 2500 m depth

## Global Distribution of Hydrothermal Vent Fields



Mid-ocean ridge

- Active
- Unconfirmed

Arc volcano

- ▲ Active
- ▲ Unconfirmed

Back-arc spreading center

- Active
- Unconfirmed

Intra-plate volcano & Other

- ◆ Active

— Ridge & Transform

- - - Trench

● Exclusive Economic Zones





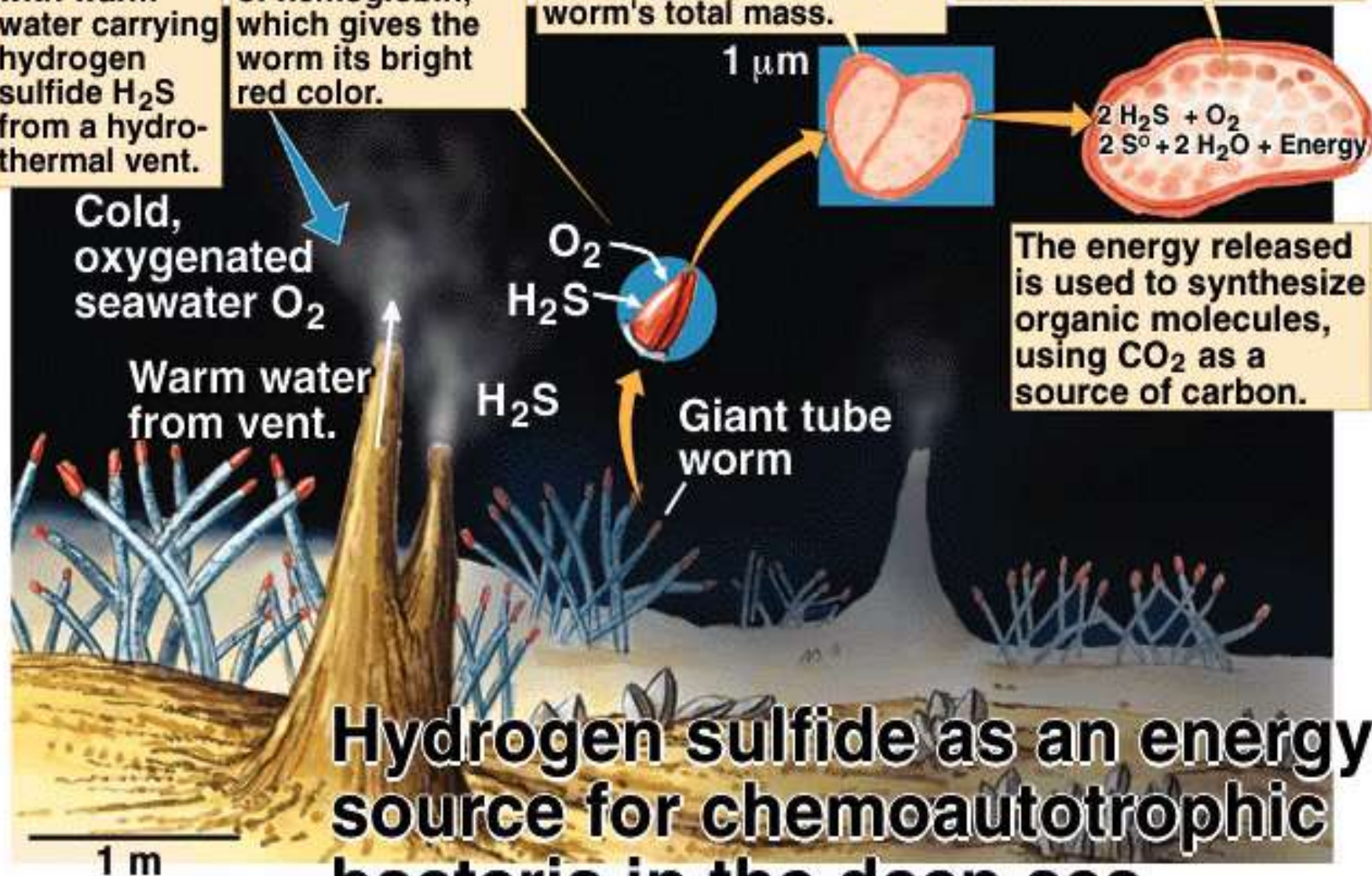
# How they work

Cold, oxygen-bearing seawater mixes with warm water carrying hydrogen sulfide  $H_2S$  from a hydrothermal vent.

A giant tube worm takes up  $O_2$  and  $H_2S$  with the aid of hemoglobin, which gives the worm its bright red color.

Chemoautotrophic sulfur-oxidizing bacteria in the tissues of the worm can make up to 60% of the worm's total mass.

Sulfur-oxidizing bacteria oxidize  $H_2S$  to elemental sulfur, an energy-yielding reaction.

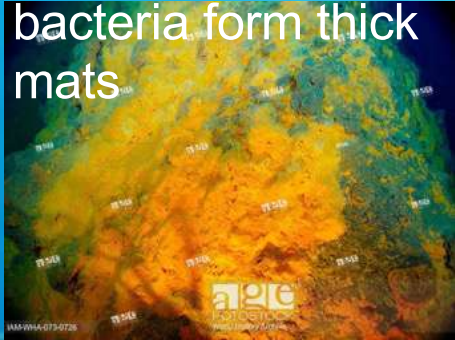


**Hydrogen sulfide as an energy source for chemoautotrophic bacteria in the deep sea.**



# Mesocosm ecosystems

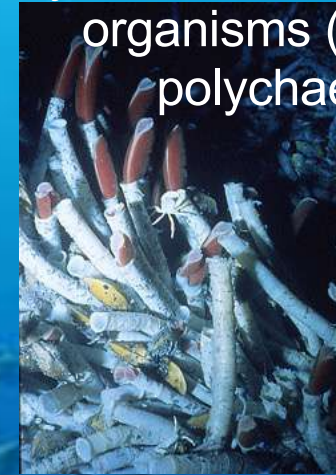
Chemosynthetic bacteria form thick mats



Snails, crabs, fish, cephalopods prey on vent organisms



Chemosynthetic bacteria are also symbionts of many organisms (e.g., polychaetes)



Grazers feed on these mats (e.g., amphipods, copepods)



Filter-feeders exploit plankton and POM (some have also symbionts)



Hotspots of biodiversity, with population densities >>> higher than neighbouring areas, high primary productivity from chemosynthesis and secondary productivity from associated fauna

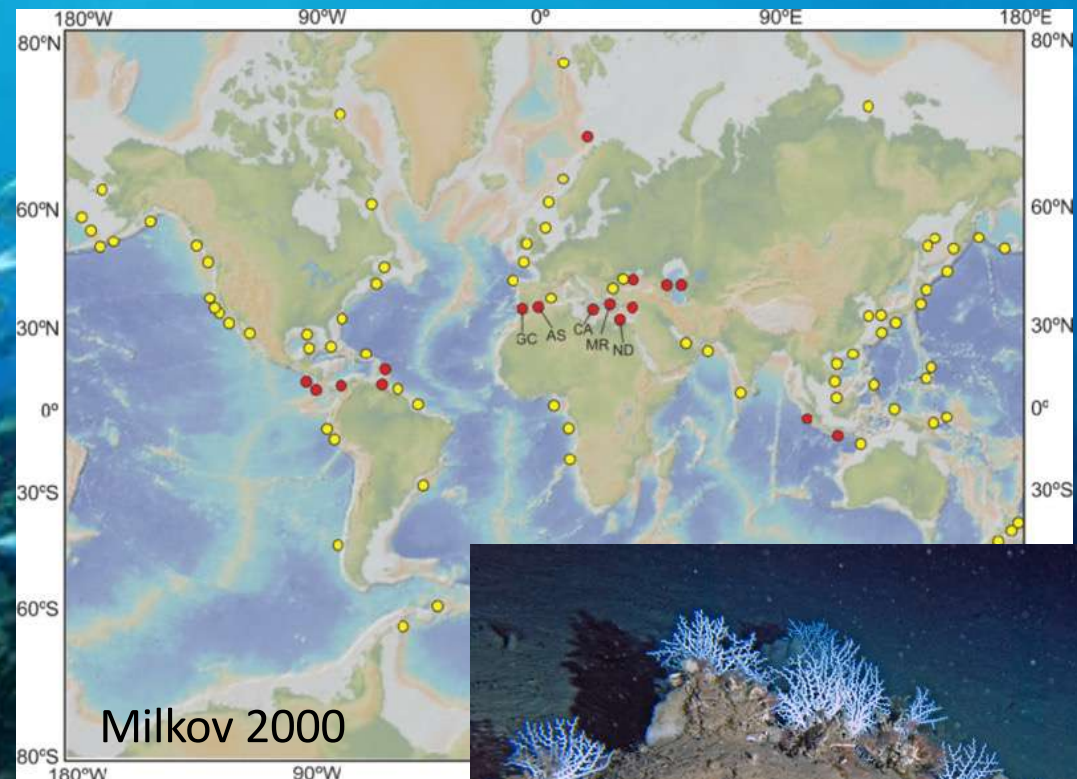


# Cold seeps

They are places where hydrocarbons – mostly methane but also ethane, propane, or even oil – seep from the sediment. From few to 1000s m, often near continental margins. In contrast to vents, fluids are not at a high temperature (so “cold”). Methanotrophic bacteria oxidise  $\text{CH}_4$  and sulphate-reducing bacteria produce  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ . A community could develop. Also,  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  sustain chemosynthetic bacteria and further increase colonization of seeps.



