

Detection of protection benefits on predatory fishes depends on the census methodology adopted

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1 Abstract

- 2 1. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are used as fisheries management and
3 conservation tools. The establishment of well-enforced no-take zones allows the
4 rebuilding of natural populations of exploited species, although there is still
5 controversy on the role of buffer zones.
- 6 2. MPA effectiveness could be underestimated since fish population assessments
7 depend largely on traditional methodologies, which may have difficulties to deal
8 with predatory fish detection due to fish behaviour.
- 9 3. Here, we compared the performance of different census methods in assessing
10 protection benefits on large predatory fishes under different protection levels
11 (i.e. no-take and buffer zones) in five Mediterranean MPAs. Specifically, we
12 compared conventional strip transects (CST, 50 x 5 m²) and tracked roaming
13 transects combined with distance sampling (TRT+DS, variable lengths),
14 including a series of TRT-derived estimators, with variable transect lengths and
15 fixed widths of 20, 10 and 6 meters (TRT20, TRT10 and TRT6, respectively).
- 16 4. We found that the transects covering larger areas (i.e. TRT+DS and TRT20)
17 allowed the detection of a greater number of species and yielded more accurate
18 estimates of density and biomass than transects of narrower fixed widths,
19 particularly the CSTs, which were associated with the lowest richness detection
20 capability, accuracy and precision. On average, both no-take zones and buffer
21 zones appeared effective for the conservation of large predatory fishes,
22 indicating that multiple protection areas were ecologically effective. However,
23 differences between MPAs were also observed, probably due to both local
24 environmental and management factors.

25 5. We suggest the implementation of methodologies with larger transects for the
26 study of MPA effects on large predatory fish populations, in order to avoid bias
27 in fish population assessments.

28

29 **Keywords**

30 Buffer zone, distance sampling, high-trophic level predators, multiple protection areas,
31 no-take zone, underwater visual census.

32 **1. Introduction**

33 High-trophic level predatory fishes (i.e. groupers, snappers, jacks, etc.) play a key role
34 in marine ecosystems (Baum & Worm, 2009). These species have been historically
35 targeted by fisheries and are currently depleted or even completely absent in coastal
36 ecosystems (Jackson, 2008; Piroddi et al., 2017).

37 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are recognised as effective tools for the conservation of
38 the biodiversity and fisheries management (Pérez-Ruzafa, García-Charton & Marcos,
39 2017). When effectively designed and managed, MPAs show positive effects on the
40 recovery of density and biomass of exploited fishes, especially those with large sizes,
41 located at higher trophic positions, and having commercial importance (Mosquera et al.,
42 2000; Côté, Mosquera & Reynolds, 2001; Micheli, Halpern & Botsford, 2004; Guidetti
43 & Sala, 2007; Claudet et al., 2008; Guidetti et al., 2008; Sciberras et al., 2013; Edgar et
44 al., 2014; Guidetti et al., 2014; Hackradt et al., 2014; Rojo et al., 2019).

45 Ecological monitoring is essential to understand the functioning of MPAs (Roberts et
46 al., 2018). Worldwide, underwater visual censuses (hereafter UVCs) have been adopted
47 as monitoring tools to assess fish assemblages in MPAs since they are non-destructive,
48 cost-efficient and allow the detection of a high number of species (García-Charton et al.,
49 2000; Edgar, Barret & Morton, 2004; Harmelin-Vivien & Harmelin, 2013; Prato et al.,
50 2017). Traditionally, UVCs have been mostly performed by using conventional strip
51 (belt) transects (hereafter, CST; e.g. Harmelin, 1987; García-Rubies & Zabala, 1990;
52 García-Charton et al., 2004; Hackradt et al., 2014), in which sampling area is delimited
53 both in length and width. CSTs assume that all fishes present within the surveyed
54 surface will be detected by the observer (i.e. probability of detection = 1; Bukland et al.,
55 2001). However, very often this assumption is not fulfilled, and CSTs generate biased

56 estimates of the descriptors of fish assemblages (Kulbicki, 1998; MacNeil et al., 2008;
57 Bukland et al., 2001; Bozec et al., 2011; Goetze et al., 2017). Many attempts have been
58 made to adapt the methodologies to focus on particular groups of fishes (i.e. large
59 predatory fish) and to maximize species detectability, by increasing the number of
60 observers (Issaris et al., 2012; Bernard et al., 2013), sampling replicates (MacNeil et al.,
61 2008), or varying the size of the transects (Harmelin-Vivien et al., 2015; Prato et al.,
62 2017). Also, sampling techniques have been further developed in order to increase the
63 accuracy of data (Katsanevakis et al., 2012), such as the combination of UVC with mark
64 and recapture methods (Hackradt, 2012), repeated presence-absence surveys for
65 occupancy models (Issaris et al., 2012), removal methods (Söffker et al., 2015), distance
66 sampling (Kulbicki & Sarramégn, 1991; Irigoyen et al., 2018) and GPS-tracked
67 roaming transects (Beck et al., 2014; Lynch, Green & Davies, 2015; Irigoyen et al.,
68 2018; Wong et al., 2018).

69 Particularly, GPS-tracked roaming transects increase the efficiency of UVC by covering
70 33–75% more area than CST for a comparable diving time because there is no diving
71 time investment on rolling the census tape and there is not transect length limitation
72 (Beck et al., 2014; Lynch, Green & Davies, 2015; Irigoyen et al., 2018). This method is
73 especially useful as it allows sampling very sparse populations that might otherwise
74 require much more effort to get a record and even remain undetected. Additionally,
75 using wider transects and especially distance sampling methods, in which perpendicular
76 distance from the transect line is estimated on large census area widths (Kulbiki &
77 Sarramégn, 1991; Buckland et al., 2001; see details below), would lead to more
78 accurate and precise estimates when compared to CSTs. This is critical when sampling
79 species that may react to the presence of divers (either attractive or elusive behaviour),

80 and hence when comparing among sites with different levels of human disturbance (e.g.
81 zones under different levels of protection within multiple-use MPAs).

82 On the other hand, it is essential to assess which MPA features favour the recovery of
83 this group of fish species (Rojo et al., 2019). One of the most debated attributes of
84 MPAs is the adequacy or not to implement partially protected areas - or buffer zones,
85 allowing extractive activities to different degrees (Sala & Giakoumi, 2017). While the
86 efficacy of fully protected areas - or no-take zones as conservation measures has been
87 widely accepted (Claudet et al., 2008; Edgar et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2017), there
88 is still controversy on the role of buffer zones, which are expected to be less effective
89 than fully protected areas (Lester & Halpern, 2008; Lester et al., 2009; Sciberras et al.,
90 2013; Giakoumi et al., 2017; Sala & Giakoumi, 2017), or even exert a negative effect on
91 conservation purposes (Claudet et al., 2008; Sciberras et al., 2013). However, it has
92 been recently found that buffer zones may produce considerable ecological benefits
93 (Hackradt et al., 2014; Zupan et al., 2018), thus understanding the effects of both
94 protection levels is crucial for management purposes.

