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1 **Taxonomic diversity hidden inside the mantle of *Octopus vulgaris*:**

2 **valuable source of information**

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57 24 laboratory.

25 **Abstract**

1
2 26 The common octopus, *Octopus vulgaris*, is a very important demersal fishery resource targeted,
3
4 27 among other fleets, by freezer bottom-trawlers in the Mauritanian Economic Exclusive Zone
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6
7 28 (MEEZ). From August 2010 to September 2011, a total of 1696 octopuses caught in the MEEZ
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9
10 29 where analysed. Many organisms trapped into the octopuses' mantle were found and identified,
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12 30 which are jointly swept while the trawling catches the targeted species. A latitudinal (by ecoregion)
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14 31 and depth study was performed to determine differences in the taxonomic diversity of these hidden
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17 32 organisms. The findings showed that the diversity patterns were similar to already established in the
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19 33 area based on scientific surveys. Therefore, this ignored bycatch could provide complementary
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22 34 ecological information of the habitat of *O. vulgaris*.

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26 36 **Keywords:** Octopus, Bottom trawl, Species richness, Spatial distribution, Mauritanian waters
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50 **Introduction**

1
2 51 The common octopus *Octopus vulgaris* (Cuvier, 1797) inhabits a wide spectrum of benthic
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4 52 substrates (e.g., rocky bottoms, reefs, grass beds and soft sediments) from coastal to outer shelf
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6
7 53 worldwide (Jouffre 1998; Sauer et al. 2019). This species is a very important demersal fishing
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9 54 resource around the world, supporting artisanal and industrial fisheries (Roper et al. 1984; Xavier
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11 55 et al. 2015). Its ecological adaptability is also reflected in the diverse fishing gears used for its
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13 56 capture (e.g., lures, hooks and lines, pots and spears), although the bottom trawling is often the most
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15 57 relevant in landings (Roper et al. 1984; Sauer et al. 2019). One of the most important bottom trawl
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17 58 fisheries in the world targeting cephalopods occurs in the Northwest African waters, from the
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19 59 Saharan Bank to Senegal (e.g., Sobrino and García 1992; Balguerías et al. 2000; Sauer et al. 2019).
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21 60 This region is enriched by the Canary Current Upwelling System, one of the four main eastern
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23 61 boundary upwelling ecosystems in the world, where a variable year-round upwelling occurs
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25 62 (Demarcq and Faure, 2000; Aristegui et al. 2009; Klenz et al. 2018).

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27 63 The Mauritanian Exclusive Economic Zone (MEEZ) has been exploited by a great variety of
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29 64 foreign fleets, being the most important fishing grounds for Spanish cephalopod-targeted freezer
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31 65 trawlers since the mid XX century. It has changed only in the first decade of the XXI century, when
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33 66 the sustainable fisheries partnership agreement (SFPA) between Mauritania and the European Union
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35 67 was modified (Council Decision, of 18 December 2012, Official Journal of the European Union,
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37 68 number 2012/827/EU). Due to its commercial and ecological importance, numerous studies have
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39 69 addressed the fisheries, biology and population dynamic of the common octopus (e.g., Balguerías
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41 70 et al. 2002; Murphy et al. 2002; Perales-Raya et al. 2010, 2014; Jurado-Ruzafa et al. 2014). But
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43 71 surprisingly, only one study has estimated the overall bycatch of this fishing activity in the MEEZ
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45 72 (Vázquez-Rowe et al. 2012) and another one, its impact on benthic ecosystems (Atkinson et al.
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47 73 2011). The absence of reliable time series of catches of *O. vulgaris* in the region, its overfishing and
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49 74 the risk of irreversible stock depletion are worrisome (Sauer et al. 2019). In addition, although to
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75 count discards is mandatory to achieve a reliable assessment of any fishing activity ([Alverson et al.](#)
76 [1994](#)), it is still a pending issue in the region. Due to scientific observers onboard were not allowed
77 in the past, an intense sampling program was designed for the fishery in MEEZ by the Centro
78 Oceanográfico de Canarias del Instituto Español de Oceanografía-Centro Superior de
79 Investigaciones Científicas (COC of IEO-CSIC) between August 2010 to September 2011, in the
80 framework of a collaborative project with ANACEF (“Asociación Nacional de Armadores de
81 Buques Congeladores de Pesca de Cefalópodos”), whose associated cephalopod-targeted freezer
82 trawlers operated in the Mauritanian waters. During this project, commercial landings were
83 analyzed by researchers who highlighted the presence of numerous organisms swept jointly and
84 ‘trapped’ into the octopuses’ mantle (Supplementary Information Fig. S11). In this context, in the
85 absence of information on discards for commercial fleet activity, a question raised up: could these
86 organisms trapped into the octopuses’ mantles describe or give information about the taxonomic
87 diversity in the region? Trawling samplings are considered an essential step for extrapolating
88 information from benthic samples to the larger scale of habitats ([de Juan et al. 2013](#)). In fact, many
89 specific scientific surveys have addressed the study of benthonic assemblages along the Mauritanian
90 coast and shelf ([Gascuel et al. 2010](#); [Jouffre and Inejih 2005](#); [Le Lœuff and von Cosel 1998](#)), which
91 finally have entailed an additional trawling impact on the bottom to the impact performed by
92 commercial fisheries ([Sauer et al. 2019](#)).