Brine pools

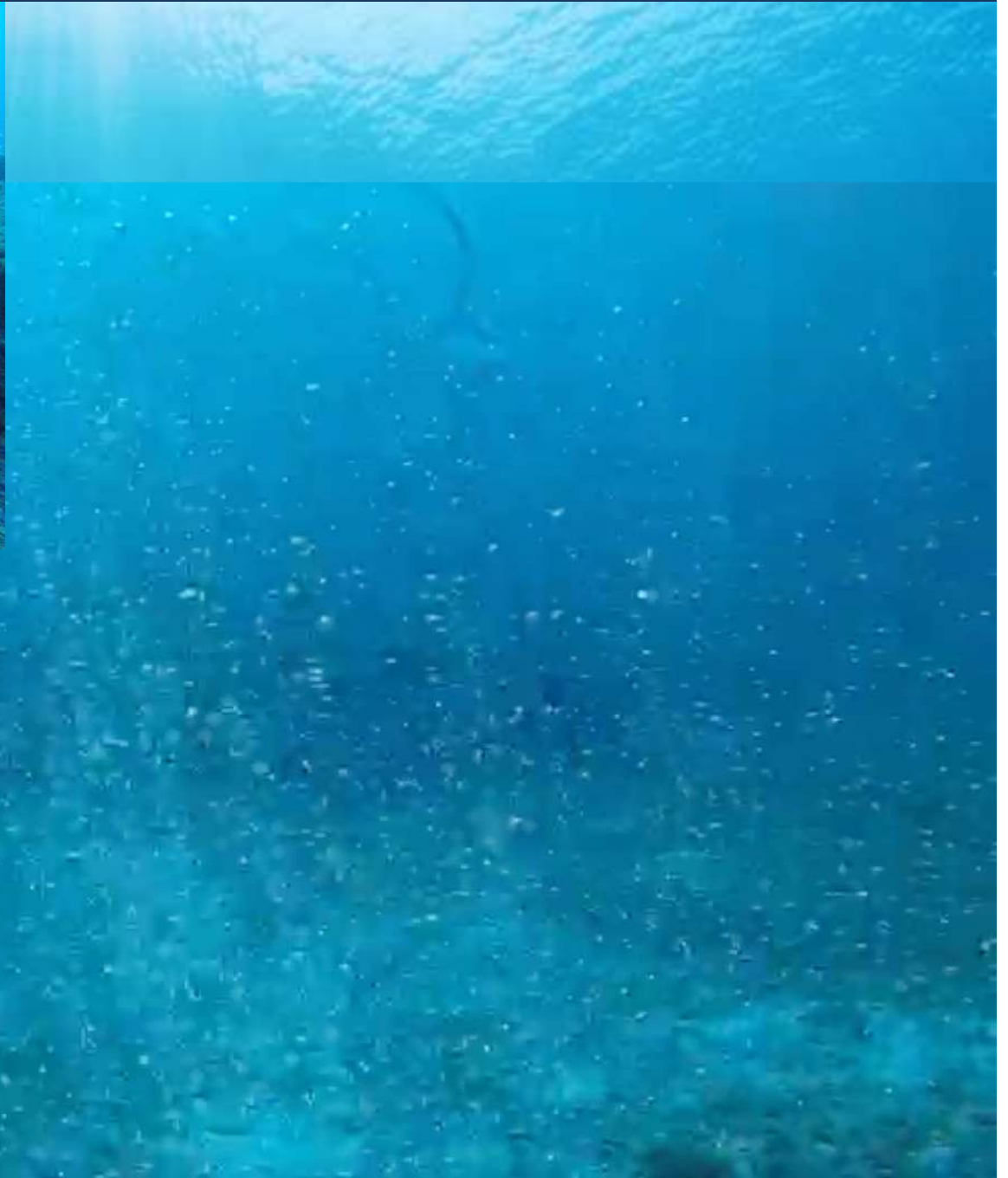


Carbonate deposition forms hard substrate for sessile organisms (worms and corals)

