

# SOUTHERN AUSTRALIAN TEMPERATE REEF FISH

Over 370 marine fish species have been recorded in South Australia, many of which use reefs as habitats for at least part of their lives and a high proportion are unique to southern Australia.

The majority of temperate reef fish are carnivorous and eat mobile crustaceans, other fish, and molluscs. Some, such as the leatherjackets, feed at vertical drop-offs and under jetties, and prey on a wide range of encrusting species. Some 20-30% of fish species eat at least some algae.



Temperate reef fish come in an enormous variety of shapes and sizes from the long and skinny (pipefish), to the plant-like (the beautiful but bizarre weedy and leafy seadragons). Some change their shape to feed (e.g. dories, which have large forward extending jaws) or to deter predators (e.g. puffer fish, which inflate their bodies by swallowing water).

Temperate fish tend to be less colourful than their tropical relations, although a few (like the brilliantly coloured harlequin fish and blue devil) are as flashy as they come. Colours of fish vary depending on their habitat, age and stage of life. For example, fish that spend time in the water column, like trevally, are often silvery and mirror-like so they are less visible to predators.



# SOUTHERN AUSTRALIAN TEMPERATE REEF FISH

The crimson-banded wrasse and other species have different colour forms depending on whether they are found in deep or shallow water. In general, temperate species are more likely to blend with their surroundings than tropical species. A spectacular example of camouflage is seen in the leafy and weedy seadragons. They are so well camouflaged that they even have leafy extensions on their fins, resembling the plants over which they hover.



One of the most iconic temperate reef fish is the western blue groper. It is the largest bony fish to be found around rocky reefs, growing up to 1.75 m in length and living to 70 years old. Even though the adult males are indeed blue, small juveniles are in fact brown and sub-adult females are green and often mistaken for being some kind of parrot fish or mullet. Blue gropers live in small social groups consisting of one blue adult male with a harem of 2-3 green females. They are a sex-changing fish, so that when the large blue adult male is removed from the group, the largest green female will change into the next male.