93 Indirect approaches to describe the ecosystem taxonomical diversity using stomach content
94 analyses have been used in the Atlantic Moroccan bottoms ([Abdellaoui et al. 2017](#)), according to
95 literature (e.g., [Cherel et al. 2004](#); [Lansdell and Young 2007](#)). Knowing that they do not represent
96 the true diversity of ecosystems and that the information on the status of this fishing ground is scarce,
97 their seasonal and geographical variation may serve as tool to detect disturbances in the region,
98 supporting management recommendations where the collaboration of cephalopod-targeted freezer
99 trawlers would play a role. The main goal of present study was (i) to determine the species found

100 within the octopuses' mantle, and (ii) to test if the taxonomic diversity found follow the same pattern
101 of spatial pattern (latitude and depth) described in the MEEZ and driving by upwelling phenomena
102 and the seasonal displacements of thermal fronts (Jager 1993; Le Lœuff and von Cosel 1998;
103 Demarcq and Faure 2000; Aristegui et al. 2009).

104 **Material and methods**

105 The sample collection strategy (by vessel) designed for the mentioned collaborative project
106 consisted of picking weekly one octopus of each commercial weight category, when possible, based
107 on the commercial classification by Mitsubishi (see Jouffre et al. 2000). A total of 2622 *O. vulgaris*
108 were analyzed from August 2010 to September 2011. Data used here correspond to the 1696
109 octopuses which contained some trapped organism/s in the mantle, varying from 129.2 g to 6961.2
110 g of total weight. The mid-point of the positions registered for the 212 hauls in which each of them
111 were caught has been used as a georeference proxy (Supplementary Information Fig. SI2). The
112 mantle-trapped organisms were extracted, photographed, labelled, and conserved frozen to be
113 examined later. Every organism was identified to the lowest taxonomic level possible and crossed
114 with data of the octopuses in whose mantles were found.

115 Depth information was assigned based on the provided coordinates by vessels and three strata
116 were considered (Duineveld et al. 1993): shallow (<50 m), medium (50-100 m) and deep (>100 m).
117 Besides, samples were also grouped in three latitudinal ecoregions (Gascuel et al. 2007; Kidé et al.
118 2015): northern (>19°15'N), central (19°15'N-17°40'N) and southern (<17°40'N). Matrix
119 information on the presence/absence of species by zone (depth strata and ecoregions) is presented
120 in Supplementary Information Table SI1.

