

## BIOTOPE INFORMATION SHEET

English name: <b>Baltic aphotic rock and boulders or mixed hard and soft substrates dominated by soft corals (Alcyonacea)</b>		Code in HELCOM HUB: <b>AB.A1G4, AB.M1G4</b>	
Characteristic species: <i>Alcyonium digitatum</i> , <i>Swiftia rosea</i>			
Past and Current Threats (Habitat directive article 17): Fishing (bottom trawling F02.02.01)		Future Threats (Habitat directive article 17): Fishing (bottom trawling F02.02.01)	
Red List Criteria: <b>A1</b>	Confidence of threat assessment: <b>L</b>	<b>HELCOM Red List Category:</b>	<b>NT Near Threatened</b>
Previous HELCOM Red List threat assessments			
BSEP 75 (1998): "3" Endangered 2.1 Rocky bottoms 2.1.1.1 Soft rock bottoms of the aphotic zone 2.2 Stony bottoms 2.2.1 Stony bottoms of the aphotic zone 2.8. Mixed sediment bottoms 2.8.1. Mixed sediments of the aphotic zone		BSEP 113 (HELCOM 2007):	
Greater concern stated by:			

### Habitat and Ecology

The biotope occurs in the aphotic zone on rocks and boulders and various mixed sediments. At least 10% of the substrate is covered by attached sessile cnidarians, of which soft corals constitutes at least 50% of the biomass. The biotope occurs from depths where the light becomes insufficient for macroalgae and down to about 100 meters and can occasionally be encountered deeper.

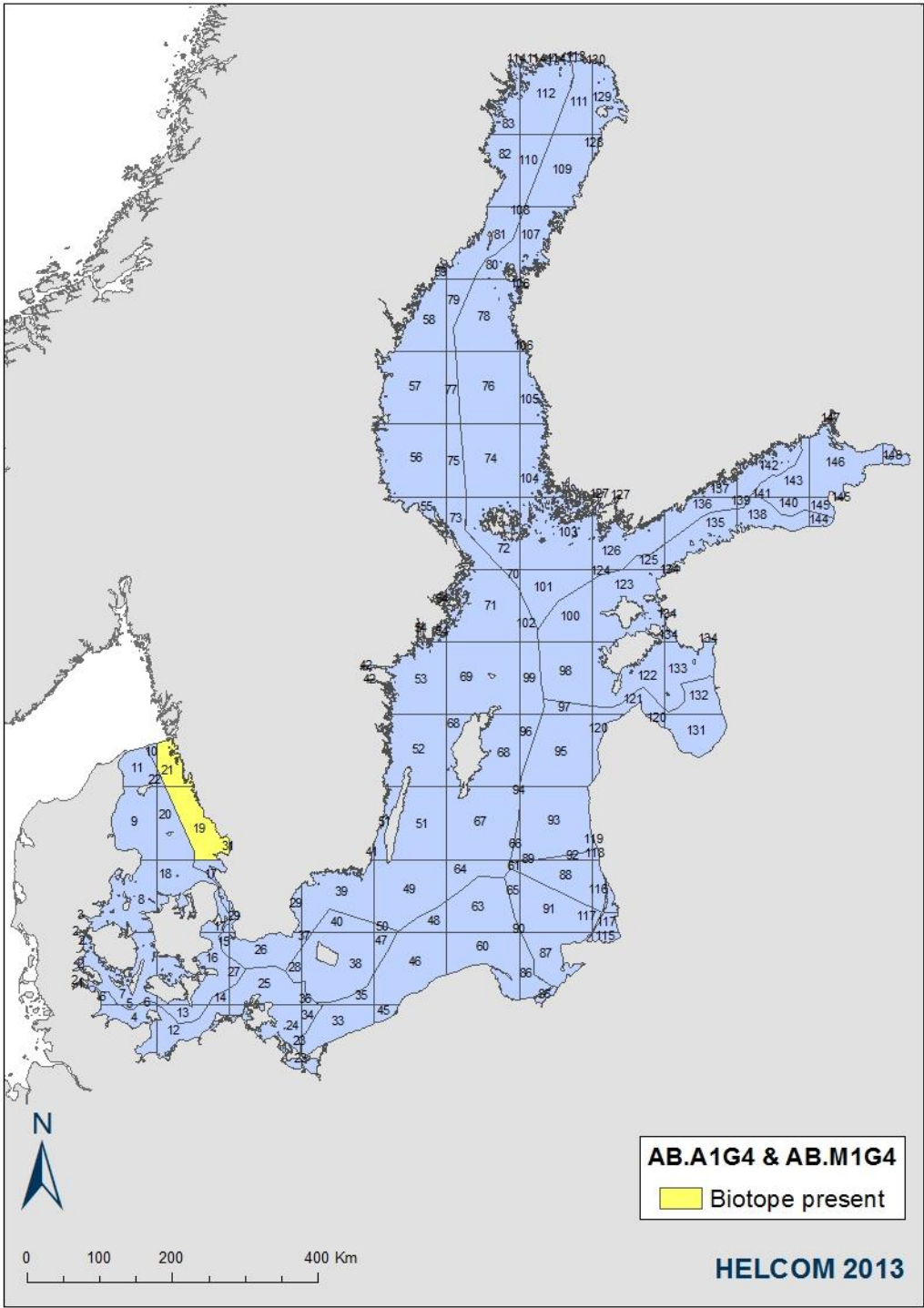
The soft coral dead man's fingers (*Alcyonium digitatum*) is a common species along the north east Atlantic, and also occurs in the Kattegat. The colonial soft coral forms irregular masses that vary in colour from orange to pink or white. *Alcyonium digitatum* is an active suspension feeder and thrives in areas where currents are strong or the hard substrate is exposed to strong wave action (Budd 2008). Colonies are known to live for over 20 years (Budd 2008). The coral reproduces by releasing planktonic larvae during the winter. The nudibranch *Tritonia homberg*, feeds mainly on *Alcyonium digitatum* and can therefore be found in relatively high abundance in the biotope (Moen & Svensen 2009).

*Swiftia rosea* lives on rocky substrate from 20 meters and deeper. The colony is branched and thin with varying colour and can grow to approximately 20cm height (Lundin 2004). In suitable environmental conditions several coral colonies can grow in close proximity. The corals require high salinity, stable cool temperatures and moderate currents (Moen & Svensen 2009).

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**Distribution and status in the Baltic Sea region**

The biotope occurs in the Kattegat and Belt Sea on rocky substrates in exposed areas of high salinity. The distribution map indicates the area in the 100 x 100 km grid where biotope is estimated to occur based on environmental gradients and the availability of the specific substrate.



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### Description of Major threats

The physical integrity of the biotope can be negatively affected by bottom trawling. Currently the severity of the various threats is unknown.

### Assessment justification

A1

The quantity of the biotope is estimated to have declined >25% in the past 50 years.

### Recommendations for actions to conserve the biotope

### Common names

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### References

- Budd, G. (2008). *Alcyonium digitatum*. Dead man's fingers. Marine Life Information Network: Biology and Sensitivity Key Information Sub-programme. Plymouth: Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom. Available at: <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/speciesfullreview.php?speciesID=2442> (viewed 3 June 2013).
- Lundin, K. (2004). Faunistiskt nytt – marina evertebrater. Göteborgs Naturhistoriska Museum Årstryck 2004: 37-48.
- Moen, F., Svensen, E. (2009) Djurliv i havet – Nordeuropeisk marin fauna. Nordstedts. 678 pp.