



**Australian Government**

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities**



## COASTAL AND MARINE WETLANDS

- Coastal wetlands include sand or pebble shores, estuarine lakes and lagoons, coastal floodplain forest, dune swamps, mudflats, coastal lakes, coastal floodplains, mangrove and saltmarsh swamps.
- Marine wetlands are saltwater wetlands exposed to waves, currents and tides in an oceanic setting.
- Marine wetlands include coral reefs, and aquatic subtidal beds with sea grass and kelps.
- Coastal and marine wetlands are important nursery and feeding areas for animals such as fish, dugongs, and marine turtles.
- These wetlands are greatly valued for tourism and recreation.
- Coastal wetlands also provide important habitats for migratory waterbirds.

### Coastal and marine wetlands in Australia

- Australia is one of the world's largest islands, with a coastline stretching about 36 000 kilometres.
- Extensive areas of seagrass meadows, mangrove stands, salt marsh and sand and mud areas provide a diverse range of habitats for many species.

#### Eighty-mile Beach in Western Australia:

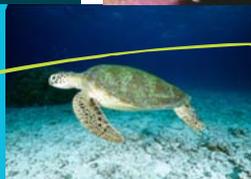
- Eighty-mile Beach is an internationally important coastal wetland located in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.
- It is one of the major arrival and departure areas for migratory shorebirds visiting Australia.

#### Did you know?

Over 300 000 waterbirds from 20 different species visit Roebuck Bay in Western Australia each year making it one of the most important areas in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

#### Coral Reefs:

- Coral reefs are well known marine wetlands.
- Coral reefs are underwater structures made from calcium carbonate produced by corals.
- Coral reefs, such as the Great Barrier Reef, have very high levels of biodiversity.
- Corals are colonies of tiny animals that are dependent on the food produced by microscopic algae (zooanthellae), that live within them, to survive.
- Many nationally threatened animals in Australian waters depend on coral reefs and sea grass beds to survive.
- The Great Barrier Reef's network of reefs is home to thousands of species.



## Plants and animals

- Green turtles often nest on tropical beaches or islands, such as the beaches in Ashmore Reef, an internationally important wetland. They graze on seagrasses, marine algae (seaweeds) and some sponges.
- Migratory shorebirds fly up to 26 000 kilometres each year from the Arctic Circle, through East and South-east Asia, to Australia and New Zealand. The corridor through which these waterbirds migrate is known as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and is one of eight major waterbird flyways recognised around the world.
- Marine algae (also known as seaweed) is extremely important for shallow marine environments as they oxygenate the water by using sunlight to make food and oxygen (this is called photosynthesis).

### Did you know?

The temperature of the nest determines what gender the green turtle hatchlings will be. Colder temperatures produce males and warmer temperatures create females.

## Threats facing coastal and marine wetlands

Coastal and marine wetlands are vulnerable to numerous threats.

Threat	Impact
Climate change.	Increases sea temperatures, cyclones and storm surges.
Over-fishing.	Reduces biodiversity.
Pollution from urban, industrial and agricultural waste.	Flow into coastal waters and can poison animals and plants.
Unsustainable recreation and tourism use.	Damage habitats.
Destructive fishing practices.	Damage habitats and reduce biodiversity.

## What can you do?

- Investigate what AuSSI (Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative) schools are doing to become more sustainable with their water use. Many of these schools are implementing actions such as installing rainwater tanks that have been connected to the school toilets or gardens or working with their communities to reduce pollution entering stormwater drains and impacting on local waterways. Some schools are partnering with their local communities to conserve local wetlands: <http://www.environment.gov.au/education/aussi/>.
- Investigate Eighty-mile Beach and coral reefs using Google Earth (<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>).

