



A new reef marine reserve in the southern Arabian Gulf – Jebel Ali (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)

Just in time to make a major contribution to IYOR, Dubai municipality (United Arab Emirates) declared protected the rich coral areas between Jebel Ali and Ras Ghantoot in November 1997 and added full legal status in February 1998. The area harbors one of the Gulf's richest ecosystems with 34 coral species and 77 reef fish species counted to date. Corals grow on subtidal

hardgrounds, but do not form true reefs. The coral community is either dominated by branching corals, mainly *Acropora* species (the dominant being *A. clathrata*), or by massives (two community types dominated by massives occur – one dominated by big *Porites* colonies, and one by small Faviid colonies).

The coral areas were almost accidentally discovered during a dredging pre-survey seeking to identify subtidal sand reservoirs. Subsequently, the value of the ecosystem was established (Riegl and Korrübel 1995) and a concept was developed for the marine reserve (Riegl 1996). This area is of particular ecological importance, as it represents one of the few remaining coastal stretches in the central UAE which have remained without major coastal alterations and dredging. It is directly adjacent to the Jebel Ali freezone and port, the biggest man-made, dredged port in the world. Over 1996/7 the coral communities experienced severe die-off, mainly of *Acropora* species, due to abnormally hot summer temperatures. As temperature related die-back can be considered a natural phenomenon (Shinn 1976), it does not reduce the reserve's value. The scientific value of the area was already demonstrated by a new coral disease which was discovered there (Korrübel and Riegl 1998). Furthermore, it also demonstrates that scientists and their research results do have the ability to convince responsible administrators to protect valuable areas.

The photograph, taken in early 1996 near Ras Ghantoot, shows a Sombre Sweetlip (*Plectorhinchus sordidus*) over a Faviid community with a strong *Porites* component and *Acropora* growth regenerating from an earlier disturbance.

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Reef sites

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