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TITLE: Submarine canyons along the upper Sardinian slope (Central Western Mediterranean) as repositories for derelict fishing gears

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ABSTRACT:

By means of ROV surveys, we assessed the quantity, composition and bathymetric distribution of marine litter in 17 sites along the Sardinian continental margin (Central Western Mediterranean) at depths ranging from 100 to 480 m. None of the investigated sites was litter free, but the mean density of litter ( $0.0175 \pm 0.0022$  items  $m^{-2}$ ) was lower than that reported from other Tyrrhenian regions. The difference in the total litter density among sites was negligible, but the density of derelict fishing gear (DFG) items (most of which ascribable to small scale fishery) in submarine canyons was higher in submarine canyons than in other habitats. Our result suggest that submarine canyons (known to be highly vulnerable ecosystems) act as major repositories of DFGs, and, therefore, we anticipate the need of specific measures aimed at minimizing the loss and abandonment of DFGs in submarine canyons.

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