



# HM Government of Gibraltar

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Ministry of Health, the Environment,  
Energy and Climate Change

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Department of the Environment expands marine monitoring capabilities and announces new marine initiatives**

As part of HM Government of Gibraltar's drive to increase its marine monitoring and surveillance capabilities, the Department of the Environment and Climate Change together with the US based company View into the Blue and Wright Tech Media, have recently installed a state of the art underwater camera in the Gibraltar Marine Reserve which is the first of its kind in Europe.

The underwater camera forms yet another element of the wider marine surveillance programme carried out by the Department of the Environment to monitor the status of marine habitats and species within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. A dedicated website has been created on the Department's Thinking Green website to provide local scientists and members of the public with real time footage of Gibraltar's rich underwater environment. The website ([www.thinkinggreen.gov.gi/underwater-camera](http://www.thinkinggreen.gov.gi/underwater-camera)) also provides users with a simple fish identification guide that will be continuously expanded, together with a comments box to enable users to report any marine life activity. Additional cameras are expected to be installed within the Gibraltar Artificial Reef Network which was recently expanded with the sinking of the Sunswale off the South Mole; a well-known fishing and recreational diving area.

It has now been nearly two years since the Artificial Reef Programme was re-invigorated by the Department of the Environment with the creation of the North West Artificial Reef which has proven to improve marine life in the area. The reef modules themselves have been found to host an array of marine life such as sponges, ascidians, invertebrates and algae. Fish species such of bream, wrasse, congers and sea bass have also been identified within the reef area as well as octopus and cuttlefish.

In addition to the creation of new reefs, the Department has also embarked on a Marine Ecosystem Restoration Programme which is currently in its advanced stages. This programme

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HM Government of Gibraltar • Duke of Kent House, Cathedral Square • Gibraltar GX11 1AA

t +350 20066491 f +350 20066706 e [mhe@gibraltar.gov.gi](mailto:mhe@gibraltar.gov.gi) w [gibraltar.gov.gi](http://gibraltar.gov.gi)



draws on historical sources of information and local expert knowledge to inform the re-introduction of species that were known to exist in the area such as fan mussels, oysters and seagrasses; the latter species being a tremendously important source of food, oxygen and habitat, as well as an excellent carbon sink. The Department of the Environment has already carried out small scale pilot projects at different locations to determine the most suitable site for seagrasses. The particular species of seagrass that will be planted is 'Neptune grass' (*Cymodocea Nodosa*). This species was known to be abundant within our waters, particularly towards the North of the Bay, although its presence has diminished over the years due to human activity. The Department of the Environment and Climate Change will be working closely with The University of Algarve's Centre of Marine Sciences on this project.

A new programme involving chemical monitoring of fish and shellfish has also been developed by the Department of the Environment and Climate Change in conjunction with the UK's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas). The species sampled as part of the programme include the White Bream and Common Mussels. Both of these species are abundant species in Gibraltar's coastal waters. The results of this programme will complement the work carried out as part of the Department's coastal water monitoring programme as well as helping scientists within the Department to better understand the ecological status or health of Gibraltar's marine environment.

Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Dr John Cortes, commented, "We are making tremendous progress in increasing our knowledge of marine life, and significantly, in creating new habitat and supporting the regeneration of marine life. Our marine programme started from zero, and over the past three years has rocketed into a serious monitoring, conservation and educational programme, including some of the best technology deployed in Europe. No other Government has ever done so much before. We are clearly showing the world that the environment in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters is in very good hands."