

Unique Bryozoan Reefs Of Western Port

Fast Facts

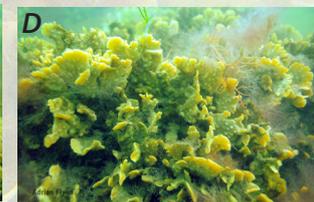
Bryozoa are non-photosynthetic invertebrate filter-feeders, which live in colonies and are commonly referred to as 'lace corals'. They are distributed throughout the globe, however what makes the Western Port Bryozoans special is the fact that they form extensive shallow water biogenic reefs (A) not seen elsewhere. The Western Port Bryozoan Reefs are of local and perhaps global significance. Biogenic reefs are important habitat for a multitude of marine species including fish, molluscs, crustaceans etc. They provide food, attachment substrate for sessile organisms, shelter from wave action and strong currents as well as concealment from predators for both adult and larval stage organisms. Consequently, these complex habitats are often biodiversity hotspots compared to the surrounding habitats. They are typified by a rigid skeletal framework rising above the seabed and are comprised of biological deposits produced over a long period. These bryozoan reefs are comprised of three main species; *Triphyllozoon umbonatum* (B), *Triphyllozoon moniliferum* (C) and *Celleporaria foliata* (D).

The research:

Despite being close to a major city, very little is known about the ecology and importance of these recently characterised bryozoan reefs. Research led by La Trobe University and Fathom Pacific (a marine consulting and research firm) will shed light on these unique reef systems. The research program also hopes to engage citizen scientists and community stakeholders to assist with data collection.

Key investigations:

- Document the biodiversity associated with the reefs
- Quantify the extent of bryozoan reefs
- Investigate their threats and vulnerability
- Understand their age and growth rates
- Understand their recolonisation processes
- Establish conservation values and protection requirements



Location of the bryozoan reefs within the Western Port Ramsar Site

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