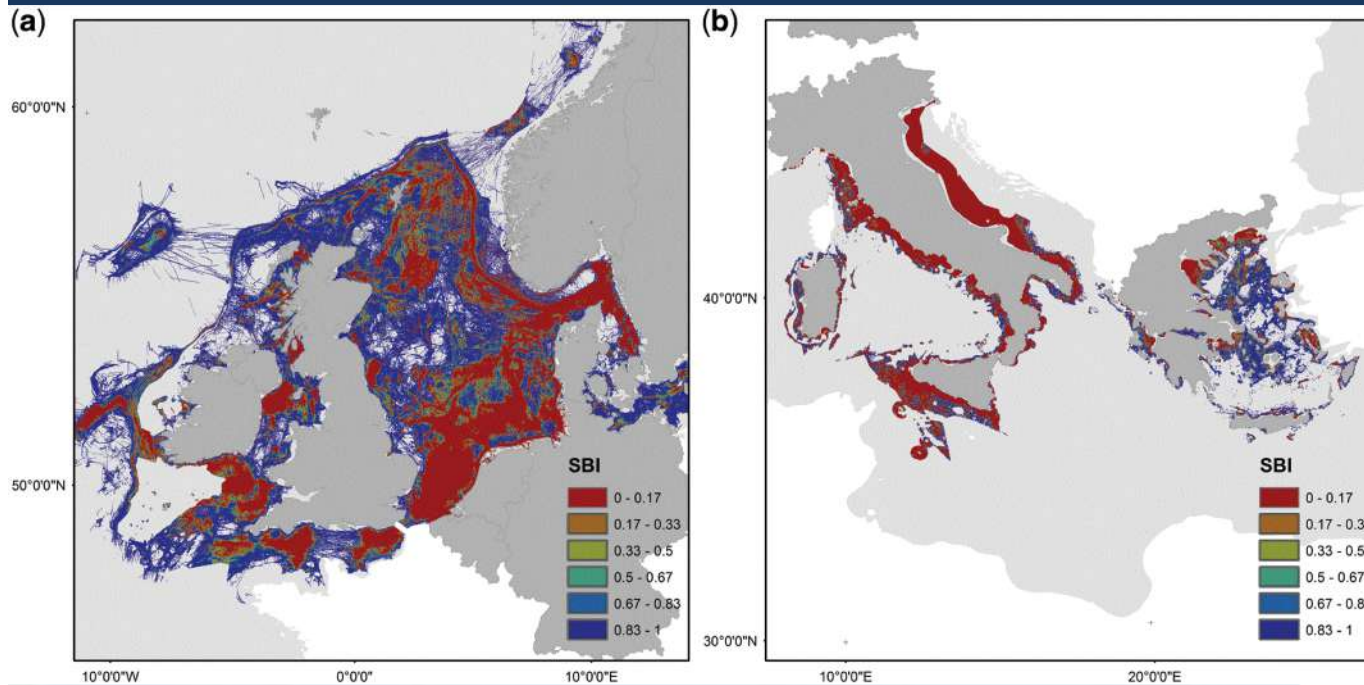




# CO<sub>2</sub> seeps



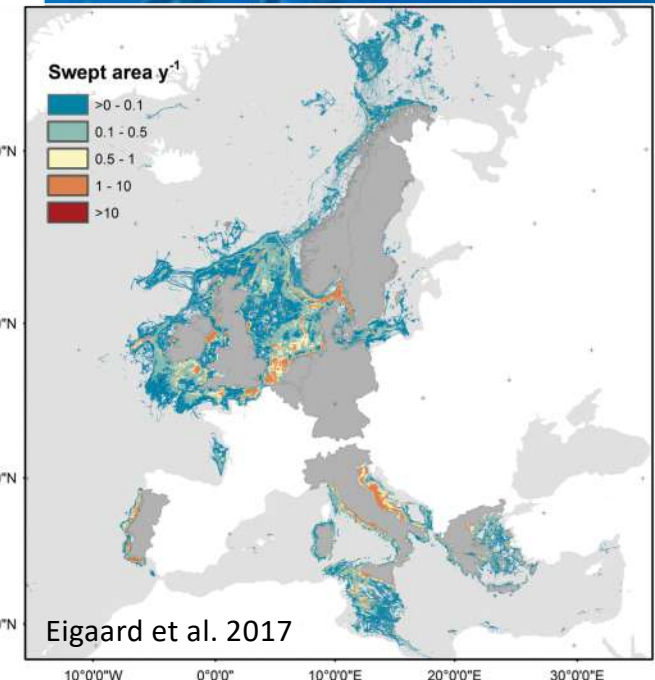
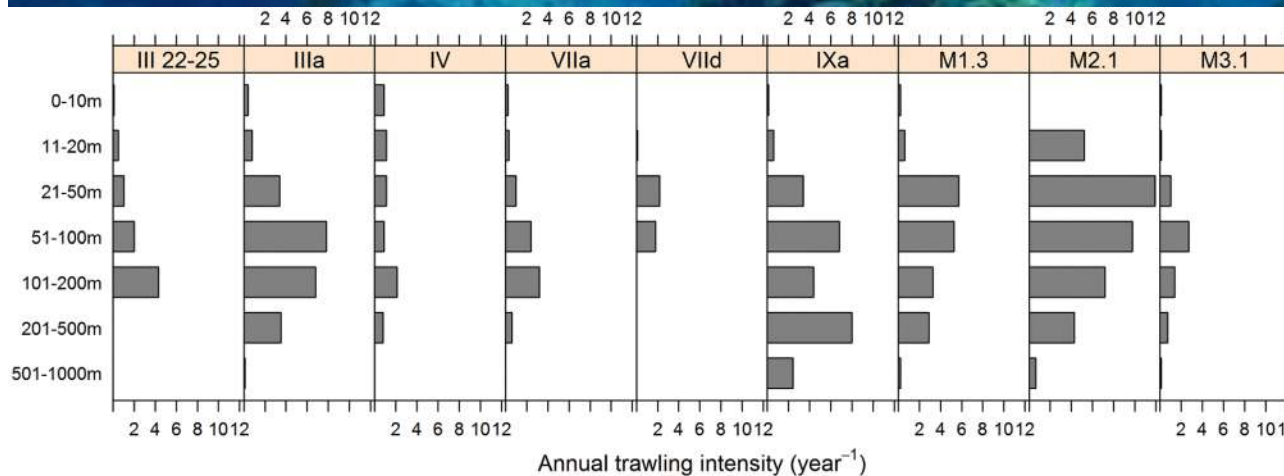
# Trawling



SBI values corresponding to the subsurface trawling intensities (sediment abrasion  $\geq 2$  cm). SBI (sea bed integrity index), 0 = all taxa affected – 1 = no taxa affected

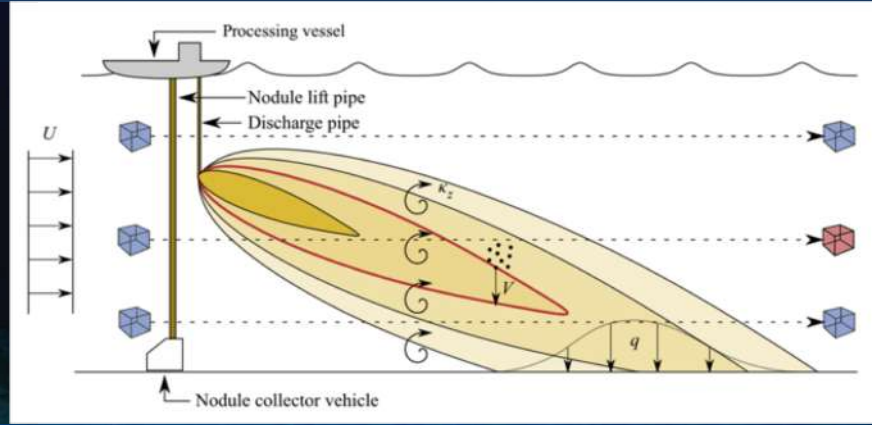
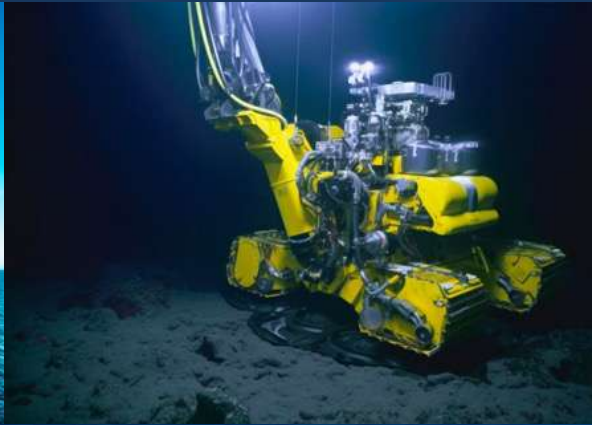
Mean annual trawling intensity in the period 2010–2012 at the subsurface level (sediment abrasion  $\geq 2$  cm).

Trawling intensity by depth zone for the nine management area with the highest trawling pressure: III (W Baltic), IIIa (Skagerrak-Kattegat), IV (North Sea), VIIa (Irish Sea), (VIIId Channel), IXa (Iberian-Portuguese), M1.3 (Tyrrhenian), M2.1 (Adriatic), M3.1 (Aegean)





# Sea bed mining

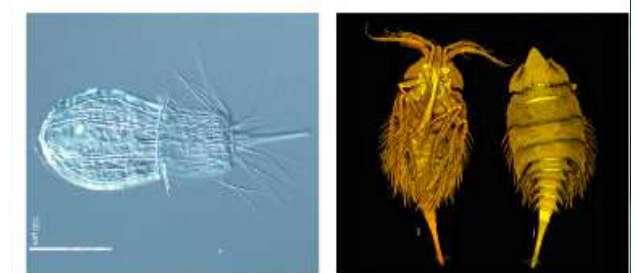
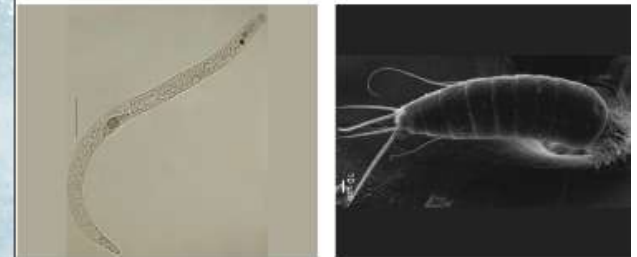
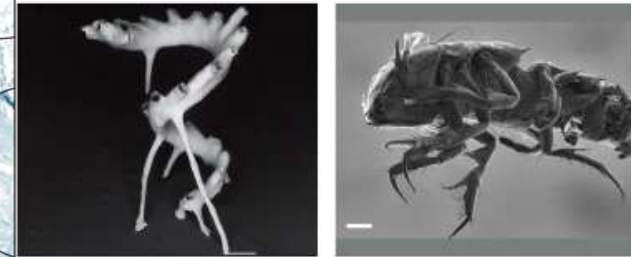
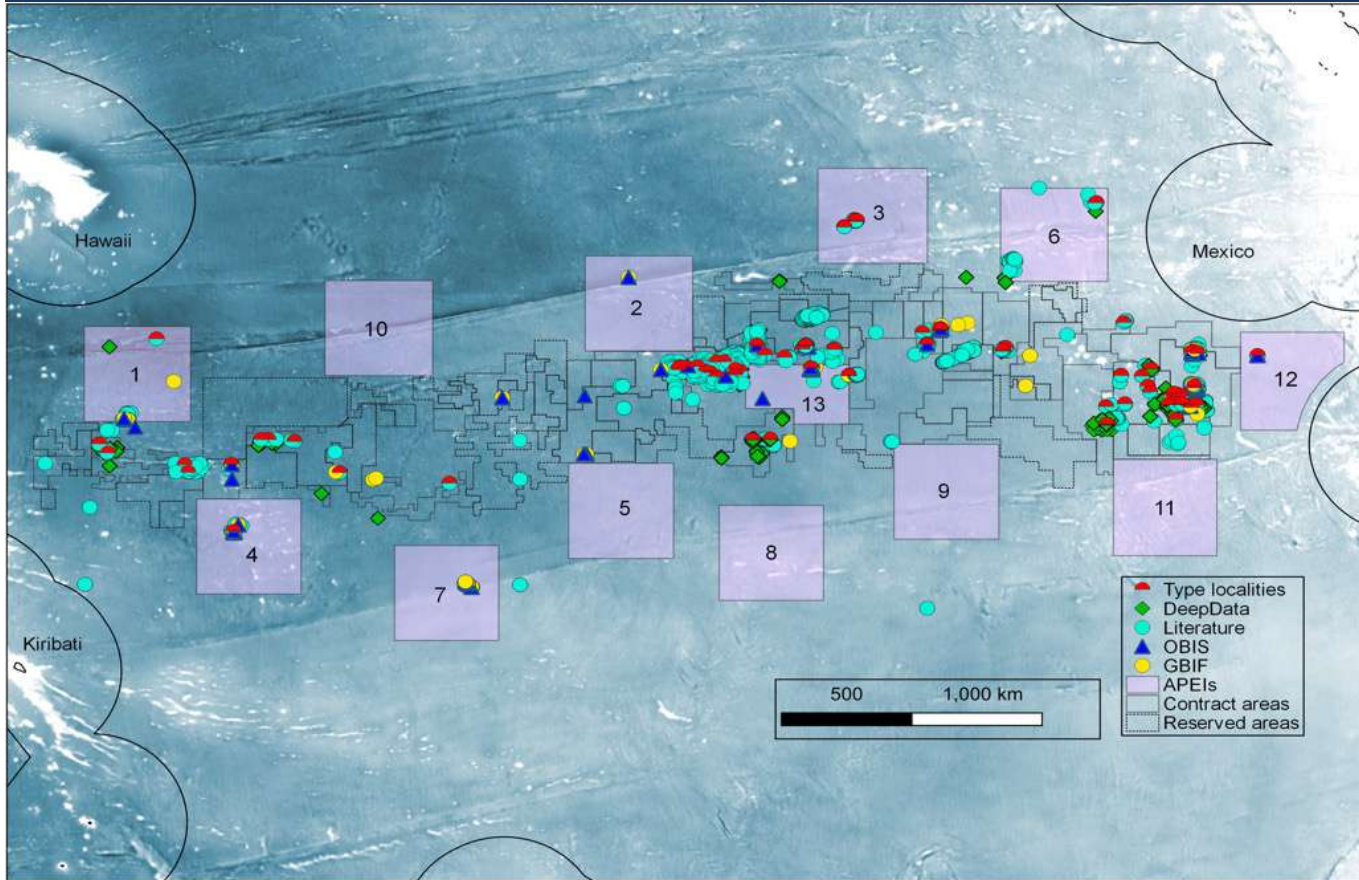


