

# Poster: Marine Habitats of Western Australia

## Phase of learning

Years 1 - 2, Years 3 - 4, Years 5 - 6, Years 7 - 8, Years 9 - 10, Senior Secondary (Years 11-12)

## WA Curriculum

K-10 Humanities and Social Sciences, K-10 Science, SS Biology – General, SS Integrated Science – General, SS Marine and Maritime Studies – ATAR, SS Marine and Maritime Studies – General

## Region

North Coast, Gascoyne Coast, West Coast, South Coast, Indian Ocean Territories

## Summary

The Western Australian coastline is as diverse as it is vast. This poster explores the myriad of marine habitats found in Western Australia.

**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.

**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 steeply sloping rock faces, rounded sea stacks and jagged rock outcrops. Its surfaces are smooth, making it difficult for animals and plants to attach. Some surfaces are bare while others are covered with corals, algae and different types of macroalgae.

**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 shell areas on, or close to, the shore which are highly influenced by strong wave action 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.

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

**Sargassum meadows**  
Sargassum are free floating plants that have adapted to live in the marine environment. They can exist as a few plants or colonies over a large area called a meadow. Sargassum habitats are important nursery and feeding areas for many organisms. Free organisms eat sargassum directly, except animals such as sea turtles and dolphins.

**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 will estuarine during part of their life, while others live there for their entire lives.

**Corals reefs**  
Corals reefs are living structures made up of colonies of tiny skeletal 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.

**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 sponges grow on and around the reef surfaces exposed to sunlight, while a colorful array of invertebrates such as sponges, sea squirts and bryozoans inhabit the rocky 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 colorful animals, including sponges, soft corals, sea lilies, sea whips, and sea fans.

**Logos:** Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Woodside, Marine Waters (marnewaters.fish.wa.gov.au)

**Download Resource**

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