95 The aim of the present study was to compare the performance of different visual census
96 methodologies in evaluating the effects of protection in five multiple-use MPAs (i.e.
97 including no-take and buffer zones) in the Mediterranean Sea. Specifically, we
98 compared estimates of predatory fish species richness, density and biomass gathered
99 through traditional CSTs and GPS-tracked roaming transects combined with distance
100 sampling (hereafter TRT+DS; *sensu* Irigoyen et al., 2018), including a set of fixed-
101 width TRT-derived transects. Based on the previous literature, we hypothesise that
102 longer and wider transects will result in more accurate estimates of the descriptors of
103 fish assemblages. Moreover, we expect no-take zones to exert a stronger protection
104 effect than buffer zones. Our results will help to identify the most accurate and realistic

105 method for the study of predatory fishes and consequently to provide better assessments
106 of MPA effects on this trophic group.

107 **2. Methods**

108 **2.1. Study areas and sampling design**

109 The study was carried out during the summer of 2016 and 2017 in five MPAs located in
110 the Western Mediterranean Sea, from south to north: Cabo de Gata-Níjar marine reserve
111 (hereafter Cabo de Gata), Cabo de Palos-Islas Hormigas marine reserve (Cabo de
112 Palos), Isla de Tabarca marine reserve (Tabarca), Es Freus d'Eivissa i Formentera
113 marine reserve (Es Freus), and North of Menorca marine reserve (Menorca) (Fig. 1,
114 Appendix A). Each MPA consists of one or several no-take zones, where all activities
115 are banned except scientific research (subject to administrative authorization), and a
116 buffer zone, where certain human activities (e.g. small-scale fishing and recreational
117 diving) are allowed but strongly regulated. In addition, adjacent unprotected areas with
118 habitat characteristics comparable to their corresponding MPA were included in the
119 study.

120 Within each protection level (no-take zone, buffer zone, unprotected areas) of each
121 location (every MPA and its adjacent unprotected area) a number of sites were
122 randomly selected separated by hundreds to thousands of meters, so that the number of
123 sites selected in each protection level was proportional to the surface of available
124 habitat. Sites were characterised by being rocky reefs located both in coastal cliff areas
125 and on islands or rocky outcrops that did not reach the surface. In general, the sampling
126 design consisted of three sites within each no-take zone, six inside each buffer zone and
127 nine in the unprotected areas. As exceptions, only six unprotected sites were sampled in
128 Tabarca and Es Freus due to the lack of suitable habitats outside these MPAs. In each

129 site, three haphazardly distributed replicates were performed with each sampling
130 technique, separated at least 20 m in order to avoid spatial dependence. Replicates
131 consisted on fish UVCs using two different methodologies: CST and TRT+DS (see
132 below), for which only predatory large-sized economically important fish species
133 occupying high trophic levels in Mediterranean coastal ecosystems were considered
134 (Appendix B). The procedure for randomly placing sample replicates was constrained to
135 include comparable habitats, consisting as much as possible of steep rocky bottoms with
136 small and medium sized boulders interspersed in some sites with patches of *Posidonia*
137 *oceanica*, surrounded by soft bottoms and seagrass meadows at 25-35 m depth. In
138 general, the replicates were conducted at depths between 13 and 18 m, with the
139 exception of some sites in Tabarca and Cabo de Gata MPAs and their respective
140 unprotected areas, in which rocky reefs deeper than 6-10 m depth are very scarce.
141 Visual censuses were carried out by experienced divers at daytime between 10 a.m. and
142 3 p.m., when light and water conditions were optimal.

143 **2.2. Sampling methods**

144 In the case of CST, transects of 50 m length (measured by a tape) and 5 m width (2.5 m
145 at each side of the diver, estimated visually; i.e. covering a surface of 250 m²) were
146 performed. Predatory fish in the sampled area were recorded, annotating the name of the
147 species, and the number and size of the individuals observed. Abundance was assigned
148 to one of nine predetermined abundance classes for which the limits coincide with the
149 terms of a base ~ 2 geometric series (1, 2–5, 6–10, 11–30, 31–50, 51–100, 101–200,
150 201–500, > 500; Harmelin, 1987) (see García-Charton et al., 2004, for further details of
151 the sampling protocol used).

152 For the TRT+DS method, two divers performed transects of variable lengths following
153 an imaginary line at a constant depth contour while pulling a GPS located on a body-
154 board on the surface. The tracks were recorded by the GPS, and the distance covered
155 along each transect was extracted by geo-referencing start/end census points with a
156 synchronized clock. Transects lasted 8 minutes, which gave a mean transect length of
157 110 m (± 2 m SE) in an equivalent diving time to CST. Each diver considered 20 m of
158 width at her/his respective side from the imaginary line; thus, for a total of 40-m width,
159 transects surveyed an average surface of 4400 m². Similarly to the case of CST, for each
160 observation the name of the species was noted, the number of individuals was counted
161 and first-sight perpendicular distance in 1-m intervals between every fish observed and
162 the imaginary line was estimated, either for single individuals or groups. Fish moving
163 from one side to the other were noted and cross-checked between the two divers after
164 the sampling in order to avoid double counts of individuals (see Irigoyen et al., 2018,
165 for further details of the sampling protocol used).

166 Both in CST and TRT+DS fish lengths were estimated in 5-cm size classes (Harmelin-
167 Vivien et al., 1985).

168 **2.3. Response variables and estimators**

169 The predatory fish assemblage was described by the response variables species richness
170 (number of species), density (number of individuals $\cdot 100$ m⁻²) and biomass (in g $\cdot 100$
171 m⁻²). The latter was calculated through adequate length-weight relationships from local
172 studies when available (Morey et al., 2003), otherwise data obtained from FishBase
173 (Froese & Pauly, 2017) were used.

174 **2.3.1. Conventional Strip transects (CST)**

175 To calculate density in each CST, geometric means of fish abundance classes were used
176 as class marks (García-Charton et al., 2000; García-Charton et al., 2004). Thus, for each
177 species in each transect, the resulting density is the sum of the geometric means of the
178 abundance class of each observation (individual or group) in a transect of 250 m².