Direct displacement, injuries, killing  
Burying/smothering  
Hampering respiration/behaviour  
Long-term species and ecosystem disruption





# Sea bed mining



## CCZ Taxonomic knowledge

## CCZ Checklist

## CCZ Biodiversity Estimators

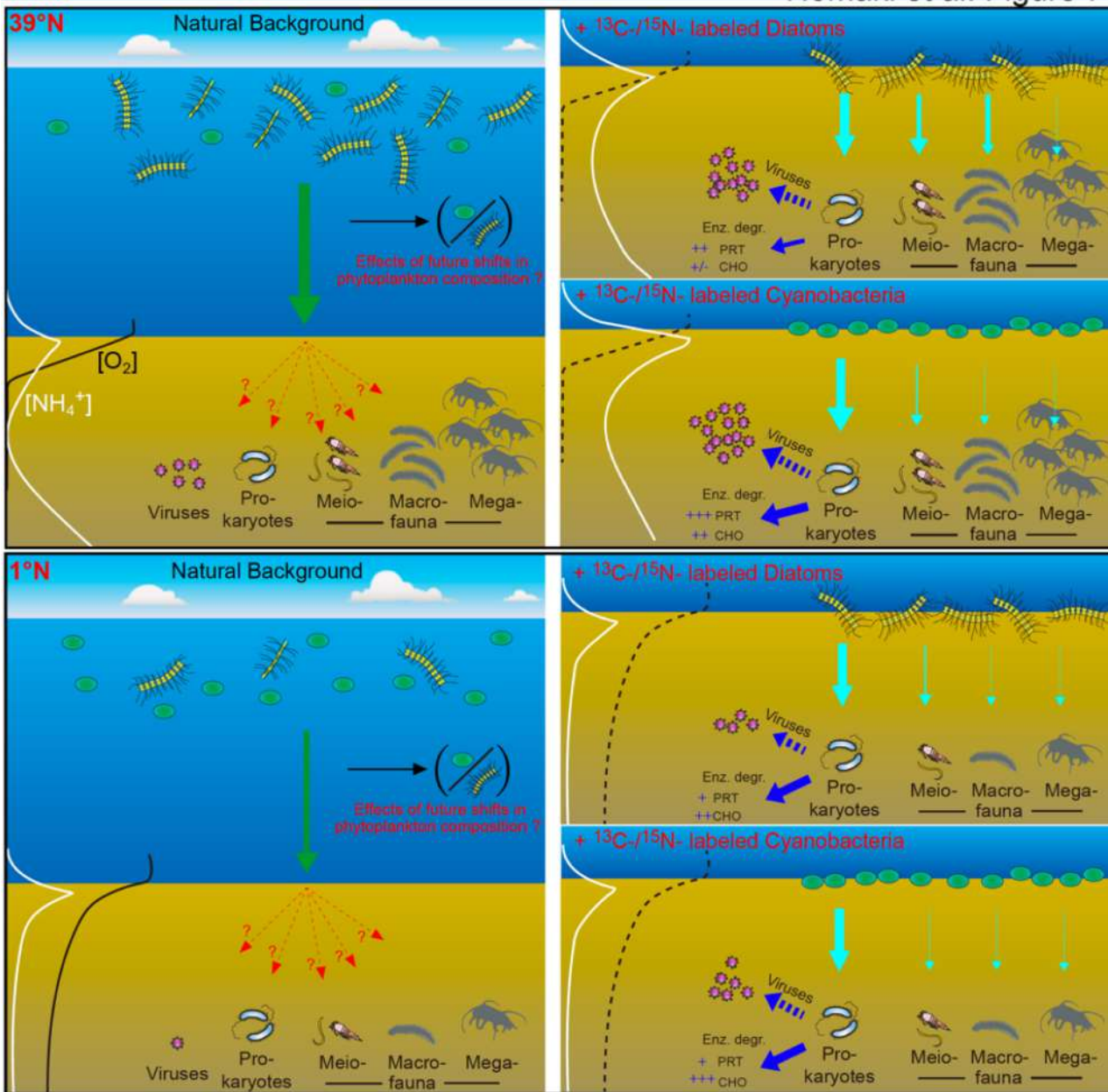
New species:	185	Phyla:	27	Unnamed species:	5,142
New genera:	31	Classes:	49	Total species: <sup>a</sup>	5,578
New families:	3	Orders:	163	Chao1 species richness:	6,233 (+/-82 SE)

Rabone et al. 2023



# Potential effect of CC on deep sea


Increasing sea water temperature could lead to oligotrophic conditions at high latitudes due stratification. This could increase the primary production of picophytoplankton against diatoms



2 stations (NWP, 1 near the equator, oligotrophic; 1 off the coast of Japan – 4-5000 m)

Shift in supply of organic matter from cyanobacteria instead of diatoms will increase viral and bacterial production against eukaryotes especially at high latitudes, with profound change in the carbon fluxes and biodiversity

Nomaky et al. 2021

An underwater photograph showing a large school of small, silvery fish swimming in clear blue water above a dark, rocky reef. Sunlight rays penetrate the water from the top, creating a bright, shimmering effect. The fish are densely packed in the middle ground, moving in various directions. The reef below is covered in green algae and other marine life.

