

DEEP LEADS CORAL CONSERVATION RESEARCH

The Deep, Hull's £45.5 million Millennium Commission lottery project, has today announced that it is to work jointly with the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) on a groundbreaking project researching cold-water corals, which are under threat from deep-water trawling. The species known as *Lophelia pertusa* builds reef structures in water depths down to 1000 metres. Together with the SAMS scientists the Deep Aquarist team will study the species to develop a further understanding of its biology, making a crucial contribution to its conservation. The coral will be displayed to further the public's understanding in The Deep's Phase 2 Twilight Zone, due to open to the public next year. The Deep is contributing £10,000 to SAMS to set up a dedicated *Lophelia* research lab. Representatives from SAMS will be meeting with Katy Rigby and the Deep's Aquarist Team on Thursday 19th January at The Deep.

The Deep's Assistant Curator Katy explained:

“We're thrilled for this unique opportunity to work with SAMS on such a pioneering conservation research project. *Lophelia* is a reef forming hard coral. It is a Convention for international Trade in Endangered Species CITES 1 listed coral, and is currently threatened by deep-water trawling. Collection of this species is carefully controlled, however, colonies can occasionally be collected during the decommissioning of oil platforms or from maintenance work carried out to the platforms under water where *Lophelia* grows as a fouling organism. This is how we hope to obtain some specimens to have on show and research at The Deep.”

Dr Murray Roberts, who leads the *Lophelia* research at SAMS, said:

“This collaboration with the Deep represents a great opportunity for us to share experiences, and to bring our science to a much wider audience. We have been keeping *Lophelia* in research aquaria for the last five years, but through this new initiative will be able to scale up our facilities to study more aspects of these unusual deep-sea reef-building corals. Scientists know so little about how these colonial animals function in the deep sea, and most people are amazed to learn that some of the largest coral structures are now being discovered in deep waters to the south west of Ireland and along the Norwegian coast.”

Background

Lophelia pertusa is a temperate hard coral. It can be found in the Atlantic mainly below 200m, on the European Continental shelf, Faroe Islands and Norwegian shelf. It also lives on top of the Darwin Mounds, which cover an area of 100km², at depths of 100m located 150km NW of Lewis in the Rockall Trough. Here they are protected by emergency regulations banning trawling in the area. This should be made into permanent legislation soon.