179 2.3.2. Tracked Roaming Transects with Distance Sampling (TRT+DS)

180 Distance sampling theory (DS) allows the estimation of density of biological
181 populations based on the recorded distances from each individual to a randomly placed
182 line. The detection function $g(y)$ is the probability of detecting an object located at a
183 perpendicular distance (y) from the line (Buckland et al., 2001). The $g(y)$ decreases as y
184 increases, always being $0 \leq g(y) \leq 1$, and assuming that $g(0) = 1$ (i.e. the probability of
185 detecting an object right on the line is 1). Thus, although a large proportion of objects
186 may be undetected, by adjusting the sightings to the $g(y)$ detection function it is possible
187 to calculate reliable estimates of the true density (Burnham, Anderson & Laake, 1980;
188 Buckland et al., 2001). DS theory requires at least 30 records to calculate trustworthy
189 densities (Buckland et al., 2001; Buckland et al., 2004). Most transects, however, had
190 less than 30 records for each species (especially in unprotected areas). As a
191 consequence, in order to graphically represent the densities taking into account the
192 detection probability function, the calculations were made considering the most
193 abundant species pooled (see Appendix B), so that only one density value has been
194 provided for each MPA and protection level. Calculations were made through the free
195 software DISTANCE 6.2 (Thomas et al., 2010).

196 For statistical modelling purposes, densities were calculated using a series of estimators
197 derived from the data taken with the TRT+DS method, but without taking into account
198 the detection function $g(y)$, as detailed below.

199 Firstly, an encounter rate (ER) was calculated in each transect i as the number of
200 individuals of all preselected species recorded (n_i) per meter of transect length (L_i) as
201 measured with the GPS track (i.e. $ER_i = n_i/L_i$). This estimator has been widely used as
202 an appraisal of distance-calculated densities in terrestrial ecology when DS theory does
203 not allow to make calculations at the transect level due to a too low abundance of the
204 recorded species (Burgi et al., 2011; Nabte et al., 2013).

205 Secondly, a value of density was calculated through the average distance estimator
206 (AD). This estimator considers the distance at which individuals were recorded but,
207 unlike DS theory, no function is applied to the histograms of sighting distances. Instead,
208 it calculates mean distances and refers the abundance to the area in which widths are
209 calculated as average distance as follows: $AD_i = [n_i/(2Ld_i)]$, with $d_i =$
210 $(1/n_i) \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} d_{ij}$ (Kulbicki & Sarramégn, 1999). In order to be able to compute the
211 formulae, the minimum width ($2d_i$) at which each observation has been recorded is 1 m,
212 even in the cases of those fishes that were seen directly on the imaginary line (i.e. at
213 distance 0).

214 Finally, Tracked Roaming Transects of fixed widths were considered by including the
215 fishes seen within distances $\leq 3, 5, \text{ and } 10$ on each side of the imaginary line over which
216 the census was made. Fixed width transects larger than 20 m (10 m from each side of
217 the line) were not included because the probability of detection dropped sharply after
218 that distance. A similar decline in the probability of detection has been previously found
219 (Bozec et al., 2012) and is the maximum width adopted in similar studies (Prato et al.,
220 2017). Densities D_i were calculated as $D_i = n_i / (L_i \times W)$, with L_i being the transect length
221 (i.e. the GPS track), W the widths of 6, 10 and 20 (called TRT6, TRT10 and TRT20,

222 respectively), and n_i the number of individuals of the selected species sighted in each
223 case.

224 For each response variable, different methods and estimators were taken into account.
225 Richness and biomass data were analysed through TRT20, TRT10, TRT6 and CST. For
226 density data, though, formal analyses were done through the *ER*, *AD*, TRT20, TRT10,
227 TRT6 and CST.

228 **2.4. Data analysis**

229 Firstly, in order to understand how the limitation in transect widths may affect the
230 detection by each of the estimators, mean detection distances were calculated for each
231 of the species in the study in the different protection levels for all MPAs pooled.

232 Then, generalized linear mixed models (GLMMs; Zuur et al., 2009) were applied to
233 explore the factors affecting the richness, density and biomass of predatory fish in
234 Mediterranean MPAs. Different analyses were performed for each of the methodologies
235 or estimators and response variables, as estimators within a response variable were not
236 independent among them. For the density and biomass analyses, species that appeared
237 in at least 10% of the total transects performed including the two methodologies
238 (Appendix A) were retained and evaluated pooled together. This allowed us to assess
239 differences among MPAs and protection levels without having the effect of rare species.
240 The species included were *Epinephelus marginatus*, *Epinephelus costae*, *Mycteroperca*
241 *rubra*, *Dentex dentex*, *Sphyrnaena viridensis*, *Sciaena umbra* and *Muraena helena*
242 (Appendix B); the latter was excluded for the biomass analyses because it appeared
243 mostly in cracks in the rocks, so it was not possible to estimate individual's lengths.
244 GLMMs models included the factors Location [fixed, with five levels (the different
245 MPAs and their unprotected counterparts); Protection level [fixed, with three levels (no-

246 take, buffer and unprotected)]; the interaction among Zone and Protection Level; and
247 Site (random, with a variable number of levels depending on the location). Location has
248 been considered a fixed factor because we hypothesize that there is a gradient of
249 primary production, being maximum in the Alboran Sea and decreasing northwards and
250 offshore from the mainland to the north-eastern Balearic Islands (García-Charton et al.,
251 2004). Indeed, the Alboran Sea has the greatest levels of primary productivity due to
252 phytoplankton uptake of nutrients upwelled at Gibraltar and the cyclonic circulation
253 cells (Lazzari et al., 2012; García-Martínez et al., 2019). Moreover, there is a coastal-
254 island gradient due to permanent frontal structures combined with river runoff and
255 upwellings created by submarine canyons (Estrada et al., 1996). Menorca island has
256 been found to be one of the most oligotrophic areas in the western Mediterranean Sea
257 (Cardona et al., 2007) due to phosphorus limitations because of the occurrence of
258 oceanographic gyres (García-Martínez et al., 2019). Arguably, primary production is the
259 most important environmental factor determining the production of marine fishes (Pauly
260 & Christensen, 1995; Watson, Zeller & Pauly, 2013; Piroddi et al., 2017). Thus,
261 accounting for this hypothesis, the factor Location would represent discrete steps along
262 a gradient of primary production following the path Cabo de Gata > Cabo de Palos >
263 Tabarca > Es Freus > Menorca. Consequently, and because all factors are categorical,
264 reference values were set for the Cabo de Gata location (i.e. the location where the
265 highest values of primary productivity occur) and the unprotected protection level (the
266 level for which the lowest values of richness, density and biomass are expected to
267 occur), thus analyses are made according to them.