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**Polar systems**



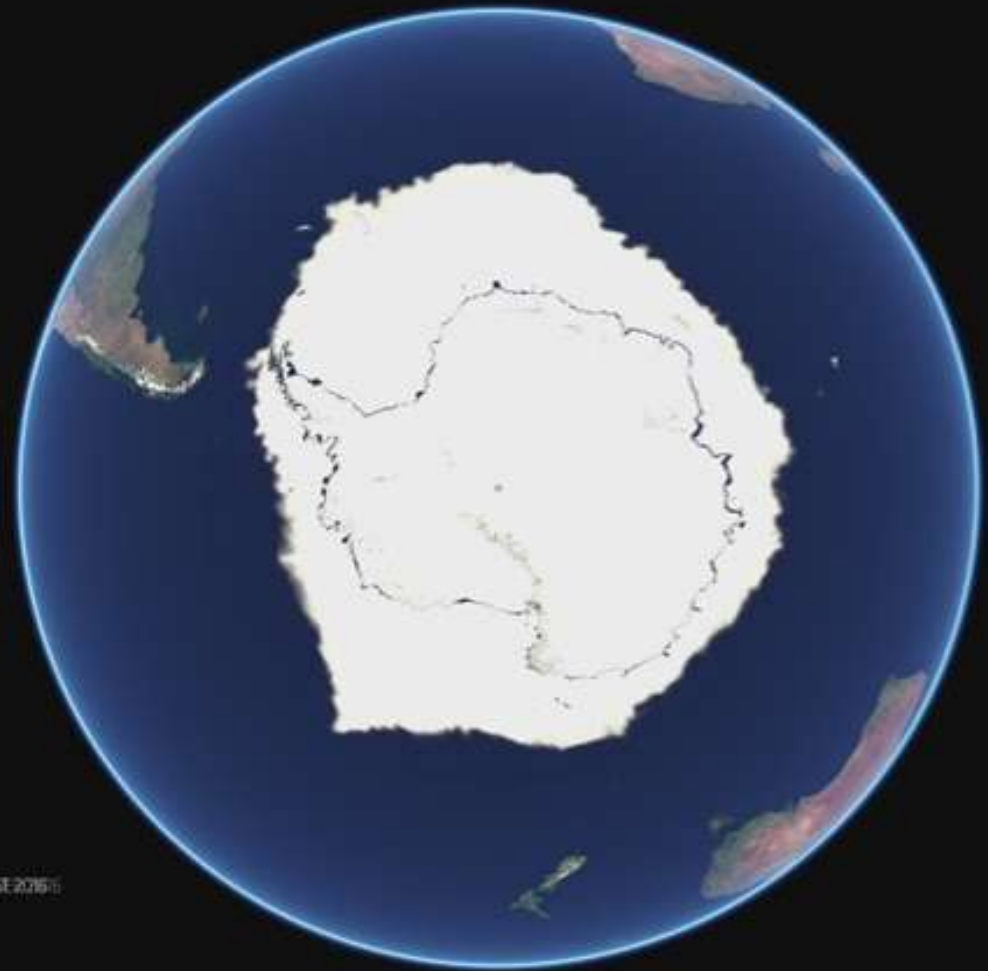
# Poles apart

Polar regions are those beyond the  $66^{\circ}33'39''$  parallel, N and S



## Arctic

Include the Arctic Ocean and portion of land in Eurasia, North America, and Greenland. Open waters and continental shelves almost covered by ice or floating ice, with perennial cap on Greenland. Averaged depth around 1000 m (>5000 m). Avg T winter about  $-35^{\circ}$  C ( $-50$ ), summer  $3-12^{\circ}$  C. Winds 40-50 km (>90 km). Low solar irradiation



## Antarctic

Include the Antarctica, other islands, and the surrounding portion of the Southern Ocean. Open waters covered by ice or floating ice, mainland covered by perennial ice cap (avg 1600 m). Max depth >7000 m (avg >3000). Avg T -10 to  $-60^{\circ}$  C ( $-90$ ). Wind 100 km (200 km). Low solar irradiation

# Biodiversity

Biodiversity is low compared with warmer areas. Almost all phyla are represented, however. Benthic communities are well developed, except for the deep Arctic Ocean, due to the low supply of organic matter. Antarctic continental shelf and some regions in the Arctic (e.g., Bering, Chukchi, and Barents) have high benthic and planktonic production, supporting large populations of fish, marine mammals, and sea birds.

## Antarctic

Taxon	Number of valid species	Number in MarBIN	Percentage with location	Number of records
Annelida	487	45	9.24	445
Arthropoda	2,309	1,014	43.92	132,585
Brachiopoda	68	10	14.71	17
Chaetognatha	5	4	80.00	1,588
Chordata	718	395	55.01	359,968
Cnidaria	372	65	17.47	1,112
Echinodermata	550	434	78.91	5,314
Mollusca	684	633	92.54	13,121
Nematoda	1,909	301	15.77	702
Nemertina	77	74	96.10	2
Porifera	268	12	4.48	39

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011683.t002

Griffiths, 2010

About 8100 animal species (De Broyer et al. 2014)



Taxon/realm	Number of species/taxa	Species endemic to the Arctic	Abundant and/or widespread species	Key reference(s)
Single-celled eukaryotes in phytoplankton and sea ice	2,106 (1,027 sympagic, 1,875 pelagic)	Diatoms <i>Melosira arctica</i> and <i>Nitzschia frigida</i>	Diatoms <i>Nitzschia frigida</i> , <i>Melosira arctica</i> , <i>Chaetoceros furcillatus</i> , <i>Thalassioria nordenskiöldii</i> , <i>Fragilariopsis oceanica</i> , <i>F. cylindrus</i> , and <i>Cylindrotheca closterium</i> ; Dinoflagellate <i>Protoperidinium pellucidum</i>	Poullin et al., 2011
Sea ice fauna	At least 50	Hydroid <i>Sympagohydra tuuli</i> ; nematodes <i>Theristus melnikovii</i> , <i>Cryonema tenue</i> , and <i>C. crissum</i> ; amphipods <i>Gammarus wilkitzkii</i> , <i>Apherusa glacialis</i> , <i>Onisimus nansenii</i> , and <i>O. glacialis</i>	Unidentified Acoela; copepod nauplii; amphipods <i>Gammarus wilkitzkii</i> , <i>Apherusa glacialis</i> , <i>Onisimus nansenii</i> , and <i>O. glacialis</i>	Bluhm et al., 2010a
Zooplankton	354	Copepods <i>Spinocalanus elongatus</i> , <i>S. horridus</i> , <i>Paraeuchaeta polaris</i> , <i>Scaphocalanus polaris</i> , and <i>Lucicutia pseudopolaris</i> ; Cnidarians <i>Rhabdoon reesi</i> and <i>Rudjakovia plicata</i> ; larvacean <i>Fritillaria polaris</i>	Copepods <i>Calanus hyperboreus</i> , <i>C. glacialis</i> , <i>Metridia longa</i> , <i>Oithona similis</i> , <i>Oncaea borealis</i> , and <i>Paraeuchaeta glacialis</i> ; chaetognaths <i>Parasagitta elegans</i> , <i>Eukrohnia hamata</i> , and <i>Homoeonema platygonon</i> ; amphipod <i>Themisto libellula</i>	Kosobokova et al., 2011
Seaweeds	~ 160	<i>Platysiphon verticillatus</i> , <i>Jonssonia pulvinata</i> , <i>Chukchia pedicellata</i> , <i>C. endophytica</i> , <i>Kallymenia schmitzii</i> , and <i>Leptophytum arcticum</i>	<i>Agarum clathratum</i> , <i>Desmarestia aculeate</i> , <i>Ectocarpus siliculosus</i> , <i>Saccharina latissima</i> , <i>Polyshiphonia arctica</i> , <i>Odonthalia dentate</i> , and <i>Ulva intestinalis</i>	Wilce, 1990, 2009, and recent work; Mathieson et al., 2010
Zoobenthos	~ 4,600	Amphipod <i>Onisimus caricus</i> , bryozoan <i>Alcyonidium disciforme</i> ; holothuroids <i>Elpidia belyaevi</i> , <i>E. heckeri</i> , <i>E. glacialis</i> , and <i>Kolga hyalina</i>	Brittle star <i>Ophiocten sericeum</i> ; amphipods <i>Ampelisca eschrichti</i> and <i>Anony nugax</i> ; bivalve <i>Macoma calcarea</i> ; polychaetes <i>Eteone longa</i> , <i>Aglaophamus malmgreni</i> , and <i>Lumbrineris fragilis</i>	Sirenko, 2001; Piepenburg et al., 2011; Rogacheva, 2007, 2011
Fish	243	<i>Arctiellus scaber</i> , <i>Arctogadus glacialis</i> , <i>Paraliparis bathybius</i> , <i>Rhodichtys regina</i> , <i>Lycodes frigidus</i> , and <i>L. adolfi</i>	<i>Boreogadus saida</i> , <i>Arctogadus glacialis</i> , <i>Gymnocanthus tricuspis</i> , <i>Myoxocephalus scorpius</i> , <i>M. quadricornis</i> , and <i>Lycodes polaris</i>	Mecklenburg et al., 2011, and pers. comm., February 16, 2011
Seabirds	64	Ivory gull, thick-billed murre, Dovekie, Kittlitz's murrelet, horned puffin, Heuglin's Gull, and various seabird subspecies	Glaucous and Iceland gull; Arctic tern; parasitic and long-tailed jaeger	Huettmann et al., 2011
Marine mammals	16	Polar bear; narwhal, beluga, and bowhead whales; walrus; ringed seal; bearded seal	Ringed seal; bearded seal	Huntington and Moore, 2008; Kovacs et al., 2011