121 The species richness was expressed as the total number of species found into the octopuses'
122 mantle in each zone. Two taxonomic diversity measures were estimated based on distance between
123 each pair of individuals as defined by a Linnaean classification tree (Warwick and Clarke 1995;

125 [Clarke and Warwick 2001](#)): average taxonomic distinctness (AvTD or Δ^+) and variation in
126 taxonomic distinctness (VarTD or Λ^+). The average taxonomic distinctness defined the mean
127 number of steps up the hierarchy that must be taken to reach a taxonomic rank common to two
128 species, computed across all possible pairs of species:

$$\Delta^+ = \left[\sum_{i < j} \omega_{ij} \right] / [S(S - 2)/2]$$

130 where ω is the branch length between species pairs and S is the number of observed species in the
131 sample. The variation in taxonomic distinctness reflects the degree to which certain taxonomic
132 groups are over- or under- represented in one sample. This index can help distinguish between
133 taxonomic trees that may have the same number of species but an unequal structure tree, considering
134 taxonomic units:

$$\Lambda^+ = \left[\sum_{i < j} (\omega_{ij} - \Delta^+)^2 \right] / [S(S - 2)/2]$$

136 where ω is the branch length between species pairs and S is the number of observed species in the
137 sample and Δ^+ is the average taxonomic distinctness for the sample as defined above. The
138 taxonomic hierarchies used in this study were species, genus, family, order, class and phylum.

139 In order to check if the taxonomic diversity follows a similar spatial distribution pattern as
140 described in the literature, pairwise similarity matrices using Jaccard's index were computed and a
141 dendrogram was obtained to visualize them ([Warwick and Clarke 1995](#); [Clarke and Warwick 2001](#)).

142 All statistical analyses were performed in R statistical and computing environment ([R Development
143 Core Team, 2020](#)).

147 Results and discussion

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3 148 A total of 66 species present into the mantles of octopuses were identified and classified into
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6 149 eight phyla (Fig.1, Supplementary Information Table SI1). The phylum Chordata (mainly
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8 150 Osteichthyes) and Arthropoda (mainly Decapoda) were the most common taxonomic groups in
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11 151 the three ecoregions and depth strata considered in the present study, although other phyla
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13 152 acquired a higher prevalence depending on ecoregion: Cnidaria in the northern, Annelida and
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15 153 Mollusca in the central and Annelida in the southern (Fig. 2). Five species of Osteichthyes were
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18 154 reiteratively found into mantles: *Arnoglossus imperialis* (Bothidae), *Microchirus boscanion*
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20 155 (Soleidae), *Helicolenus dactylopterus* (Sebastidae) and *Dentex macrophthalmus* (Sparidae)
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23 156 characterized by a benthic life-style, and *Capros aper* (Caproidae) with a benthopelagic
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25 157 behaviour (Supplementary Information Table SI1). In general, *H. dactylopterus* and *P.*
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27 158 *heterocarpus* only appeared in the northern ecoregion and *M. boscanion* was only sampled in
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30 159 the southern ecoregion. Including depth strata, fish species were mainly found in the medium
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32 160 strata (50-100 m) in the northern and in the deep strata in the central zone, whereas in the
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35 161 southern zone was similar observed in all strata (Supplementary Information Table SI1). Two
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37 162 Decapoda (*Munida cf. iris* and *Plesionika heterocarpus*) were commonly collected too.

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41 163 The highest species richness ($n= 34$) was noted in the northern ecoregion between 50 and
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43 164 100 m of depth, and the lowest ones ($n= 3$), in samples from the central ecoregion at depth >100
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46 165 m (Table 1). Simulation test on Δ^+ using funnels showed that sites' values generally fell within
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48 166 the 95% confidence funnel, and only one case (southern ecoregion at >100 m of depth) was
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51 167 lower than the expected mean (Fig. 3). The highest values of Δ^+ were reached in the central
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53 168 ecoregion, while the highest values of Λ^+ were observed in the southern ecoregion (Table 1).
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55 169 These findings agreed with the idea that the diversity in the shallow Mauritanian waters follows
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58 170 a spatial gradient (latitudinal and bathymetric) promoted by the favourable environmental
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171 conditions (Jager 1993; Demarcq and Faure 2000; Kidé et al. 2015). A permanent upwelling
172 occurs in the northern ecoregion, while it is seasonal (from December to March) in the central
173 ecoregion (Le Loeuff and von Cosel 1998; Arístegui et al. 2009). The presence of processes
174 provides higher plankton productivity supporting a large variety of fish communities (Hagen,
175 2001; Zeeberg et al. 2006; Kidé et al. 2015). That is reflected in the cluster obtained, where a
176 clear latitudinal separation was noted (Fig. 4). On another hand, the MEEZ is considered a
177 transitional zone between temperate and tropical marine fauna (Le Loeuff and von Cosel 1998;
178 García-Isarch et al. 2017), which may explain the high taxonomic diversity found in the three
179 ecoregions. Finally, the type of bottom (soft vs. rocky) between shallow and medium strata also
180 seemed to influence Δ^+ , being higher in rocky bottoms, as occurs in other geographical regions
181 (Tuya et al. 2019).