268 For species richness, Poisson error distributions and log-link functions were used. The
269 glm() and glmer() functions of the packages stats (R Core Team, 2017) and lme4 (Bates
270 et al., 2015) were applied, respectively. For the density and biomass response variables,

271 the `glmmTMB()` function from the `glmmTMB` package was applied (Brooks et al.,
272 2017) in which models are fitted using maximum likelihood estimation and random
273 effects are integrated using the Laplace approximation. This package has been recently
274 developed and is more flexible than other packages to deal with zero-inflation and
275 overdispersion on the non-zero data (Brooks et al., 2017). Raw abundance and biomass
276 per transect were modelled using negative binomial distributions and log-link functions,
277 and the area covered by each transect was included as an offset parameter. Model
278 selection was based on Akaike's information criteria (AIC). The model with the lowest
279 AIC was selected, and when Δ AIC was ≤ 2 the simplest model was selected (Burnham
280 & Anderson, 2002). Significant terms were considered when $p \leq 0.05$. Model validation
281 was done through visual inspection of residual plots and Shapiro tests for deviations
282 from homoscedasticity and normality, respectively. The performance of the final models
283 was evaluated by means of the marginal R^2 , which measures the variability accounted
284 by the fixed terms of the model (Nakagawa & Schielzeth, 2013). The function `r2()` from
285 the `sjstats` package (Lüdecke, 2018) was used. All analyses were performed in R (R
286 Core Team, 2017).

287 **3. Results**

288 **3.1. Diversity of predatory fish assemblage**

289 A total of 252 transects with each methodology were performed along the five MPAs.
290 The complete set of predatory species recorded in the study includes *Caranx crysos*,
291 *Dentex dentex*, *Dicentrarchus labrax*, *Epinephelus marginatus*, *Epinephelus caninus*,
292 *Epinephelus costae*, *Euthynnus alletteratus*, *Muraena helena*, *Mycteroperca rubra*,
293 *Pagrus pagrus*, *Sarda sarda*, *Sciaena umbra*, *Scorpaena scrofa*, *Seriola dumerili*,
294 *Sparus aurata*, *Sphyraena* spp., *Myliobatis aquila* and *Torpedo marmorata* (Appendix

295 B). The number of species recorded by the CST, the TRT+DS and their derived
296 estimators differed according to the MPA and the protection level considered, as did the
297 values obtained for the density and biomass (Fig. 2).

298 **3.2. Average detection distance**

299 The average detection distance of individuals using the TRT+DS method was similar
300 among the species considered, and values varied between 1 and 6 m from the
301 observation line (Fig. 3). However, this parameter tended to increase as the level of
302 anthropogenic disturbance augmented (i.e. from no-take zones to unprotected areas; no-
303 take = 3.12 ± 1.11 ; buffer = 3.20 ± 0.39 ; unprotected = 3.91 ± 0.31 m; mean values
304 across species \pm SE), what was more evident for the species *E. costae* (no-take = $2.79 \pm$
305 0.92 ; buffer = 3.72 ± 0.36 ; unprotected = 4.5 ± 0.29 m; mean \pm SE) and *M. rubra* (no-
306 take = 3.03 ± 0.90 ; buffer = 3.48 ± 0.39 ; unprotected = 6.00 ± 0.42 m; mean \pm SE).

307 **3.3. Methods and estimators performance in detecting MPA effects**

308 3.3.1. Richness of predatory fish

309 For any location and protection level considered, the methods and estimators covering
310 greater areas per transect tended to yield higher values of richness (i.e. more species
311 detected with the estimator; TRT20 > TRT10 > TRT6 > CST; Fig. 2a). AIC did not
312 differ among the GLM and GLMM models for richness, indicating the absence of effect
313 of the factor Site. The results of GLM applied to the richness of predatory fish species
314 measured by the CST method showed that the response of this assemblage to protection
315 level varied depending on the location considered (as shown by the significant
316 interaction between particular Locations and Protection levels, while it was non-
317 significant when measured through the TRT6 method). The TRT20 and TRT10 models
318 included the interaction but none of the specific terms was statistically significant

319 (Table 1). Regarding the interaction, CST showed that richness was higher in the buffer
320 and no-take zone of Cabo de Palos, as well as in the buffer zone of Menorca and
321 Tabarca (Table 1). Moreover, regarding the main effects, data obtained with methods
322 TRT20 and TRT10 showed that species richness was significantly greater in no-take
323 zones, while the data obtained with TRT6 detected significantly higher values of species
324 richness in both no-take and buffer zones (Table 1). Additionally, Cabo de Palos and Es
325 Freus harboured higher species richness than the other locations (positive and
326 statistically significant results, all protection levels considered together, Table 1) with
327 all census methods, apart from the case of the data obtained with CST. The R^2 of the
328 final models were around 50% for all the estimators considered (Table 1).

329 3.3.2. Density of predatory fish

330 Density of predatory fish varied according to the Protection Level and the Location
331 considered for all the studied methods and estimators. Density was significantly lower
332 in Menorca than the reference level for all methodologies, as did the *AD* estimator for
333 the Es Freus and Tabarca MPAs. Moreover, *ER*, TRT20 and TRT10 found that Cabo de
334 Palos MPA harboured statistically significant higher density, while CST found the
335 opposite pattern for the same MPA (Table 3). According to the protection levels, *AD*,
336 *ER*, TRT20 and TRT10 showed that generally no-take zones harboured greater density
337 of predatory fish (Table 2, Fig. 2b, 4).

338 However, when looking at the interactions, *ER*, TRT20, TRT10, TRT6 and CST found
339 that there was significantly greater density in buffer zones of the Cabo de Palos, Es
340 Freus, Menorca and Tabarca MPAs when compared to unprotected areas (except Es
341 Freus for the CST; Table 2). With *AD*, though, we found a greater density both in the
342 no-take and buffer zones of Es Freus, as well as CST did for the no-take of Cabo de

343 Palos MPA (Table 2). The dispersion model showed greater overdispersion in all MPAs
344 and the no-take zone with all the estimators, except the Es Freus MPA when the *ER* was
345 considered (Table 2). However, the zero-inflation model did not vary according to the
346 factors studied, which means that the proportion of zeros is equivalent among Locations
347 and Protection Levels. Marginal R^2 were around 39 – 43 % for all the estimators
348 considered.

349 3.3.3. Biomass of predatory fish

350 Biomass of predatory fish was significantly greater in no-take zones than in unprotected
351 areas for the TRT20, TRT10 and TRT6 estimators. Moreover, the TRT20 found that
352 Cabo de Palos MPA had greater biomass of predators while Menorca had the opposite
353 trend (Table 3, Fig. 2c).

