Establishment of blue mussel beds to enhance fish habitats

Human activity has impacted many coastal fjords causing degeneration of the structure and function of the fish habitats. In Nørrefjord, Denmark, local fishermen complained of declining fish catches which could be attributed to eutrophication and extraction of sediments over several decades. This study aimed to establish blue mussel beds (Mytilus edulis) to increase structural complexity and increase the abundance of fish and epifauna in Nørrefjord. It was expected that the mussels would improve water transparency and increase the depth range and coverage of eelgrass (Zostera marina). New methods for mussel production and -bed construction were investigated in collaboration with local volunteer fishermen. The effect of the artificial mussel beds was most evident on a small scale. Video observations directly at the beds (Impact area) demonstrated increased biodiversity and a three times higher abundance of mesopredator fish compared to the Control area. Water clarity and eelgrass coverage were unchanged. Two methods for establishing mussel beds were tested. A total of 44 tons of blue mussels were produced and established in beds over an area of 121,000 m². Production of blue mussels directly on hemp sacs hanging on long-lines was the most effective method. This new method is potentially a useful management tool to improve fish habitats.