Bluhm et al., 2011

Arctic  
About 7600 species





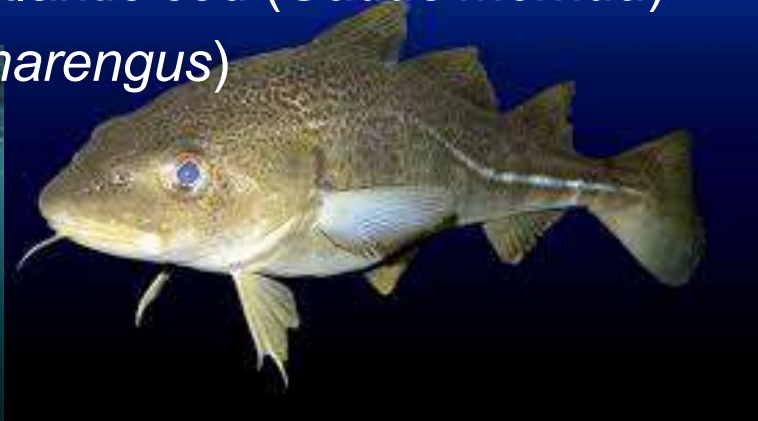
# Fish

## Arctic

Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*)

Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*)

Atlantic herring (*Clupea harengus*)



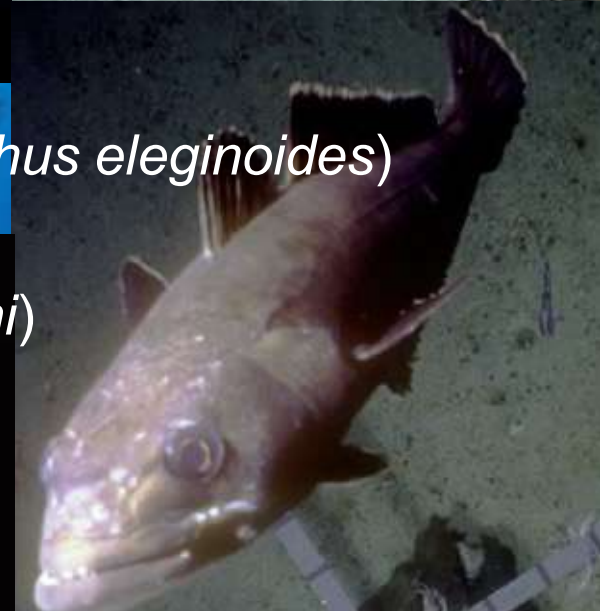
## Antarctic

Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*)

Antarctic toothfish (*Dissostichus mawsoni*)



Mackerel icefish  
(*Champsocephalus gunnari*)





# Marine birds

*Diomedea epomophora*



*Sterna paradisaea*



*Aptenodytes forsteri*



*Fratercula arctica*



# Mammals

*Odobenus rosmarus*



*Pagophilus groenlandicus*



*Hydrurga leptonyx*



*Leptonychotes weddellii*



*Mirounga leonina*



*Ursus maritimus*



*Monodon monoceros*



*Balaenoptera musculus*



*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*  
(*B. bonaerensis*)

*Orcinus orca*





# Adaptations

Polar marine organisms tend to **grow slower and live longer** than their temperate and tropical counterparts (slow basal metabolisms, as many deep sea organisms)

Many species have **conservative reproductive strategies** (e.g., late sexual maturity, few eggs, parental care for a long time, as many sea birds, polar bears and whales). Opposite strategy for high variable habitats, such as sea ice.

Many resident polar animals **store large quantities of lipids** in their bodies as reserve, others overwinter in a dormant form (e.g., polar bears).

Ice algae secrete **osmolytes** (DMSP) to maintain osmotic equilibrium in salty waters, secrete **special protein** to protect membranes from ice crystals, and have **high levels of xantophyll** to avoid damage from excessive UV exposure during summer.

Icefish also have **anti-freezing proteins** in their blood. No hemoglobin, due to high oxygenation of waters. This allows saving energy facilitating body circulation.

Some species, such as many whales and seabirds, **migrate** into Arctic marine areas during the productive summers and overwinter in warmer areas.



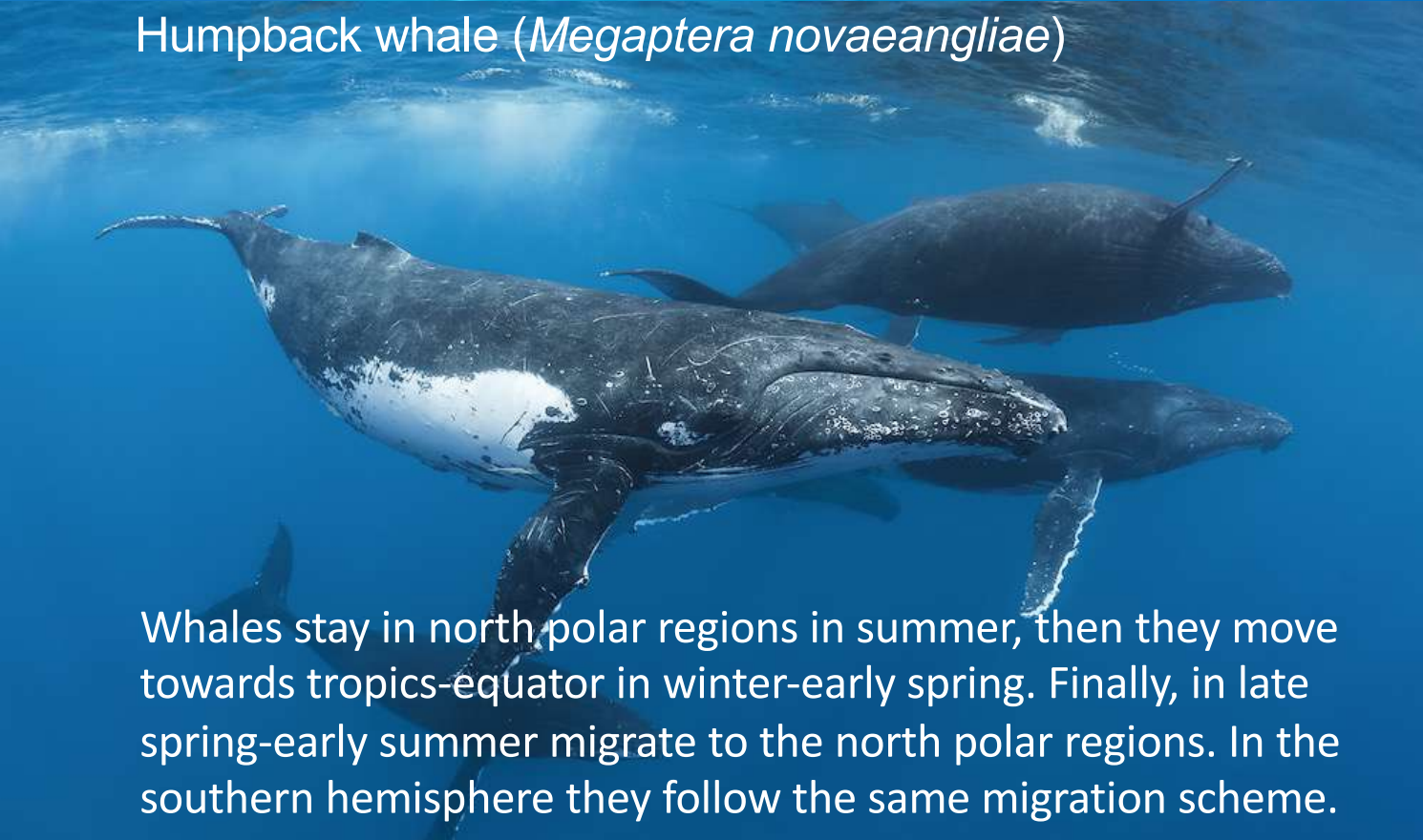
# Migrations



The Arctic Tern migrate for breeding to north polar areas in summer, and to southern polar areas in winter. This birds fly for about 40.000 km in few months

*Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea)*

Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

A photograph of several humpback whales swimming underwater. The whales are dark grey with characteristic white patches on their sides. They are seen from a side profile, moving through clear blue water. The background shows a school of smaller fish and some underwater vegetation.

