

## Seadragons and seahorses fact sheet



Seadragons and seahorses are fish. They swim using their fins. Their main form of defence is hiding and camouflage. They only need to swim slowly.

Seadragons and seahorses belong to a group called pipe fish. These fish are covered in armour and have long round mouths that can look like a drinking straw. They use their mouth to suck up small animals floating in the water. Their mouth is like a tiny vacuum cleaner.

The males look after the eggs. Most have a pouch where the eggs are protected until they hatch. It takes about eight weeks. The young are tiny and look the same as the adults.

They live in the cooler shallow sea of southern Australia and along the east and west coast. They don't live in the tropical seas. They hide among seaweed and seagrass where they blend in with their environment. It is hard to see their fins moving when they swim, so they look like floating seaweed. When they die they can be washed up onto the beach.

Left – Seahorses have a tail that can hold onto to seagrass and seaweed. They stay upright in the water.

Top – Weedy seadragons only live in the cooler seawaters of Australia. They can also hold on using their tail.

Bottom right – Leafy seadragons only live in the cooler seawaters of Australia. They can slowly change colour to match the seaweed and seagrass around them.

Bottom left – Pipe fish are long and straight and their mouth looks like a pipe. They live in both cool and tropical waters around the world.

Seahorses and seadragons are protected by laws in Australia. Beds of seaweed and seagrasses must be protected. Speedboats should travel slowly through shallow water. Seahorses are used in some Asian medicines. Where seahorses are being fished for medicine or to live in aquariums, the countries should make sure the populations of seahorses are not affected.

**Additional teacher notes**

- The pipefish including seahorses and seadragons are covered in bony interlocking plates. This gives them their rigid body and is what is found washed up on beaches.
- The tubular mouth has a small opening at the end. They have enough sucking power to capture small animals passing by.
- The greatest threat to these fish in Australia is pollution, seagrass and seaweed beds being destroyed by storms and covered by silt from the land and climate change. Threats in other countries are likely to be greater where there is less or no protection for them.