

Site Name: Wicklow Reef SAC

Site Code: 002274

Wicklow Reef is situated just to the north of Wicklow Head on the east coast of Ireland in Co. Wicklow. The substrate is a mixture of cobbles, bedrock and sand and is subject to strong tidal streams.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[1170] Reefs

Wicklow Reef is an example of a subtidal reef constructed by the honeycomb worm *Sabellaria alveolata*. In Irish waters this worm normally constructs reefs on intertidal rocks, in areas subject to some sand scour. Such reefs are widespread but uncommon. *Sabellaria alveolata* subtidal reefs are known to occur in the Mediterranean but this example is an extremely unusual feature and may be the first record for Britain and Ireland.

The reef occurs at a depth of 12-30 m and reaches a thickness of at least 0.3-0.5 m. It is composed of consolidated sand grains formed into a honeycomb structure by the activities of the worm. There is a good diversity of species associated with the reef, including hydroids (e.g. *Hydrallmania falcata*), a variety of polychaete worms, the snail *Calliostoma zizyphinum*, the bivalves *Musculus discor* and *Mytilus edulis*, other molluscs, bryozoans, barnacles, amphipods, crabs, starfish, brittlestars and sea squirts. Three of the species associated with this biogenic reef are rare in Irish waters. The bryozoan *Phaeostachys spinifera* is only known from five locations, with the majority on the west coast and no records in the Irish sea south of Co. Antrim. The polychaete *Eulalia ornata* and the amphipod *Unciola crenatipalma* are only known from one and two sites respectively in Ireland.

Wicklow Reef is of high conservation value as it is the only documented example in Ireland of a biogenic reef. Further, it supports a number of uncommon species.