354 Furthermore, TRT20, TRT10 and TRT6 found a positive and significant interaction
355 between Cabo de Palos, Es Freus and Tabarca and the buffer protection level, while
356 CST found positive and significant values of biomass in the no-take and buffer zones of
357 Cabo de Palos, and the no-take of Es Freus and Menorca MPAs (Table 3). In this case,
358 the zero-inflation model varied according to the location and protection level factors,
359 and it was significantly lower for the Cabo de Palos and Es Freus MPAs and both the
360 no-take and buffer zones for most estimators. The dispersion models were only
361 significant for the no-take zone when the TRT10 was considered. Marginal R^2 were
362 between 61 – 65 % for all estimators (Table 3).

363 **4. Discussion**

364 Understanding the best methodological approaches to evaluate MPA effectiveness is of
365 great interest for a correct assessment of the ecological effects of protection, particularly
366 when focusing on vulnerable and valuable species. Moreover, determining the

367 comparative performance of both no-take zones and buffer zones in MPAs is essential
368 to evaluate the potential conservation usefulness of multiple-use areas while allowing
369 certain human activities.

370 **Effects of the method and estimator applied on detecting MPA effectiveness**

371 The average detection distance (as estimated by the TRT+DS method) was greater as
372 the level of protection was lower (i.e., the level of human disturbance increased),
373 especially for some species, such as *E. costae* and *M. rubra*. In fact, regardless of the
374 protection level, the average distances were always greater than 2.5 m (the maximum
375 width taken into account in the CST). These findings compromise the reliability of the
376 density and biomass estimates made with CST, particularly in unprotected sites. The
377 influence of the behaviour of medium and large commercial fish species has been
378 previously signalled (Kulbicki & Sarramégn, 1991; Irigoyen et al., 2018). Therefore,
379 selecting a method to visually census reef fishes that best allows the detection of
380 predatory species in multiple-use MPAs (i.e. including zones where different human
381 uses occur, from no-use to regulated, compatible uses) is essential to correctly assess
382 MPA effectiveness.

383 Our results showed that mean values of species richness, density and biomass differed
384 among methods and estimators. Those census methods covering larger areas yielded
385 higher values of species richness for all locations and protection levels, and the values
386 diminished as the censuses covered smaller areas. Similar results have been previously
387 found when comparing methodologies, as significantly higher mean richness of reef
388 fishes were measured when sampling was done through line transects combined with
389 DS than CST (Thanopoulou et al., 2012). This is in concordance with the species-area
390 relationship (SAR), which states that an increase in the area sampled must be

391 accompanied by a greater species richness because of an increase in the habitat
392 heterogeneity (Kallimanis et al., 2008). However, the method *per se* may be accounting
393 for the increased species richness, as methods that use “first contact” are more likely to
394 record fish that may respond to the presence of divers than belt transects (Beck et al.,
395 2014). Moreover, for the same area covered by the transects, increasing their length
396 allows to detect a greater number of species than increasing their width (Loiseau et al.,
397 2016), since the detectability of species is complete on the line that marks the center of
398 the transect while it decreases rapidly as the fish is further away from that line (Kulbicki
399 et al., 2010; Bozec et al., 2011; Loiseau et al., 2016).

400 For their part, the values of density and biomass in our study increased as the area
401 covered by the methods or estimators decreased, being much greater for the *AD* and
402 *CST* and lower for the *DS* and *TRT20*. This observation is contrary to what is indicated
403 by previous studies (Kulbicki & Sarramégn, 1999; Thanopoulou et al., 2012) which
404 found that density estimates obtained with line transects combined with *DS* were higher
405 than those obtained with *CST*, because *DS* takes into account both the detectability of
406 the species and their behavior (including particularly shy species). The fact that our
407 density estimates made with *CST* were higher than those obtained by using *DS* or *TRT*
408 methods may be due to several reasons. Firstly, *CST* counts may be biased to
409 overestimate abundances of highly mobile or aggregated species. For instance, Ward-
410 Paige, Flemming & Lotze (2010), through a simulation model, found that counts go
411 overestimated when non-instantaneous census are performed (i.e. when counting
412 animals that enter the transect after the survey has started), and showed how biases
413 increased with fish speed, although slow moving fish were also overestimated. In fact,
414 calculations applied by Ward-Paige, Flemming & Lotze (2010) to the results of Sandin
415 et al., (2008), which supported the idea of the inverted trophic pyramid in Kingman and

416 Palmyra, were down-sized by two orders of magnitude when correcting for the detected
417 bias; in addition, this overestimation was empirically demonstrated by Bradley et al.,
418 (2017) to be one order of magnitude lower through mark-recapture and acoustic-
419 tracking methods. Secondly, increasing transect areas may have reduced the density
420 estimates as a "dilution effect" (i.e. area increasing more than the number of individuals
421 recorded, which leads to lower density estimates). Thus, if the purpose of the study is to
422 have more accurate estimates of density and biomass, methods surveying a larger area
423 should be preferred (Prato et al., 2017; Irigoyen et al., 2018). Thirdly, the lower density
424 found with the estimators covering larger areas may also be partially explained by a
425 "habitat effect" (García-Charton et al., 2004), derived from the complex and steep
426 topography of the sites in our study. Wider UVCs include sightings of fish from a wide
427 depth range because it incorporates shallow areas as well as deeper ones due to the
428 narrow and cliffy nature of the rocky reefs, and frequently the deeper areas included
429 other habitat types, such as soft bottoms and seagrass meadows (García-Charton &
430 Pérez-Ruzafa, 1998; García-Charton & Pérez-Ruzafa 2001). This has direct
431 consequences on fish counts, as the abundance of rocky dweller predatory fish species
432 like groupers is generally lower in both abovementioned habitats.

433 Therefore, in order to bring the most accurate estimates of fish richness, density and
434 biomass of predatory species, it is advisable to choose underwater visual census
435 methods that maximize the area covered by enlarging the length and width of the
436 transects. To achieve this, the DS is the most reliable method, as additionally it takes the
437 detectability of the species into account when calculating fish densities. However, for
438 modelling purposes, we have ascertained the difficulty of reaching 30 records per
439 transect for the species studied even in some no-take zones (e.g. Menorca). Thus, wide

440 TRT, and especially the TRT20, which allows the detection of most of the species, will
441 be a solution for increasing the area sampled and performing calculations easily,

442 **MPA effectiveness for the protection of predatory fish**

443 Our results showed some differences in the magnitude of the effect of MPAs on
444 predatory fish assemblage according to the method and estimator considered, although
445 altogether they indicate that all the studied MPAs, with the notable exception of
446 Menorca, are being ecologically effective for this important group.

