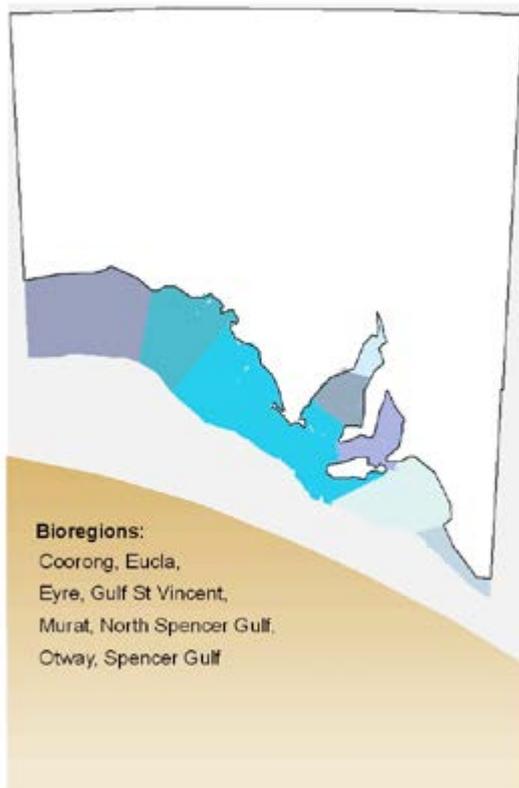


Sea Squirts

Ascidians



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.

Sea Squirts get their name from their ability to squirt out a jet of water if stepped on. They come in a wide range of sizes and colours. Some stand upright, while others spread out to cover the surface they are growing on. Some species grow as individuals, while others grow as a colony made up of hundreds or even thousands of individuals living together.

The body of a Sea Squirt is sac-like, with two holes called 'siphons' that have quite strong muscular openings. One siphon is used to draw water in (the 'inhalant siphon'), and the other expels it (the 'exhalant siphon'). Their outside skin is called 'the tunic'.

Sea Squirts date back at least 500–600 million years. They do not have a spine when they are adults, but their juvenile larvae (which look a bit like tadpoles) have features in common with vertebrates. Sea Squirts are the natural prey of a variety of sea creatures including molluscs, fish and rock crabs.

Diet

Sea Squirts are filter feeders which means that they draw water in and filter out the tiny plankton through their pharynx (like the throat in humans). The water then passes through their gills so they can breathe before it is expelled.

Breeding

Nearly all Sea Squirts are hermaphrodites (have both male and female sex organs) and eggs are fertilised externally.

Habitat

They can be found in the intertidal zone of rocky shores, but are more common in deeper water where they are not exposed at low tide. Sea Squirts can be found attached to rocks, jetties and to other hard surfaces.

Threats

Sea Squirts are threatened by marine pollution, much of which comes from coastal development. As they live on the shore they may also be threatened by climate change including warming water and sea level change.



South Australia is home to over 200 different Sea Squirt species. This is the greatest diversity of the species found anywhere in the world!

Conservation

You can help the Sea Squirt by:

- not polluting – anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea. Sea Squirts are particularly vulnerable to pollution because they are filter feeders
- organising a day at the beach picking up litter with your friends and family
- doing your bit to stop climate change such as being wise with your energy use at home
- not stomping on them.

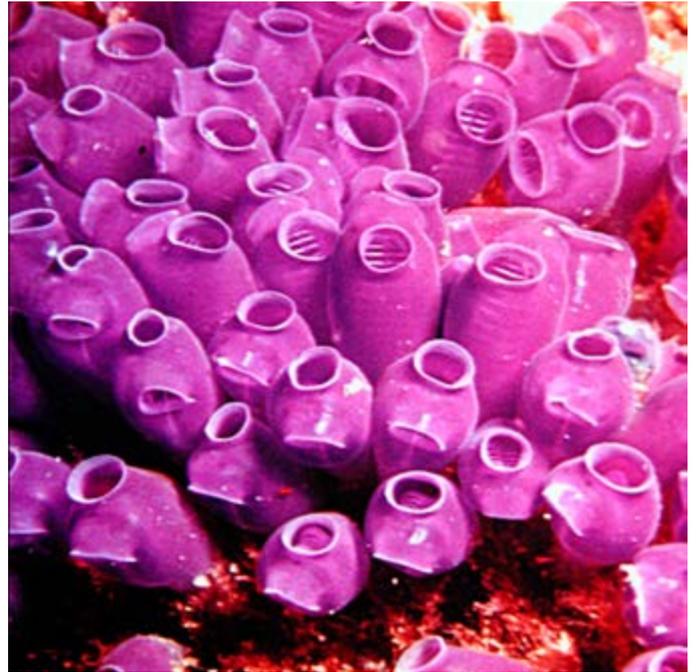


Photo by David Muirhead

Sea Squirts



Photo by David Muirhead

Sea Squirts

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

