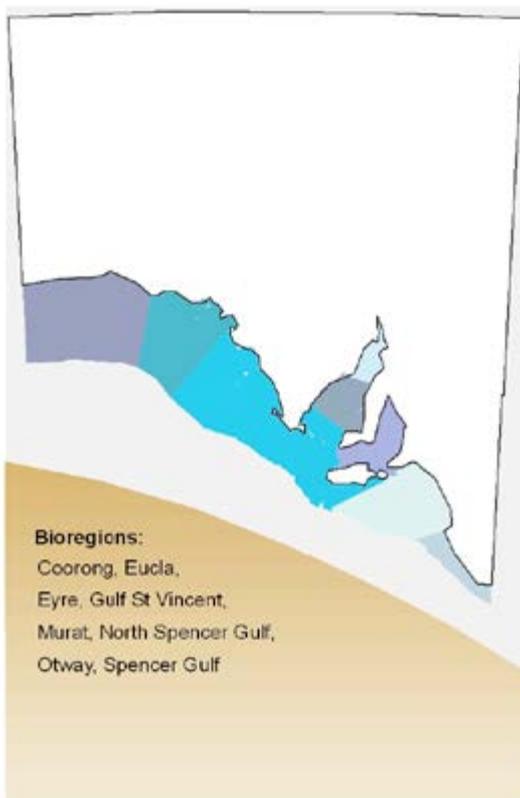


# Leafy Seadragon

*Phycodurus eques*



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

Leafy Seadragons are a unique species of marine fish known for their ability to camouflage themselves in weedy habitats. They are South Australia's state marine emblem and their name comes from the distinctive leafy appendages that are attached to their bodies. Closely related to seahorses and pipefish, Leafy Seadragons are in the family of animals called Syngnathidae and are a protected species under the *Fisheries Management Act 2007 (SA)*.

Instead of scales, their bodies are protected by bony plates. They are smaller than the Weedy Seadragon, which is the only other seadragon species and is also found in the waters of SA.

Leafy Seadragons are slow moving, and rely on their excellent camouflage to protect them from predators (they are well disguised as floating seaweed). They can also change colour depending on their age, diet, location, or stress level. Several long, sharp spines along the sides of their bodies can also help protect them from fish. They can grow to a length of 45cm but on average they are 30cm.

## Diet

Leafy Seadragons have long, tubular snouts with small toothless mouths that suck up food. They feed on plankton, mysids and other small crustaceans and fish.

## Breeding

They belong to one of the few groups of animals where males rear the young. Female seadragons deposit their eggs on a brood patch near the end of the males' tail where they are fertilised on contact. Males then carry them while they develop and release tiny seadragons after four to six weeks. Mature after two years, they have a lifespan of 5–10 years. Leafy Seadragons are completely independent when born, but they are vulnerable to predation as they are only 20mm long.

## Habitat

They are only found in temperate waters of southern Australia and live in seagrass meadows, seaweed beds, rocky reefs and structures colonised by seaweed.

## Threats

Illegal capture for display and as pets is a threat to the Leafy Seadragon. They are very sensitive to disturbance of any kind and will often struggle to survive sudden changes in water depth and pressure. Marine pollution, habitat loss and degradation are other threats that Leafy Seadragons face.



Homing beacons.....Leafy Seadragons are able to travel hundreds of metres from home and return to exactly the same place!

### Conservation

Leafy Seadragons are protected in SA waters.

You can help the Leafy Seadragon by:

- not polluting. Anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- picking up any litter you see, especially at the beach – fishing line and other litter can hurt LeafySeadragons
- keeping your distance and not disturbing Leafy Seadragons if you see them.



Photo © Paul Macdonald

Leafy Seadragon



Photo © Paul Macdonald

Leafy Seadragon

## For further information

### Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

**Eastwood:** (08) 8273 9100

**Gawler:** (08) 8523 7700

**Lobethal:** (08) 8389 5900

**Willunga:** (08) 8550 3400

### Education enquiries

For teachers wanting more information about environmental education resources and opportunities please contact the relevant NRM Education sub regional team on:

**Northern Adelaide:** (08) 8406 8289

**Barossa:** (08) 8563 8436

**Central Adelaide:** (08) 8234 7255

**Southern Adelaide:** (08) 8384 0176

**Southern Fleurieu:** (08) 8551 0524

