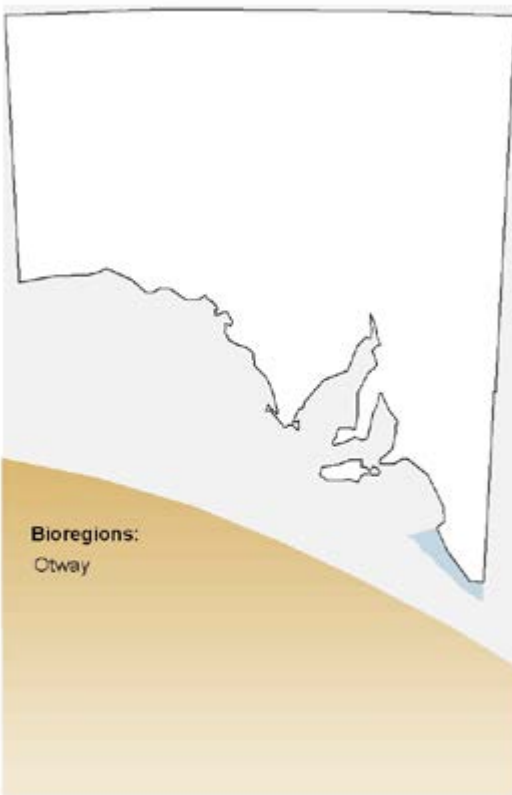


Bull Kelp

Durvillaea potatorum



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.

Bull Kelp is a fast growing, brown macroalgae (seaweed). It can grow 10-14 cm per day. It does not have flowers, seeds or roots like other plants. Instead, the plants fix themselves to rocks using a root-like structure called a 'holdfast' to prevent being swept away. These are remarkably strong, but some kelp plants can still be found washed up on the shore after strong storms.

Bull Kelp form the basis of important ecosystems on the southern coast. These are highly productive areas that expand the food web of rocky reef communities. Bull Kelp grows in large groups called 'forests' that become important nursery areas and sanctuaries for many species of fish, crustaceans, suspension feeders and other invertebrates including sea urchins, sea stars and crabs, by providing shelter from predators and currents.

Bull Kelp is a good source of trace minerals that well-up from the bottom of the sea. It is harvested for use in medicine (it is particularly popular in natural medicines), as a fertilizer and as feed in aquaculture. Aboriginal people in Tasmania used dried Bull Kelp to transport water and food. The species name came from this use: potatorum means 'to drink' in Latin.

Diet

Like any plant, Bull Kelp uses photosynthesis to grow, and its fronds 'thallus' can reach a length of eight metres.

Habitat

Bull Kelp dominates exposed rocky coasts in the Southern Ocean. The plants can live intertidally where waves give them moisture between the high and low tides. They can live for up to eight years.

Threats

Bull Kelp is threatened by climate change. Even small increases in water temperature have resulted in its distribution contracting further south. The distribution of Bull Kelp has already retreated 50 km south since 1940 from New South Wales to Victoria due to global warming. Further warming in the oceans could lead to it retreating further south, or even disappearing from our coasts altogether.

Commercial harvesting, though regulated, is also a potential threat. Pollution coming into the ocean via storm-water is another threat to its health.



Bull Kelp is used to make ice-cream and toothpaste! It contains a useful chemical (Alginate) that causes liquids to gel.

Conservation

You can help protect Bull Kelp by:

- not polluting. Anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- keeping our beaches clean - always put litter in the bin
- doing your bit to stop climate change. Be wise with your energy use at home.

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



Photo by Sarah Bignell

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