



MOUNTAINS TO SEA
CONSERVATION TRUST



EXPERIENCING
MARINE RESERVES



WHITEBAIT
CONNECTION



FISH OF THE YEAR

TE IKA O TE TAU 2026

Activity Book

Name: _____

Voting opens March 1st

Scan the QR code below

to place your vote!



Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's **Fish of the Year | Te Ika o Te Tau** competition aims to raise awareness for some of the issues our awesome ika face. By checking our website, you can also learn about the incredible biodiversity in our freshwater and marine environments.

This competition runs during Seaweek – Kaupapa Moana, New Zealand's annual national week celebrating the sea and extends to the end of March. Seaweek is an opportunity for all ages to discover the many ways that our lives are connected to the sea. In March every year, Seaweek encourages and promotes events and community action projects to inspire and enable this connection, through:

- Activities and presentations within schools
- Community beach clean-ups
- Kayaking and snorkelling experiences
- Marine ecosystem field trips and engagements with citizen science.

Seaweek is coordinated nationally by Sir Peter Blake Marine Education and Recreation Centre (MERC) and is made possible through the work of a large network of volunteers with support from a wide range of individuals, groups, businesses and organisations.

Are you ready to discover some of Aotearoa's favourite ika? Check out Mountains to Sea's annual Fish of the Year competition, meet the ocean voyagers, the camouflagers, the freshwater migrants and more!

Voting in 2026 **opens at 9am on Saturday February 28th**. The voting will run for two weeks, the competition will **close at 5pm on Sunday 15th March**. The winner will be announced on Monday 16th March.

**Check out www.fishoftheyear.org.nz
to meet this year's contenders!**





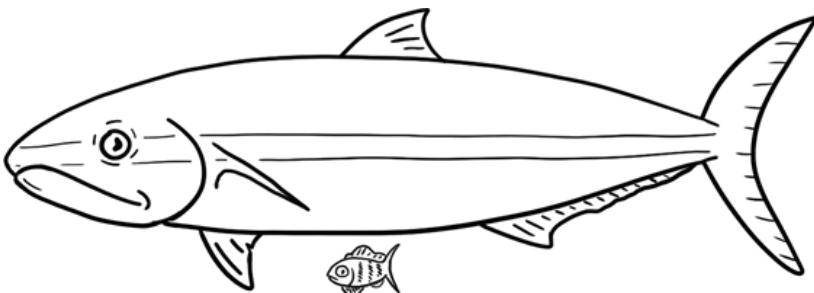
See if you can find all of these fish in Fish of the Year!

Find and circle the names of the fish!

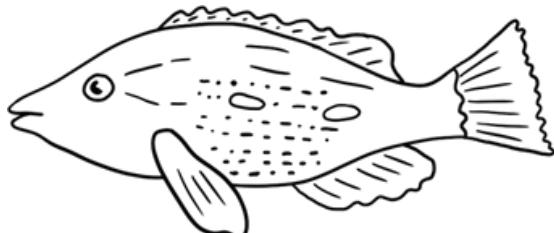
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Basking shark	Common bully	Hiwihiwi	Leatherjacket	Red moki	Snapper
Black angelfish	Crested weedfish	Īnanga	Longfin eels	Redfin bully	Spotty
Blue cod	Flounder	John dory	Moray Eel	Sandager's wrasse	Stargazer
Blue maomao	Goatfish	Kingfish	Oceanic manta ray	School shark	Torrentfish
Blue-eyed triplefin	Great white shark	Kōkopu	Pigfish	Scorpion fish	Trevally
Butterfish	Hāpuka	Lamprey	Porcupine fish	Seahorse	Two-spot demoiselle

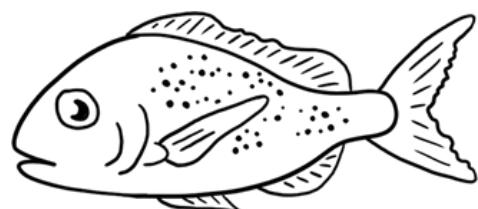
Can you unscramble the names of these fishes?



