

# Seagrasses

**Scientific name**

*Zostera Marina*



Photo: Department of Fisheries WA

## Description

The seagrasses name is derived from its ribbon-like grassy leaves which hold a similar appearance to grass. It is also commonly known as sea weed. It is vital in supporting a highly productive and diverse ecosystem within coastal regions. Seagrasses are important for many marine organisms, being a source for food and shelter as well as providing breeding habitats and nursery's. Seagrasses also oxygenate water, trap sand and recycle nutrients. There are approximately 60 different seagrass species worldwide with each kind ranging in size from less than one centimeter to 7 metres in length. Seagrasses have roots, stems and leaves and also form tiny flowers, fruits and seeds.

## **Did you know?**

Western Australia's unique Shark Bay Marine Park has the world's largest meadows of seagrass and the largest number of seagrass species growing together in one place in the world.

## Diet & Habitat

Seagrasses are evident throughout the world with Australia having the most recorded seagrass species. The meadows off South Western Australia have the largest mass of living organisms and highest species diversity anywhere in the world. Most of the seagrass species off the coast of Western Australia grow in clear waters that are protected from heavy seas and swells so they can grow all year round in clumps to form seagrass 'beds' or 'meadows'.

## In the Wild

Seagrasses and algae produce energy from photosynthesis. This is when sunlight is converted into energy and therefore both must live in shallow water that is touched by the sun. Reproduction of seagrass occurs by pollination with pollen transported to other plants by water. Algae produces much of the earth's oxygen. It is estimated they produce between 50 and 75 per cent.

## Threats

A number of factors affect the survival and health of seagrass populations within coastal regions. Threats posed by human include pollution, water pollution, oil spills, herbicides, pesticides, boat propellers, nets, anchors, chains and moorings. Storms and cyclones can tear up and severely damage large meadows that can potentially take years to reestablish. A reduction in light can decrease seagrass growth and kill whole populations.