Whales stay in north polar regions in summer, then they move towards tropics-equator in winter-early spring. Finally, in late spring-early summer migrate to the north polar regions. In the southern hemisphere they follow the same migration scheme.

# Primary productivity

This high availability of nutrients triggers phytoplankton blooms. Cyanobacteria, dinoflagellates, and especially diatoms are responsible for most primary production in polar marine systems. Ice algae live on the ice surface or melting ponds, within the ice in cracks, pores, brine channels, and under the sea ice where they can form thick mats.



*Melosira arctica*



*Fragilariopsis cylindrus*



Macroalgae are less common, because of ice scouring, strong seasonality of solar radiation, being constrained to sea bottom and subpolar regions, where could be locally abundant.

*Ascophyllum nodosum*



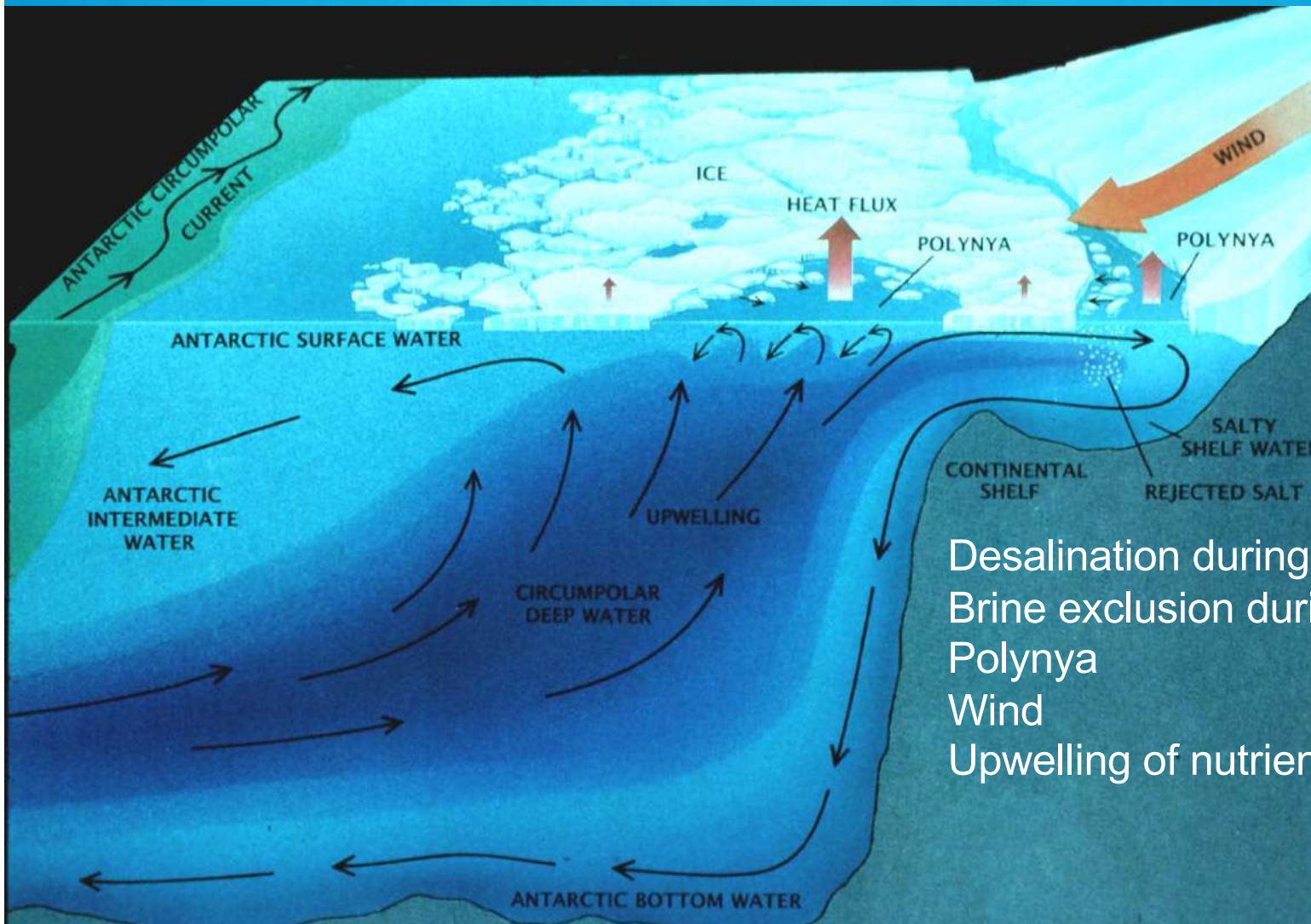
*Desmarestia menziesii*





# Ice and life

Despite harsh environmental conditions, polar marine ecosystems are among the most productive ones. This is particularly true for the Southern Ocean. The Arctic Ocean, in general, are not especially productive, but some subpolar areas (Bering, Barents, Iceland Sea) include some of the most productive basins in the northern hemisphere.



Desalination during ice formation  
Brine exclusion during ice melting  
Polynya  
Wind  
Upwelling of nutrient-rich deep waters



# Krill

Krill (Euphausiacea) are shrimp-like crustaceans that are extremely abundant in polar waters. In the Arctic they are abundant in waters on the Atlantic portion and in the Bering Sea. Krill can constitute up to 45% of zooplankton catches but krill are, more prominent in the Southern Ocean.



Antarctic krill *Euphausia superba* often dominates the zooplankton community in numbers and biomass. Antarctic krill has adapted to almost the entire range of marine habitats in the Southern Ocean, including the abyssal plains and the underside of pack-ice. Its potential distribution covers large parts of the Southern Ocean. Krill are highly influential organisms, capable of grazing as much as 55% of the net primary production and sustaining the functioning of the whole marine ecosystem in the Antarctic (Flores et al., 2012). Many polar organisms, from zooplankton to whales rely on krill as a primary food resource. Its estimated biomass reach >400 million tons (Flores et al., 2012).

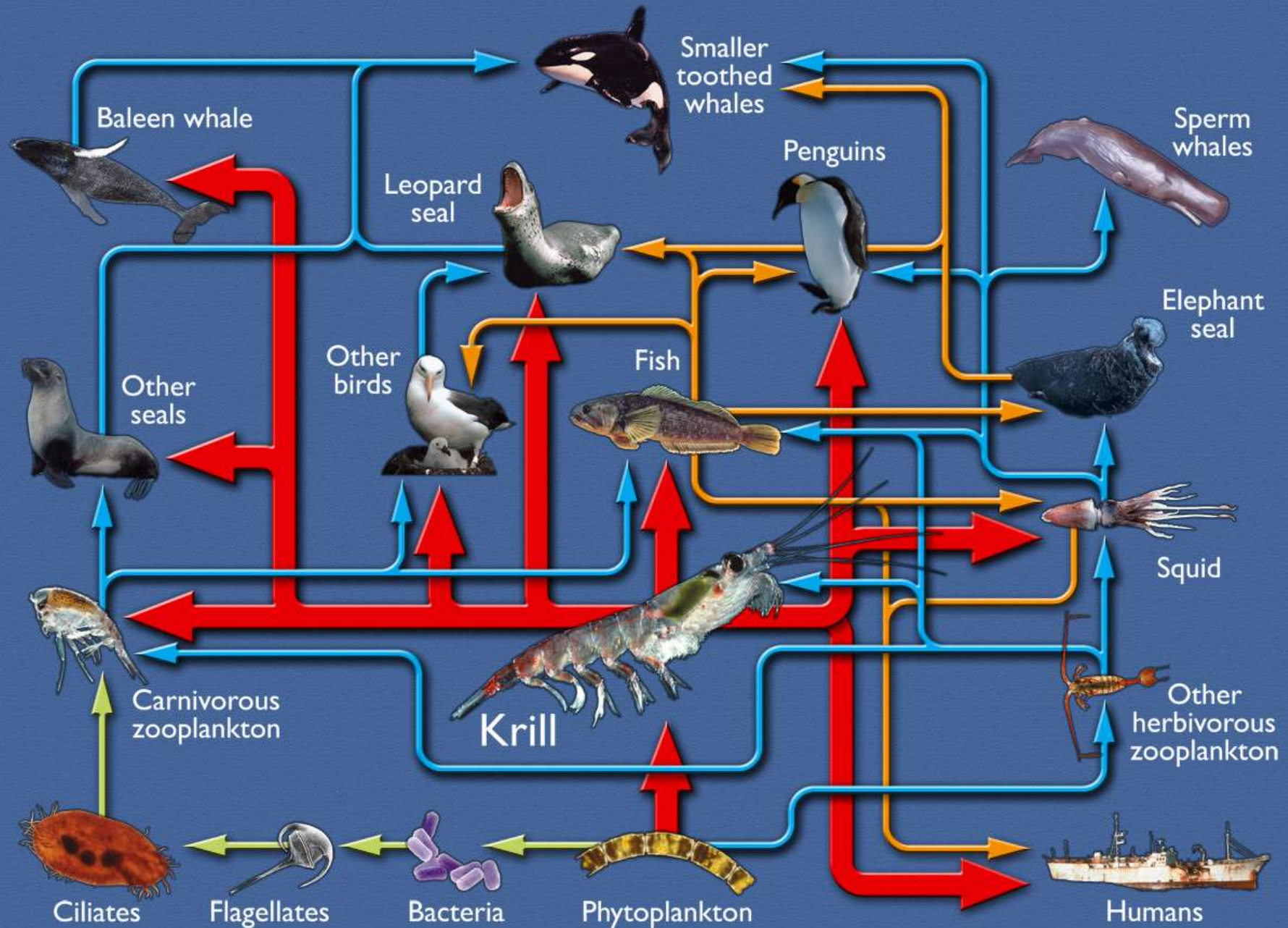
>10.000 ind m<sup>-1</sup>  
(William et al., 1983)



