



# Essential Fish habitats, Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital

## Essential Fish habitats

Essential fish habitats are aquatic habitats which are necessary for fish breeding, feeding or growth to maturity, such as spawning grounds, nursery grounds, feeding areas and migration corridors. They have a disproportionate ecological value in supporting critical fish life stages, hence ensuring viability of fish populations and provision of the associated ecosystem services. As such, essential fish habitats are key areas of interest when considering the potential impacts of marine activities. Feeding areas, spawning areas and migratory routes may also be important for some fisheries. Therefore, some habitats are important both for fish populations and for fisheries, which creates challenges for their sustainable management.

Many coastal fish species are highly dependent on shallow and sheltered coastal habitats, such as coastal wetlands, estuaries, seagrass beds, seaweed beds, mussel beds, rocky bottoms (including artificial substrates), gravels, muds and sands for their reproduction. Coastal habitats are in addition also utilized as spawning and nursery areas of migratory marine species, such as black seabream, bass, herring and flatfishes.

## Ecosystem Services

Ecosystem services are the functions and products from nature that can be turned into human benefits with varying degrees of human input. These can be provisioning services such as food or raw materials, or regulating services such as water quality, nutrient cycling or primary production, or they can be cultural such as cognitive value or recreational opportunities.

## Natural Capital

Natural Capital is the elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. When we talk about natural capital, we talk in terms of assets. Any capital asset has the important capacity to produce various goods and services. Natural capital is simply those assets provided by nature which have the capacity to generate goods and services. In fact, natural capital can be regarded as the source of all other types of capital whether manufactured, financial, human or social.

**So we can see that, in essence, natural capital gives rise to a flow of ecosystem services. Essential fish habitats are part of our marine natural capital that deliver ecosystem services which support fish populations and fisheries.**

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