

# Discovering the sea at Dunstaffnage

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SCIENTISTS from Dunstaffnage's Scottish Association of Marine Science (SAMS) have been working with their Dutch counterparts on coral reefs in a bid to find out 'how they tick'.

The research vessel *Pelagia* has berthed in Oban's North Pier this summer in between trips to the Western Isles and off the west coast of Ireland.

The ship belongs to the National Institute of Sea Research of the Netherlands with SAMS scientists like Dr Andrew Davies and Dr Murray Roberts on board.

Gerard Duineveld, is the chief scientist aboard the *Pelagia*.

He said: 'We are working with the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) on a European project investigating coral reefs. We have been looking at special deep water coral reefs off Ireland called the Rockall Bank, Rockall Trough and Porcupine Bank which are 24 hours sailing from Galway. These corals are considered to be special

biodiversity communities. We investigate the fish and what other sea life there is in the reefs.'

Cameras are sent 600metres below the water and pictures are beamed and recorded back to the *Pelagia*. The scientists then send 'bottom landers' onto the particular points of the reefs they want to analyse.

But why are they investigating these reefs?

Gerard says their work could be important for discovering more about fish and other sea life tick which could be important in terms of halting the decline of fish stocks in the sea. He said: 'We think reefs may provide hiding places for fish and we are interested in how reefs recycle food from the particles they eat from the water. We also measure the amount of oxygen they use and have discovered the reefs don't need light to exist - unlike tropical reefs.'

After working off Ireland the *Pelagia* set sail for the Western Isles and the Mingulay coral reef complex which might have existed for thousands of years but scientists know very little about it.