



MLA-006-Jellyfish-Malta

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Investigating the socio-economic impact of jellyfish blooms



A *Pelagia noctiluca* jellyfish sighted at the Blue Lagoon in Comino last August. Photo: Goncalo Santos

A study on the socio-economic impact of jellyfish blooms by Mariella Ciantar, as part of her studies for a Master of Arts at the University's Islands and Small States Institute, has shed new light on the jellyfish bloom phenomenon.

Ciantar conducted a series of structured interviews of both directly and indirectly affected stakeholders in different coastal areas around Malta, ranging from restaurant owners, scuba divers and fishermen to beach furniture and boat operators and pharmacists.

Her multi-tiered methodology also involved the tapping and analysis of online newspapers comments featuring the jellyfish thematic, as well as the engagement of a selected number of individuals through informal interviews.

She also conducted a tourist-targeted jellyfish socio-economic survey, currently being deployed across Mediterranean countries, to identify any possible differences in perceptions about the jellyfish bloom phenomenon.

She also conducted an extensive desktop study through which it emerged that no marine region in the world has been spared, at one point or another, the phenomenon of jellyfish blooms.

Ciantar found that most stakeholders reported a negative economic impact on their activities as a result of the occurrence of jellyfish blooms, with such an impact mainly ranging up to 20 per cent. The only stakeholder class that reported a higher negative economic impact was that of boat trip operators.



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When interviewed on possible causes of the jellyfish bloom phenomenon, 38 per cent listed the decline in marine turtle populations, 21 per cent cited the decline in marine life in general, 20 per cent cited the increase in sea temperatures, 16 per cent cited an increase in pollution levels, two per cent cited a decline in jellyfish-consuming species in general, a further two per cent could not identify an exact cause and one per cent identified changes in the marine environment in general as the catalyst behind the phenomenon.

Ciantar also compared the reports of jellyfish sightings recorded in the Spot the Jellyfish database. A high degree of consistency between the two emerged; both the database and stakeholders reported that 2010 was characterised by the highest presence of jellyfish to date.

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