447 The local primary productivity, as an environmental factor added to the fishing pressure
448 to explain the observed fish biomass both within and outside MPAs (Piroddi et al.,
449 2017), has not fully accounted for the patterns found. Although Menorca was the
450 location performing the worst in terms of conserving predatory fish, coinciding with the
451 lowest level of primary productivity, Cabo de Palos and Es Freus were the locations
452 where the highest values of density and biomass were found, which are not located at
453 any end of the gradient of primary productivity. Therefore, other MPA features and
454 environmental conditions must concurrently allow for an explanation of the patterns
455 observed.

456 Many factors have been found to affect the effectiveness of MPAs for the conservation
457 of fish, such as the time elapsed since the protection has been in force, the area of the
458 no-take and the buffer zones, and the level of enforcement. All MPAs included in this
459 study have been protected for long periods, from 17 (Menorca) to 31 years (Tabarca).
460 The number of years necessary to detect a response to protection varies with the species
461 considered, and for high level predators these effects are expected to be noticed in the
462 long term (from 5 to 20 years; Guidetti & Sala, 2007; Claudet et al., 2008; Edgar et al.,
463 2014; Friedlander et al., 2017). Thus, all MPAs in the study are susceptible to have

464 reached the age to show comparable results. It was previously thought that bigger no-
465 take zones would produce greater benefits (Claudet et al., 2008; Claudet et al., 2010;
466 Edgar et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2017), though it has been recently found that even
467 small but well enforced MPAs are effective for some commercial fish species and the
468 whole community in the Mediterranean Sea (Giakoumi et al., 2017) and for piscivore
469 populations worldwide (Rojo et al., 2019). In fact, enforcement has been found as a
470 critical factor driving ecological effectiveness (Guidetti et al., 2008; Edgar et al., 2014;
471 Giakoumi et al., 2017; Rojo et al., 2019). In our study, no-take zones ranged between 78
472 (Tabarca) and 2310 (Cabo de Gata) hectares. Cabo de Palos, followed by Tabarca and
473 Es Freus were the MPAs in which there were higher levels of enforcement, measured as
474 the total number of days per year with effective surveillance and no major episodes of
475 poaching (following Guidetti et al., 2008). In fact, Menorca was found to have few
476 patrols, thus the poor level of enforcement may explain, at least partially, the lack of
477 ecological effects of protection in this MPA.

478 Importantly, our results show that, when looking at specific MPAs, buffer zones support
479 higher density and biomass of predatory fish compared to unprotected areas. Moreover,
480 mean values appeared to be similar between no-take and buffer zones (even greater, as
481 is the case of Menorca), which may indicate that this partially protected areas are being
482 effective for the conservation of predatory fish. Buffer zones are traditionally seen as
483 less beneficial for the species than no-take zones (Lester & Halpern, 2008; Sciberras et
484 al., 2013; Giakoumi et al., 2017; Sala & Giakoumi, 2017), especially when the species
485 being harvested are the same that are protected in no-take areas (Sciberras et al., 2013).
486 Some authors even consider that they might reduce the effectiveness of the entire MPA
487 when their sizes are excessively large, as these areas are attractive for local artisanal
488 fishers, thus reducing MPA efficacy (Claudet et al., 2008). However, it has been

489 recently found that buffer zones can be ecologically effective when they are well
490 regulated and located adjacent to fully protected areas (Abecasis et al., 2015; Zupan et
491 al., 2018), as is the case of the MPAs in our study. Buffer zones benefit from the
492 presence of adjacent no-take zones, either through juveniles and adult spillover or by
493 larval supply. The fact that they may enhance ecological benefits is especially important
494 in areas where traditionally many livelihoods are linked to the sea (Di Franco et al.,
495 2016). The activities allowed in buffer areas are usually small-scale fisheries and
496 recreational diving, the first representing around 80% of the fishing boats in the
497 Mediterranean Sea, hence being an activity of enormous socio-economic importance for
498 the local communities (Maynou et al., 2013). Thus, if buffer zones are ecologically
499 effective, they may help to achieve a win-win scenario in which both fish and fishermen
500 would benefit from protection measures (Dalton, 2010).

501 In conclusion, partially protected areas of the studied MPAs are effective for the
502 conservation of predatory fish species. Thus, well-managed multiple-use MPAs are still
503 to be retained as important tools to conserve marine resources and protect marine
504 biodiversity. Regarding the methodologies applied, most methods or estimators allowed
505 the detection of the effects of protection on fish assemblages, but they yielded different
506 patterns. Those UVC methodologies covering larger areas allowed for a better detection
507 of most of the predatory species studied, regardless of the protection level considered,
508 and yielded more accurate estimates for the response variables. This is particularly
509 important because UVCs are used worldwide for the evaluation of fish populations and
510 MPA performance, and our results show that CSTs may provide biased estimates,
511 particularly when comparing among levels of human disturbance. This is essential
512 because in the future MPAs, and particularly multiple-use MPAs, will tend to increase,
513 thus identifying the best methodology will allow a better assessment of MPA

514 effectiveness. Therefore, we recommend to routinely adopt methodologies that include
515 larger sampled areas (and, more specifically, to use TRT+DS or TRT20) when
516 surveying predatory fish populations, for instance to evaluate MPA performance or to
517 measure demographic parameters of the species.

518

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531

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7. Tables

Table 1. Results of the GLMs for the estimators applied (TRT20, TRT10, TRT6 and CST) showing the variables explaining fish species richness, based on model selection. Models excluded by AIC are not shown in the table.

Parameter	TRT20			TRT10			TRT6			CST		
	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	-0.08	0.20	0.70	-0.25	0.22	0.25	-0.61	0.17	<0.001	-0.25	0.22	0.25
LOC CP	1.07	0.23	<0.001	1.11	0.25	<0.001	1.31	0.17	<0.001	-0.97	0.42	0.02
LOC EF	0.95	0.25	<0.001	1.00	0.27	<0.001	1.14	0.18	<0.001	0.25	0.32	0.43
LOC MN	-0.17	0.30	0.56	-0.10	0.32	0.75	0.09	0.21	0.68	-0.85	0.40	0.03
LOC TA	-0.17	0.33	0.60	-0.34	0.38	0.38	0.25	0.21	0.24	-0.56	0.42	0.18
PL BZ	0.28	0.29	0.34	0.14	0.33	0.69	0.62	0.12	<0.001	0.19	0.33	0.55
PL NT	0.82	0.30	0.01	0.89	0.33	0.01	0.84	0.13	<0.001	0.76	0.39	0.02
LOCCP: PLBZ	0.10	0.34	0.77	0.32	0.38	0.40				2.29	0.50	<0.001
LOCEF: PLBZ	0.17	0.35	0.64	0.42	0.39	0.28				0.13	0.45	0.77
LOCMN: PLBZ	0.69	0.40	0.08	0.66	0.45	0.14				1.19	0.51	0.02
LOCTA: PLBZ	0.42	0.44	0.34	0.86	0.50	0.08				1.42	0.51	0.01
LOCCP: PLNT	-0.05	0.35	0.90	-0.02	0.38	0.97				1.81	0.52	<0.001
LOCEF: PLNT	-0.53	0.39	0.18	-0.46	0.41	0.26				0.09	0.47	0.86
LOCMN: PLNT	-0.13	0.46	0.78	-0.17	0.49	0.73				-0.25	0.65	0.70
LOCTA: PLNT	0.63	0.44	0.16	-0.64	0.50	0.20				0.69	0.55	0.21
AIC	821.34			776.92			729.11			663.70		
Marginal R ²	0.52			0.55			0.54			0.54		

