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Global warming and pollution bring 10 new fish species near Malta

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The number of exotic species between Malta and Lampedusa has increased in recent years, including 10 new species from the Red Sea and 12 from the Atlantic Ocean.

However the cause of this increase is global warming and pollution, according to Maltese and Italian researchers who have been working together to map sea changes due to warming waters and pollutants, including an increase in exotic fish, threats to sensitive species and the appearance of male sex organs in a female mollusc.

More alarming is the news that these researchers found the pollutant DDT, which was banned in most countries in the 1970s, in Malta's main sewage discharge waters.

Italian news agency ANSA reports that this project, named the European MonItaMal project, was carried out by Italy's main marine research institute, the Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA, in collaboration with the University of Malta and Sicily's Scientific and Technological Park.

The project found that the quality of the sea around the islands in the Sicilian Channel was generally good but with a significant amount of pollutants near highly-populated areas.

The project also found an increasing number of exotic species between Malta and Lampedusa, including ten new species from the Red Sea and twelve from the Atlantic Ocean.

Furthermore, the ISPRA experts also analysed the effects of TBT, an 'anti-vegetative' component of anti-fouling ship paint, which causes the females of a mollusc species to become males. It seems that this TBT, which was banned by the International Maritime Organization in 2001, causes a masculinisation of these molluscs.

The MonItaMal researchers also analysed coral in order to reconstruct sea temperatures over the last 100 years.

ISPRA said the data, which are still being elaborated, might "unveil the climatic history of this strategic area of the Mediterranean".
