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Decapod crustacean larval communities in the Balearic Sea (western Mediterranean): Seasonal composition, horizontal and vertical distribution patterns
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Abstract: Decapod crustaceans are the main target species of deep water bottom trawl fisheries in the Balearic Sea but little is known about their larval stages. This work focuses on the species composition of the decapod larval community, describing the main spatio-temporal assemblages and assessing their vertical distribution. Mesozooplankton sampling was carried out using depth-stratified sampling devices at two stations located over the shelf break and the mid slope, in the north-western and southern Mallorca in late autumn 2009 and summer 2010. Differences among decapod larvae communities, in terms of composition, adult's habitat such as pelagic or benthic, and distribution patterns were observed between seasons, areas and station. Results showed that for both seasons most species and developmental stages aggregated within the upper water column (above 75 m depth) and showed higher biodiversity in summer compared to late autumn. Most abundant species were pelagic prawns (e.g., Sergestidae) occurring in both seasons and areas. The larval assemblages' distributions were different between seasonal hydrographic scenarios and during situations of stratified and non-stratified water column. The vertical distribution patterns of different larval developmental stages in respect to the adult's habitat were analyzed in relation to environmental variables. Fluorescence had the highest explanatory power. Four clearly different vertical patterns were identified: two corresponding to late autumn, which were common for all the main larval groups and other two in summer, one corresponding to larvae of coastal benthic and the second to pelagic species larvae.

Keywords: Larval assemblages, Decapoda, Adult habitats, Developmental stage, Vertical distribution patterns, Western Mediterranean