

# The Belgian Register of Marine Species - BeRMS

VLIZ Belgian Marine Species Consortium

<http://www.marinespecies.org/berms/consortium.php>

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Although Belgium is the smallest North Sea country with the shortest coastline ( $\pm 67$  kilometers) and a continental shelf of 3,457 km<sup>2</sup>, it has a long history of marine research in which scientists try to understand its diversity and complexity. A first step towards understanding is to obtain an idea of the species diversity within this area, in other words, to establish an inventory of the local marine species. In 2010, the Flanders Marine Institute undertook efforts to compile a species list for the Belgian marine waters.

Information was extracted from already existing inventories and databases of the North Sea and a new literature search was started to further complete the Belgian marine list. A large network of experts – both taxonomic experts of the World Register of Marine Species and field experts – have joined forces to check the quality and content of the list. Of all species once documented for the Belgian part of the North Sea, the taxonomy and geographical distribution was verified. After this thorough analysis, some species were now known to be ‘extinct in Belgian marine water’ or are only appearing sporadically and labeled as ‘vagrant’.

For some species groups, Belgian research is rather limited or just getting started. Although they are being described in literature as ‘present in the Belgian marine waters’, their presence in our area cannot (yet) be confirmed. For other groups, there is still a lot of discussion going on concerning the taxonomic status, which is why we decided not to include them in the Register just yet. The above mentioned situations lead to exclusion of the following groups from the Register: Bacteria, Protozoa and Bacillariophyta or diatoms.

Although it is obvious that this Belgian marine species list is not yet complete, this is so far the most complete list ever presented for this region. So far, only species currently or historically occurring in the marine environment up till (but not including) the coastal dune front are included. Future efforts will be undertaken to list all known species of the coastal zone, including the salt marshes, mud flats, dunes and the adjacent brackish areas.

The Belgian Register of Marine Species is available as a regional sub-list of the World Register of Marine Species ([www.marinespecies.org/berms](http://www.marinespecies.org/berms)) since 2010. Recently, VLIZ also made Dutch web pages available, aimed at a broader audience ([www.vliz.be/vmdcdata/berms](http://www.vliz.be/vmdcdata/berms)). Starting from a general overview page – listing known larger taxonomic groups – a simple click leads to more information on that group and an overview of the documented species – with a Dutch name where available and pictures.

Currently (January 2012), 2,205 species are documented to occur (or have occurred) in the Belgian marine waters.

## References

VLIZ Belgian Marine Species Consortium 2011. Het Belgisch Register van Zee- en Kustsoorten. Online beschikbaar op <http://www.vliz.be/vmdcdata/berms>.

VLIZ Belgian Marine Species Consortium 2010. The Belgian Register of Marine Species. Online available at <http://www.marinespecies.org/berms>

Vandepitte L., Decock W. & J. Mees 2010. The Belgian Register of Marine Species, compiled and validated by the VLIZ Belgian Marine Species Consortium. VLIZ Special Publication, 46. Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee (VLIZ) : Oostende, Belgium. 78 pp. ISBN 978-90-812900-8-1.