182 In conclusion, despite the limitations assumed in the present study (mainly in terms of
183 quantitative-based results), our findings followed the expected diversity pattern in the study
184 area. Cephalopod-targeted fisheries occurs worldwide (Sauer et al. 2019), but scientific
185 observations onboard are still scarce, and discards are poorly studied or not reported at all. The
186 analyzed hidden organisms are not even considered discards and at present this information is
187 lost. Based on the present results, the consideration and sampling of these hidden specimens
188 within the mantle of the commercially caught octopuses (and/or other cephalopods) may
189 provide valuable indirect information about the ecosystems where octopuses inhabit. This
190 indirect information-source may be considered complementary to the high-cost scientific
191 surveys.

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3 195 **Authors' contributions** AJR conceived the study, conducted the sampling and wrote the paper;

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6 196 VDN, MNC, MGP and JGJ carried out the sampling and the identification of marine organisms;

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8 197 VMT performed the statistical analysis and wrote the manuscript. All authors commented on

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11 198 previous versions of the manuscript and approved the final manuscript.

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25 203 **Compliance with ethical standards**

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29 204 **Conflicts of interest/Competing interests** The authors declare that they have no conflict of

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32 205 interest.

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35 206 **Ethics approval** All applicable international, national, and/or institutional guidelines for the

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38 207 care and use of animals were followed by the authors.

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50 211 **Consent for publication** The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current

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52 212 study are available in the Table S11 of Electronic Supplementary Information.

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322 **Figure Captions**

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5 324 **Fig. 1** Megafaunal species trapped into octopuses' mantle analysed in the Mauritanian waters. **a**
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7 325 invertebrates; **b** fishes