Crab-eater seal  
(*Lobodon carcinophaga*)



# Trophic nets



# Major threats to polar ecosystems

## Global warming

Global warming is causing a fast reduction in ice cover especially in northern polar region. Antarctic ice seems more stable, or slightly increasing. However, some areas in the southern ocean are experiencing a decreasing trend.

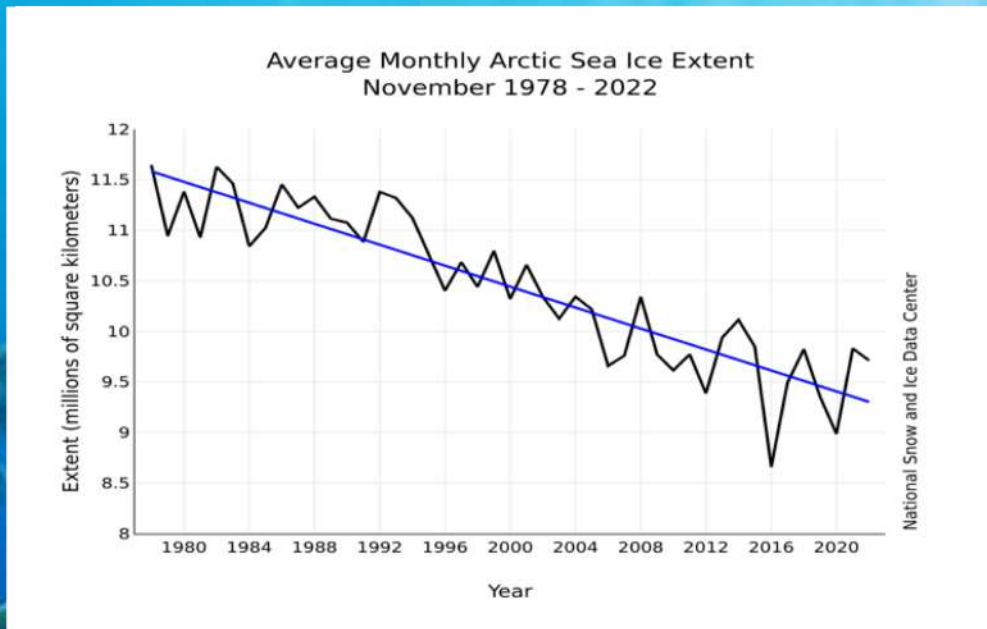
Habitat destruction for seals and bears with consequent loss of feeding grounds and refuge

Decrease in primary productivity and risk of cascading effects

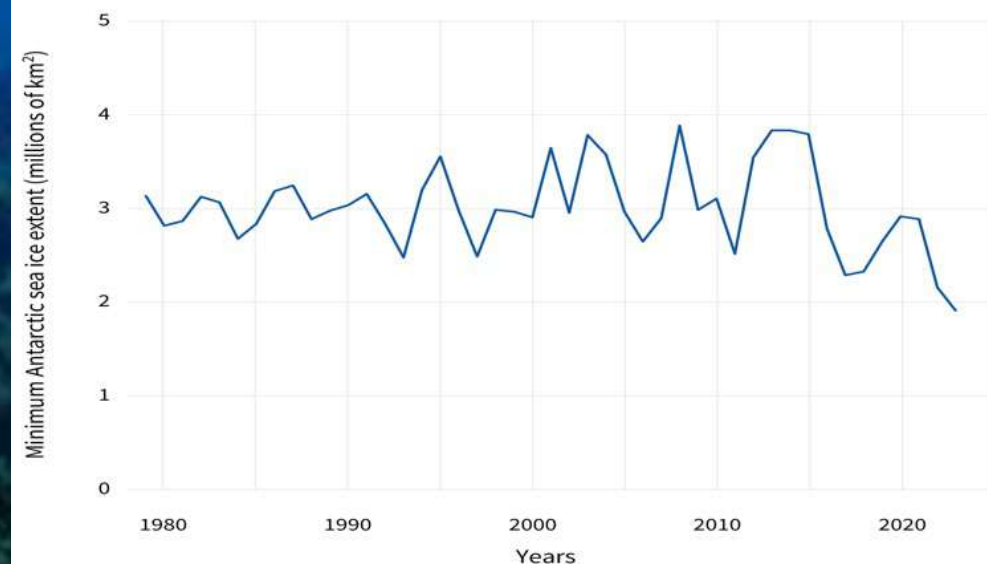
Earlier spring sea ice retreat and later fall sea ice formation

Shifts in species composition and northward faunal range expansions

Grebmeier 2012



## ANTARCTIC SEA ICE YEARLY MINIMUM





# Major threats to polar ecosystems

## Pollution

Oil spills

Radioactive substances

PCBs, organochlorine

organochlorine pesticides

Heavy metals such as mercury,  
lead, cadmium

Plastic debris

(Muir et al 1992, Khalturin et al.  
2005; Còzar et al., 2017)

Decrease primary production

Accumulation through trophic webs

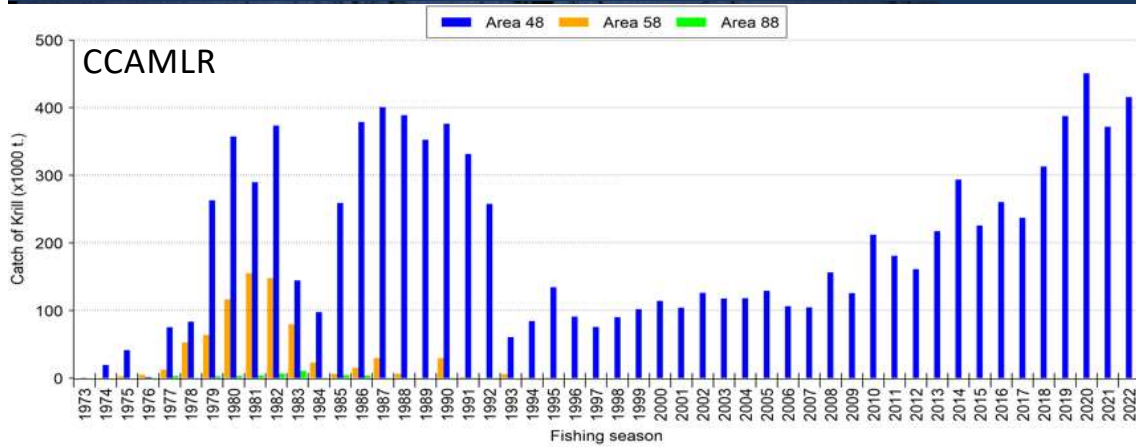
Effects on reproduction and  
physiology

Injuries and dead





# Major threats to polar ecosystems



Arctic (crabs, scallops, cod, halibut and many other)



Habitat destruction  
Bycatch  
Cascading effects of depleting basal resource  
Fragile trophic webs

Melting ice in the Far North opens opportunities to extend fishing grounds.



Antarctic cod (toothfish)/ Icefish – now regulated





# Protection

International agreements to stop commercial fisheries for 16 years in the Arctic (2017). National regulations (e.g., Canada) to restrict fishing areas. CAFF areas of management/use or park/reserve.

In 2016, OSPAR proposal of huge MPA, but some countries say not

There are currently 67 Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) and 7 Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs) under international agreements, of which 6 are dedicated marine ASPAs, while 11 ASPAs and 4 ASMAs contain both marine and terrestrial habitat. (Griffiths 2010)