LOC: location. CP: Cabo de Palos. EF: Es Freus. MN: Menorca. TA: Tabarca. PL: protection level. BZ: buffer zone. NT: no-take zone. The final models were: Estimator \sim ZN * PL + ZN + PL. The estimate (including the sign), standard error and p-value of the parameters are shown.

Table 2. Results of the GLMMs for the estimators applied (*ER*, *AD*, TRT20, TRT10, TRT6 and CST) showing the variables explaining the density response variable. Models excluded by AIC are not shown in the table.

	<i>ER</i>		<i>AD</i>			TRT20		TRT10			TRT6			CST		
<i>Random effects</i>	Variance	SD	Variance	SD		Variance	SD	Variance	SD	Variance	SD	Variance	SD	Variance	SD	
Parameter																
ST	0.19	0.43	0.30	0.53		<0.001	<0.001	0.23	0.48	0.12	0.35	0.33	0.57			
<i>Conditional model</i>	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	
Intercept	-3.46	0.43	<0.001	-3.13	0.51	<0.001	-6.39	0.43	<0.001	-5.78	0.5	<0.001	-5.34	0.48	<0.001	
LOC CP	1.51	0.49	0.00	0.23	0.59	0.70	1.45	0.47	0.00	1.29	0.6	0.02	0.87	0.52	0.09	
LOC EF	0.47	0.58	0.41	-1.60	0.68	0.02	0.24	0.55	0.66	-0.20	0.6	0.75	-0.40	0.58	0.49	
LOC MN	-1.40	0.52	0.01	-2.76	0.62	<0.001	-1.47	0.52	0.01	-1.60	0.6	0.01	-1.63	0.59	0.01	
LOC TA	-0.62	0.55	0.26	-1.55	0.65	0.02	-0.64	0.53	0.23	-0.75	0.6	0.23	-0.70	0.62	0.26	
PL BZ	-0.40	0.64	0.53	-0.57	0.84	0.50	-0.49	0.65	0.45	-0.73	0.7	0.31	-0.87	0.69	0.20	
PL NT	1.57	0.66	0.02	2.07	0.90	0.02	1.49	0.64	0.02	1.56	0.7	0.02	0.89	0.71	0.39	
LOCCP: PLBZ	1.46	0.73	0.05	1.56	1.09	0.11	1.47	0.73	0.05	1.70	0.8	0.04	0.61	0.77	0.01	
LOCEF: PLBZ	1.90	0.83	0.02	3.51	0.99	0.00	1.93	0.81	0.02	2.11	0.9	0.02	2.13	0.82	0.01	
LOCMN: PLBZ	2.20	0.76	0.00	1.91	1.00	0.06	2.24	0.79	0.01	2.29	0.9	0.01	2.10	0.85	0.01	
LOCTA: PLBZ	1.56	0.78	0.05	1.66	1.06	0.10	1.52	0.78	0.05	1.85	0.9	0.04	1.80	0.86	0.04	
LOCCP: PLNT	0.11	0.77	0.89	-0.27	1.19	0.80	0.12	0.71	0.87	0.06	0.8	0.94	1.07	0.80	0.18	

LOCEF: PLNT	0.71	0.88	0.42	3.04	1.21	0.01	1.57	0.86	0.51	0.02	0.9	0.99	1.25	0.92	0.17	0.75	0.95	0.44
LOCMN: PLNT	-0.53	0.82	0.52	-1.72	1.07	0.11	-0.44	0.79	0.57	-0.47	0.9	0.59	0.14	0.92	0.90	0.55	0.91	0.55
LOCTA: PLNT	0.30	0.82	0.71	-1.30	1.06	0.22	0.32	0.76	0.68	0.01	0.9	0.99	0.75	0.91	0.41	1.54	0.93	0.10

Zero-inflation model

Parameter	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	-4.23	1.30	0.00	-20.85	3293.04	1.00	-4.46	1.74	0.01	-3.78	1.29	0.00	-3.31	1.05	0.00	-20.58	4664.68	1.00

Dispersion model

Parameter	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	-1.20	0.29	<0.001	-1.5	0.25	<0.001	-1.34	0.27	<0.001	-1.47	0.31	<0.001	-1.44	0.30	<0.001	-0.59	0.45	0.20
LOC CP	1.48	0.34	<0.001	1.2	0.29	<0.001	1.53	0.33	<0.001	1.63	0.37	<0.001	0.68	0.38	<0.001	0.50	0.52	0.34
LOC EF	0.66	0.37	0.07	0.7	0.31	0.02	0.85	0.36	0.02	1.04	0.43	0.02	1.34	0.46	0.00	-0.16	0.49	0.75
LOC MN	1.65	0.58	0.00	1.7	0.40	<0.001	1.35	0.53	0.00	1.46	0.63	0.02	1.08	0.52	0.04	0.90	0.89	0.31
LOC TA	1.41	0.50	0.01	1.8	0.44	<0.001	1.41	0.44	<0.001	1.39	0.50	0.01	1.06	0.51	0.04	-0.02	0.52	0.98
PL BZ	0.21	0.32	0.51	-0.2	0.27	0.41	0.06	0.30	0.85	0.30	0.34	0.37	0.27	0.33	0.42	0.31	0.46	0.50
PL NT	0.83	0.36	0.02	0.3	0.30	0.37	0.86	0.35	0.01	1.28	0.42	0.00	0.83	0.40	0.04	1.01	0.50	0.04
AIC	1540.01			1633.52			1501.11			1382.93			1213.52			1050.44		
R ² marginal	0.49			0.54			0.47			0.41			0.39			0.54		

LOC: location. CP: Cabo de Palos. EF: Es Freus. MN: Menorca. TA: Tabarca. PL: protection level. BZ: buffer zone. NT: no-take zone. The final models were: Abundance Estimator ~ ZN * PL + ZN + PL + offset(log(area transect) + (1 | ST)). The estimate (including the sign), standard error

and p-value of the parameters are shown for the conditional, zero-inflated and dispersion models, as well as the variance and standard deviation of the random effects model.