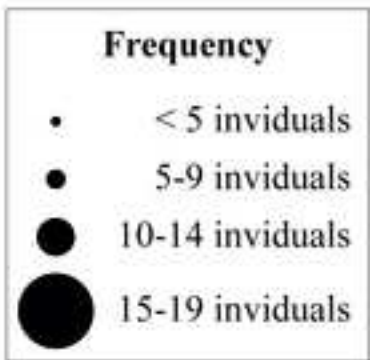
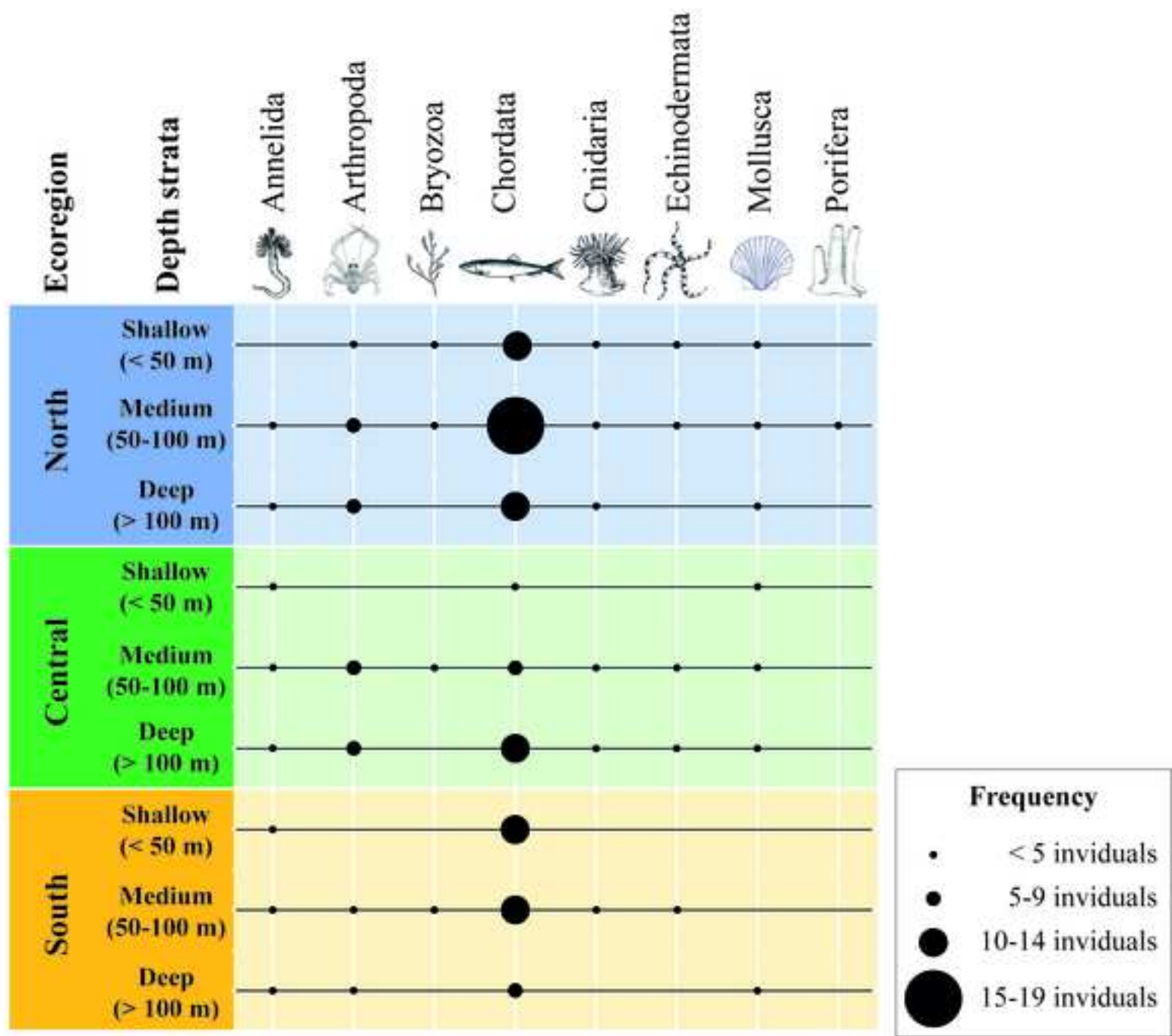
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9 326
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12 327 **Fig. 2** Phylum importance by ecoregion and depth of megafaunal trapped into octopuses' mantle
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14 328 analysed in the Mauritanian waters.

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19 330 **Fig. 3** Average taxonomic distinctness (Δ^+) against numbers of species trapped' into the octopuses'
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21 331 mantle in the Mauritania waters in relation to the "expected" value (and its upper and lower 95%
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23 332 probability limits) of this index. Color dot indicates the ecoregion: blue - northern; green - central;
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25 333 yellow - southern.

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29 335 **Fig. 4** Dendrogram of the cluster analysis of the species trapped' into the octopuses' mantle in the
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31 336 Mauritania waters (Jaccard similarity index). CD - central ecoregion and deep stratum; CM - central
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33 337 ecoregion and medium stratum; ND - northern ecoregion and deep stratum; NM - northern ecoregion
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35 338 and medium stratum; NS - northern ecoregion and shallow stratum; SD – southern ecoregion and
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37 339 deep stratum; NM - southern ecoregion and medium stratum; NS - southern ecoregion and shallow
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39 340 stratum.

Table 1 Taxonomic diversity trapped into the octopuses' mantle in the Mauritania waters. *S*, species richness; AvTD, average taxonomic distinctness (Δ^+); VarTD, variation in taxonomic distinctness (Λ^+)

Ecoregion	Depth	<i>S</i>	AvTD	VarTD
Northern	Shallow	21	78.00	4.14
	Medium	34	81.08	2.47
	Depth	19	77.20	3.83
Central	Shallow	3	100.00	17.16
	Medium	21	85.05	3.83
	Depth	21	84.28	3.83
Southern	Shallow	13	55.00	6.19
	Medium	22	80.18	3.68
	Depth	13	77.81	5.49





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