

Large reef fish

Most fish have a skeleton made of bone, one gill opening on each side of the head and a swim bladder. The overall structure of a fish is streamlined and most are covered in scales. The largest fish on the Great Barrier Reef are giant cods and groupers. They can weigh up to 400 kilograms and have a life span of several decades.

The shape of a fish helps determine where it lives, what it eats and how it catches its prey. The shape of a fish also varies between each species, however there are five main types of fish body shapes:

Streamlined – fast swimmers (mackerels)

Laterally compressed – swim in bursts to escape from predators or capture food (butterflyfish)

Ventrally compressed – flattened from top to bottom and live on the bottom of the sea (flathead)

Elongated (stretched) – moving in and out of narrow spaces (eels)

Unusual – these are slow moving (seahorse)

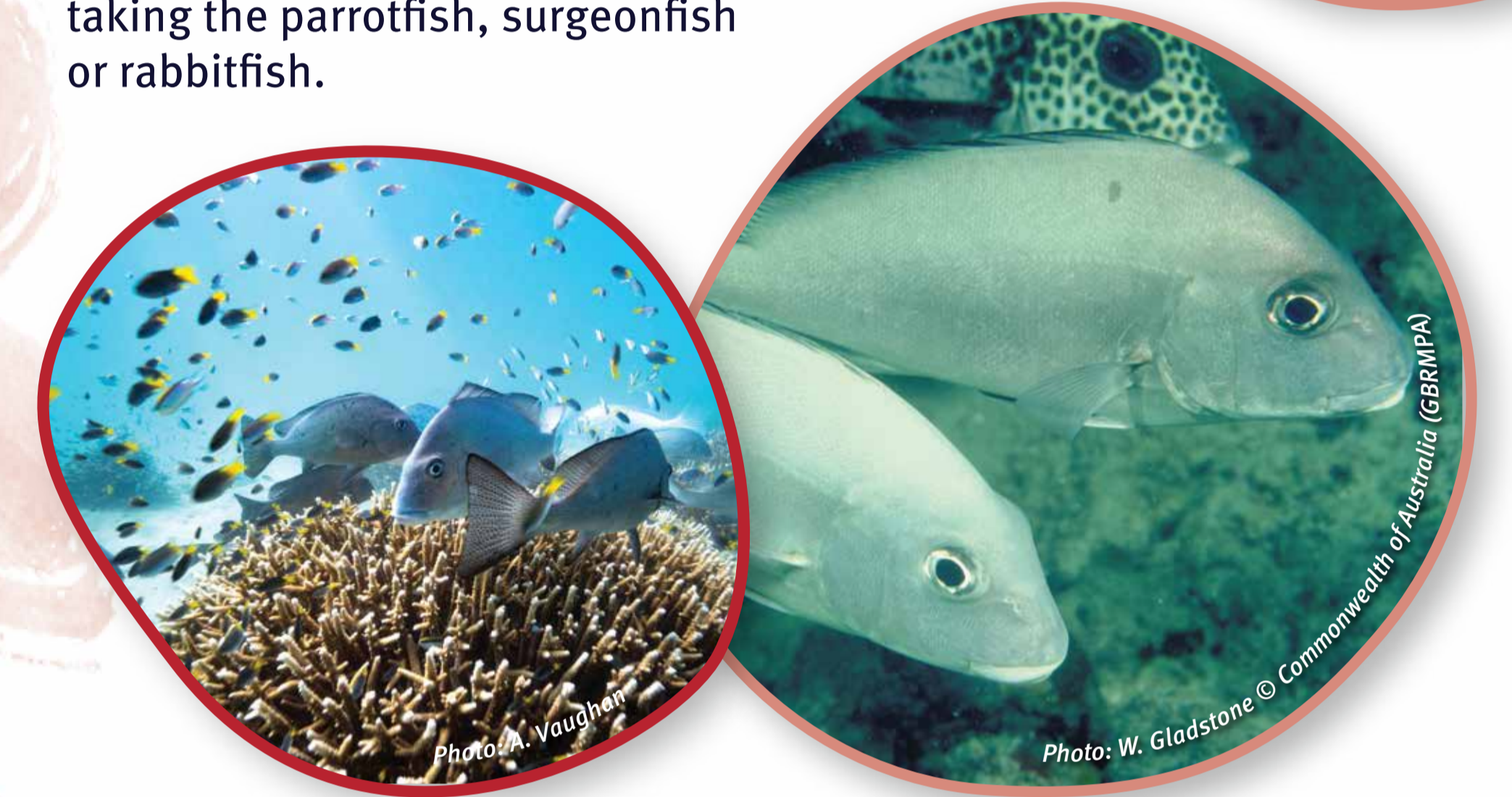
Fish reproduce through external fertilization. Amazingly, female coral cods can transform into males and a dominant male may have a harem of 12 females. Most reef fish release large quantities of eggs annually which float away and never have any further contact with their parents. Baby fish know instinctively how to swim and find food.

Plant-eating fish, or herbivores such as parrotfish, surgeonfish and rabbitfish, remove seaweed from reefs. In normal conditions, these fish act as nature's lawnmowers and keep seaweed levels under control.

Help keep the reefs healthier by not taking the parrotfish, surgeonfish or rabbitfish.



Learn more about recreational fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park



From top: Diagonal banded sweetlip; coral cod; parrotfish; painted sweetlip; painted sweetlip over coral