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Trevor D. Harrison, Neil D. Armour, Michael T. McNeill, Peter W. Moorehead



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Trevor D. Harrison*, Neil D. Armour, Michael T. McNeill, Peter W. Moorehead

Marine & Fisheries Division, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, 17 Antrim Road, Lisburn, Tonagh, Northern Ireland, BT28 3AL.

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: Trevor.Harrison@daera-ni.gov.uk (T. Harrison)

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Abstract

The fish communities of Northern Ireland's estuaries were described and compared using data collected with a modified beam trawl over a six year period from 2009 to 2014. Multivariate analyses identified four estuary groups based on variations in their physico-chemical attributes. These groups broadly corresponded with the distribution and variation of estuary geomorphic types identified around the Irish coast. The dominant fish species captured were also among the main species reported in other North East Atlantic estuaries. A significant link between the estuary types and their fish communities was found; each estuary group contained a somewhat distinctive fish community. The fish communities also showed a significant relationship with the physico-chemical characteristics of the estuaries. Differences in fish species composition are attributed to habitat and environmental preferences of key estuary-associated species.

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