



# FINFO

WINTER EDITION: THE COAST OF AUSTRALIA

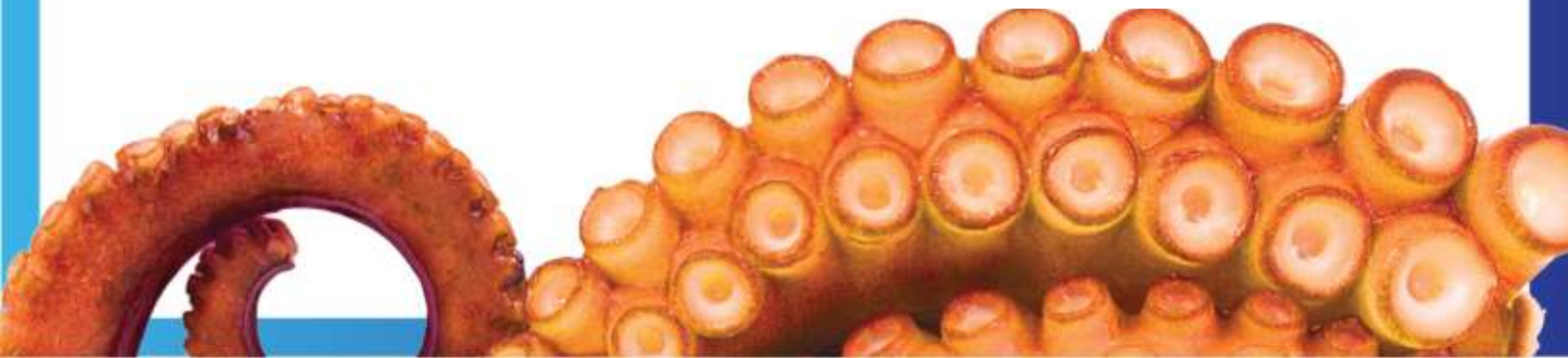
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Australia is known as “The Land Down Under”. When you think about Australia, you might think of animals such as Kangaroos and Koalas. Did you know that there is a **habitat** just past the waves called the Great Barrier Reef? This reef is the largest coral reef in the world. It is home to many different kinds of sharks and other fish, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates (animals without backbones). It is one of the most **diverse** areas in the world.



Did you know? The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest reef system, composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and has 900 islands stretching for over 2,600 kilometers!

*What are corals?* Corals are animals that have a  **symbiotic relationship**  with algae. This algae is called zooxanthellae. The algae give coral its bright color. It is also because of this algae that corals are only found in certain places in the world. Algae use sunlight to make their food, so they need to live in shallow water. The sun needs to **penetrate** the water to reach the algae. The corals also need the water where they live to be warm and clean. It also needs to have just enough salt. There needs to be an **abundance** of food floating through the water. Corals are filter feeders. They use their tentacles to grab pieces of food floating by. You won’t find corals in places such as the North Pole because it is too cold.



*What is a coral reef?* Coral reefs are made by coral animals stacking on top of each other. When the animal dies, it leaves behind a hard skeleton (similar to your bony skeleton!). New coral polyps (baby corals) can then stack on top. Individual corals work together to create a **colony**. It is this colony of coral skeletons and coral polyps that forms the reef.

Coral reefs provide shelter for small fish. They create homes for animals such as snails and clams. There is an abundance of food there for octopus and whales.



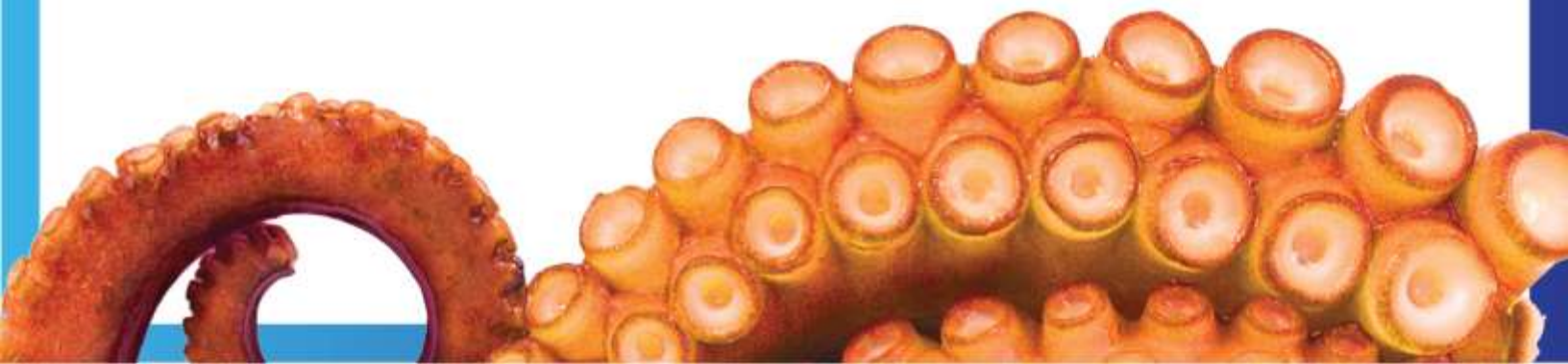
Clown fish are one of the many types of fish that use the Reef as their home!

There are even cleaning stations for larger fish and sharks. Many animals depend on the reef for many different reasons, so this is a very important habitat!

People depend on the reef, too. Reefs help keep ocean waves from crashing too hard on the beaches and causing **erosion**.

Many people like to eat animals that live on the reef. Scuba divers enjoy swimming through the reef to explore the animals' homes. There are scientists and doctors trying to use the reefs to make medicines. They hope these medicines will help keep people from getting sick.

The Great Barrier Reef is found off of the coast of Australia. If you put all of it together, it would be as big as 70 million football fields! Over 1,500 different types of fish can be found on this reef. Six different types of sea turtles can be found here too. There are also many species of sharks and whales that visit the reef. Some people believe that the Great Barrier Reef is over 500,000 years old!





This is an example of how pollution can affect our ocean. Visit: [adventureaquarium.com/Conservation](http://adventureaquarium.com/Conservation) for more information on how to help preserve our oceans!

Reefs around the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, are in trouble. When people litter, their trash can go in the ocean. The litter can harm the corals and other animals. Factories that dump chemicals into the air and the water can also hurt the reefs. Boats can hurt the reefs, too, when they get too close and scrape the reefs.

People who care about the reefs can do things to help. You can help at a beach

clean up and pick up litter before it blows into the ocean. If your family has a boat, you can drive it around the reefs. Or, you can talk to people about how important the reefs are and **encourage** them to protect them too!

# Vocabulary

ABUNDANCE - A LARGE AMOUNT

ALGAE - A SIMPLE, PLANT-LIKE ORGANISM

COLONY - A LARGE GROUP

DIVERSE - HAVING MANY DIFFERENT THINGS

ENCOURAGE - URGE ON

EROSION - WEARING AWAY OF LAND

HABITAT - A PLACE WHERE AN ANIMAL OR PLANT LIVES

PENETRATE - PASS THROUGH

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP - TWO SPECIES WORKING TOGETHER TO SURVIVE