Table 3. Results of the GLMMs for the estimators applied (TRT20, TRT10, TRT6 and CST) showing the variables explaining the biomass response variable. Models excluded by AIC are not shown in the table.

	TRT20		TRT10			TRT6			CST			
<i>Random effects</i>												
Parameter	Variance	SD	Variance	SD		Variance	SD		Variance	SD		
ST	0.28	0.53	0.44	0.66		0.48	0.70		0.47	0.69		
<i>Conditional model</i>												
Parameter	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	0.15	0.45	0.74	0.59	0.44	0.18	1.05	0.44	0.02	-0.05	0.53	0.93
LOC CP	1.04	0.52	0.05	0.86	0.53	0.10	0.72	0.54	0.18	-0.44	0.86	0.61
LOC EF	-0.02	0.56	0.98	-0.65	0.59	0.27	-0.96	0.59	0.10	-0.50	0.70	0.47
LOC MN	-1.33	0.60	0.03	-1.15	0.62	0.06	-1.10	0.63	0.08	-1.79	0.81	0.03
LOC TA	-0.18	0.63	0.77	-0.62	0.65	0.34	-0.59	0.66	0.37	-0.29	0.81	0.73
PL BZ	-0.23	0.63	0.71	-0.60	0.70	0.39	-0.54	0.72	0.45	-0.19	0.75	0.80
PL NT	1.49	0.62	0.02	1.69	0.64	0.01	1.73	0.65	0.01	0.29	0.81	0.72
LOCCP: PLBZ	2.73	0.78	<0.001	3.34	0.86	<0.001	3.17	0.89	<0.001	4.22	1.12	<0.001

LOCEF: PLBZ	1.72	0.81	0.03	2.83	0.89	0.00	2.83	0.92	0.00	1.82	1.01	0.07
LOCMN: PLBZ	2.29	0.84	0.01	2.47	0.92	0.01	2.17	0.96	0.02	1.44	1.10	0.19
LOCTA: PLBZ	1.00	0.86	0.25	2.00	0.93	0.03	1.98	0.98	0.04	1.65	1.09	0.13
LOCCP: PLNT	1.46	0.79	0.06	1.39	0.84	0.10	1.25	0.86	0.14	4.46	1.18	<0.001
LOCEF: PLNT	0.78	0.85	0.35	0.19	0.91	0.84	0.34	0.92	0.72	2.25	1.13	0.05
LOCMN: PLNT	0.38	0.86	0.66	0.07	0.92	0.94	-0.07	0.96	0.94	2.47	1.21	0.04
LOCTA: PLNT	1.08	0.87	0.22	1.16	0.92	0.20	1.01	0.95	0.29	1.61	1.15	0.16
<i>Zero-inflation model</i>												
Parameter	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	0.44	0.33	0.18	0.49	0.32	0.13	0.42	0.32	0.19	0.67	0.35	0.05
LOC CP	-3.26	0.79	<0.001	-2.90	0.67	<0.001	-2.30	0.56	<0.001	-0.09	0.46	0.84
LOC EF	-1.95	0.57	<0.001	-1.45	0.49	0.00	-1.43	0.49	0.00	-0.46	0.51	0.38
LOC MN	-0.34	0.41	0.41	-0.08	0.41	0.84	0.16	0.40	0.69	0.93	0.48	0.05
LOC TA	-0.80	0.46	0.08	-0.76	0.45	0.09	-0.21	0.43	0.62	-0.01	0.50	0.98
PL BZ	-0.92	0.36	0.01	-0.84	0.34	0.01	-0.80	0.33	0.01	-1.90	0.36	<0.001
PL NT	-1.95	0.58	<0.001	-1.87	0.53	<0.001	-1.45	0.46	0.00	-2.73	0.51	<0.001
<i>Dispersion model</i>												
Parameter	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	SE	P
Intercept	-0.16	0.18	0.36	0.03	0.19	0.90	0.07	0.20	0.71	-0.10	0.32	0.77
PL BZ	0.10	0.24	0.67	0.00	0.26	0.99	-0.16	0.27	0.54	-0.50	0.38	0.20
PL NT	0.52	0.28	0.07	0.60	0.31	0.05	0.62	0.33	0.06	-0.15	0.39	0.71
AIC	3918.71			3672.23			3445.32			2442.64		
Marginal R ²	0.64			0.64			0.61			0.65		

LOC: location. CP: Cabo de Palos. EF: Es Freus. MN: Menorca. TA: Tabarca. PL: protection level. BZ: buffer zone. NT: no-take zone. The final models were: biomass Estimator \sim ZN * PL + ZN + PL + offset(log(area transect) + (1 | ST)). The estimate (including the sign), standard error and p-value of the parameters are shown for the conditional, zero-inflated and dispersion models, as well as the variance and standard deviation of the random effects model.

8. Figure legends

Figure 1. Location of the MPAs sampled in the coast of Spain (A): Cabo de Gata MPA (B), Cabo de Palos-Islas Hormigas MPA (C), Tabarca MPA (D), Es Freus MPA (E) and Norte de Menorca MPA (F). No-take zones (light gray) and buffer zones (dark gray) are highlighted in the maps.

Figure 2. Mean richness (A), density (B) and biomass (C) according to the protection level and the location for the estimators included in the study. NT: no-take zone. BZ: buffer zone. UP: unprotected area. CG: Cabo de Gata. CP: Cabo de Palos. TA: Tabarca. EF: Es Freus. MN: Menorca. DS refers to the density value calculated through the distance sampling theory.

Figure 3. Mean sighting distances of the 7 most abundant species included in the analyses by protection level. Data were pooled across locations. NT: no-take zone. BZ: buffer zone. UP: unprotected area.

Figure 4. Mean abundance according to the protection level and the location for the ER estimator. NT: no-take zone. BZ: buffer zone. UP: unprotected area. CG: Cabo de Gata. CP: Cabo de Palos. TA: Tabarca. EF: Es Freus. MN: Menorca.

9. Appendices legends

Appendix A. Features characterizing the MPAs included in the study.

Appendix B. Complete set of species recorded in the study, and the percentage occurrence in the transects performed, including the two methodologies TRT+DS and CST. Species selected for the study for being in at least 10 % of the transects are highlighted in bold.