ALIEN AND RANGE EXPANDING SPECIES IN THE STRAIGHTS OF THESPROTIA–CORFU (N.W. GREECE)

Conference Paper · October 2016

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8th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society

20-23/10/2016
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Climate change (temperature rise of sea water), influx of tropical/thermophilic alien marine species via the Suez canal, transfer of species via ballast water and ship hulls, aquaculture escapes and aquarium disposals represent serious threats to native species and ecosystems in the Mediterranean Sea. The north Ionian Sea has become the main corridor for range expansion and invasion of many species to the Adriatic Sea. During the recent years, nine species have been recorded mainly in the coastal zone of Thesprotia and in the eastern coast of Corfu based on literature and collected specimens, of whom six were aliens (Caulerpa cylindracea Sonder, Callinectes sapidus Rathbun, 1896, Farfantepenaeus aztecs (Ives, 1891), Lagocephalus sceleratus (Gmelin, 1789), Siganus luridus (Rüppell, 1829) and Siganus rivulatus Forsskål & Niebuhr, 1775), two were natives with range expansion (Scedophilus ovalis (Cuvier, 1833) and Sparisoma cretense (L. 1798)) and one was of unknown origin (Pinctada imbricata radiata (Leach, 1814)). Most of the aliens belong to worst invasive species lists, occupy a wide range and variety of coastal habitats and compete with natives for the same food resources. Moreover, at least three species have commercial fishing interest. Overall, marine biodiversity in the Ionian Sea is in a continuous process of change and early detection and monitoring are essential for any management actions.