

# Marine Habitats of Western Australia

A marine habitat is an area or environment where an organism (plant or animal) or groups of organisms normally live or occur. Some marine animals and plants are found across many different habitats while others are restricted to just one area or type of habitat.

## Open water

The largest aquatic habitat is the marine open water (pelagic) environment. The open water helps to connect marine organisms moving from one area to another. Microscopic plants and animals called plankton, which drift with ocean currents, inhabit the surface layers of open waters.



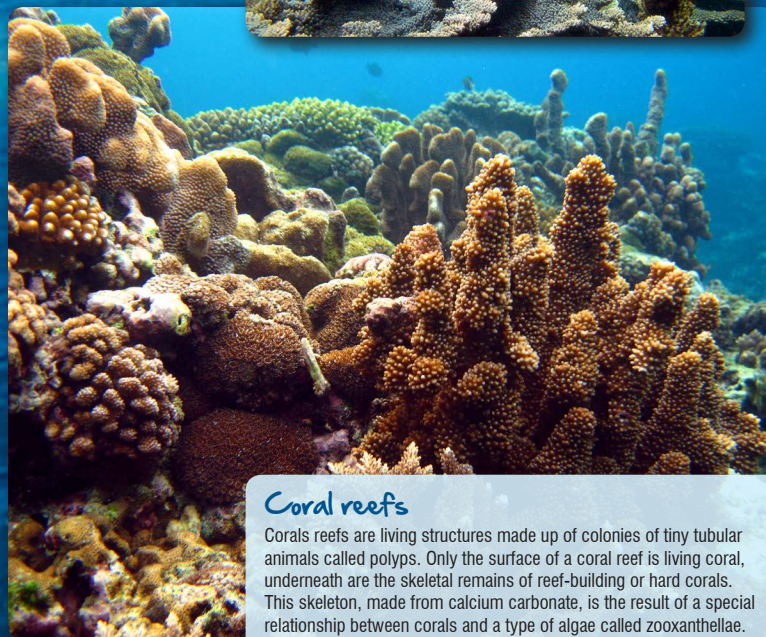
## Mudflats

Mudflats are a habitat with no vegetation, are low in oxygen, often saline and have a high organic content. They support a very diverse benthic (bottom-dwelling) community which in turn, provides food for many fish species.



## Intertidal reefs

These are rock and reef areas on, or close to, the shore which are highly influenced by strong wave motion and tides. For animals and plants to survive, they have special adaptations to hold onto rocks. They also need to cope with time out of the water, where they are exposed to air and sun.



## Coral reefs

Coral reefs are living structures made up of colonies of tiny tubular animals called polyps. Only the surface of a coral reef is living coral, underneath are the skeletal remains of reef-building or hard corals. This skeleton, made from calcium carbonate, is the result of a special relationship between corals and a type of algae called zooxanthellae. Coral reefs support an incredible variety of marine life.



## Mangrove forests

Mangroves are salt-tolerant land plants that grow in the muddy bottoms of tidal areas. Mangrove forests are highly fertile habitats, supporting a rich diversity of marine animals. They protect the coastline by creating a buffer from storms and slow down tidal currents to reduce erosion.



## Granite reefs

Granite is a hard rock, which in the sea forms sloping rock faces, rounded sub-tidal rocks and fragmented boulders. Its surfaces are smooth, making it difficult for animals and plants to attach. Some surfaces are bare while others are covered with coralline algae and different types of macroalgae.



## Sandy seabed and soft sediments

In what may appear to be a barren landscape, the seabed is in fact abundant with tiny animals that burrow into the soft sediments. These organisms filter food particles from the water column or obtain them from sediments.



## Seagrass meadows

Seagrasses are true flowering plants that have adapted to live in the marine environment. They can exist as a few plants or establish over a larger area called a meadow. Seagrass habitats are important nursery and feeding areas for many organisms. Few organisms eat seagrass directly, except animals such as sea turtles and dugongs.



## Estuaries

Estuaries are the meeting place for seawater and freshwater. They provide significant sources of food and habitats, making them ideal for marine animals in their juvenile stage. Some animals visit estuaries during part of their life, while others live there for their entire lives.



## Limestone reefs

Limestone reefs develop from the remains of marine organisms such as coral and shells. Limestone is easily eroded to create formations including caves and ledges. Macroalgae (seaweed) and seagrasses grow on and around the reef surfaces exposed to sunlight, while a colourful array of invertebrates such as sponges, sea squirts and bryozoans inhabit the shady parts.



## Sponge gardens

Sponge gardens are found in low light environments, with strong currents that make it impossible for plants to grow. These areas consist of an array of colourful animals, including sponges, soft corals, sea tulips, sea whips, and sea lilies.



Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development

Sponsored by:



**Marine Waters**  
marinewaters.fish.wa.gov.au