KSIGIHNF



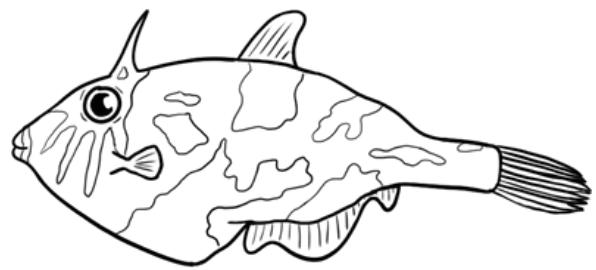
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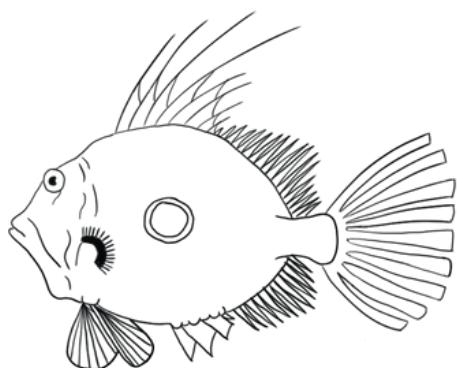
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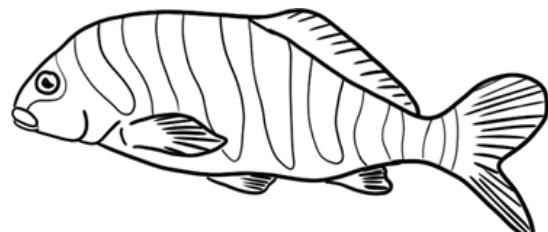
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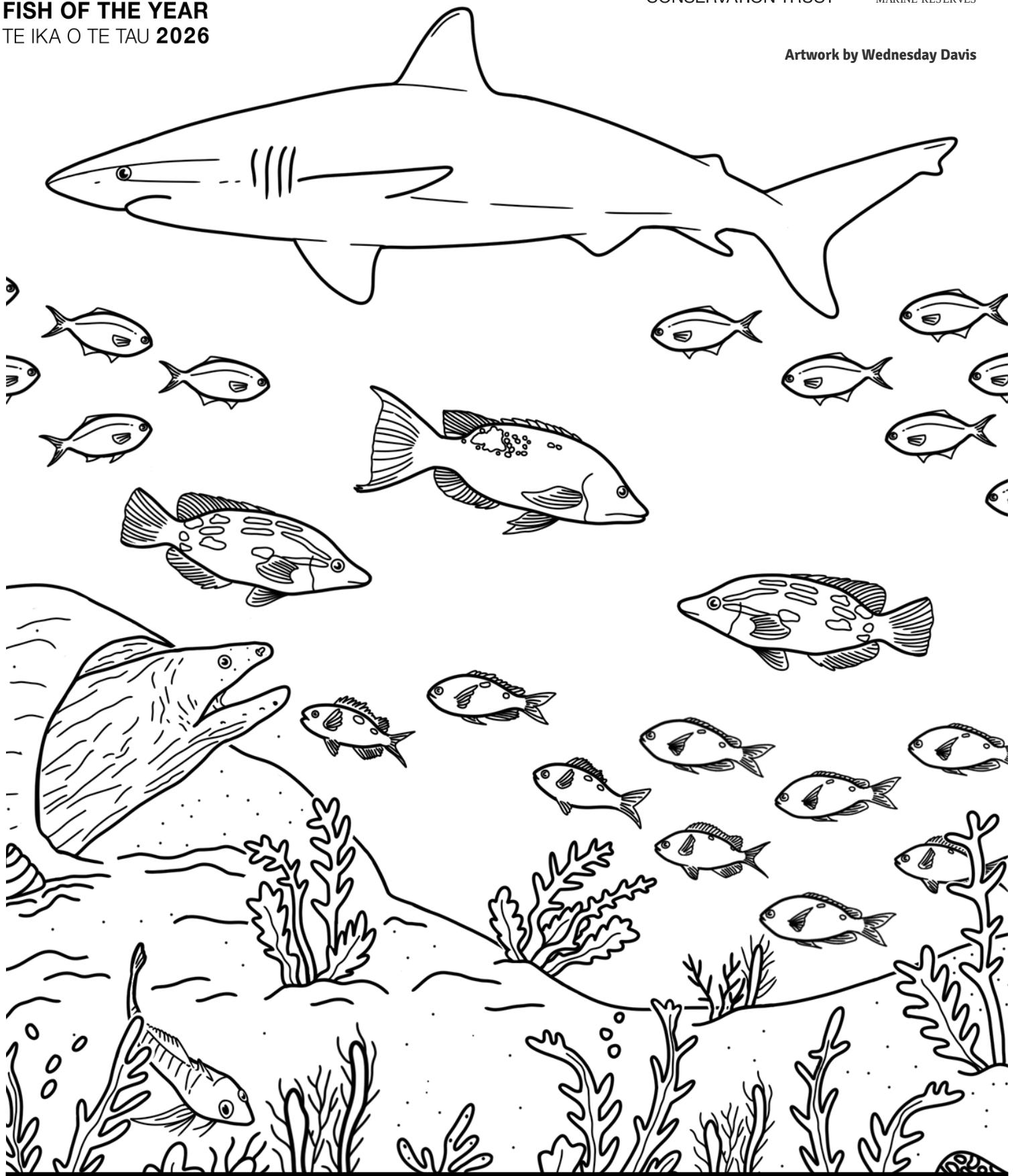


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Artwork by Wednesday Davis



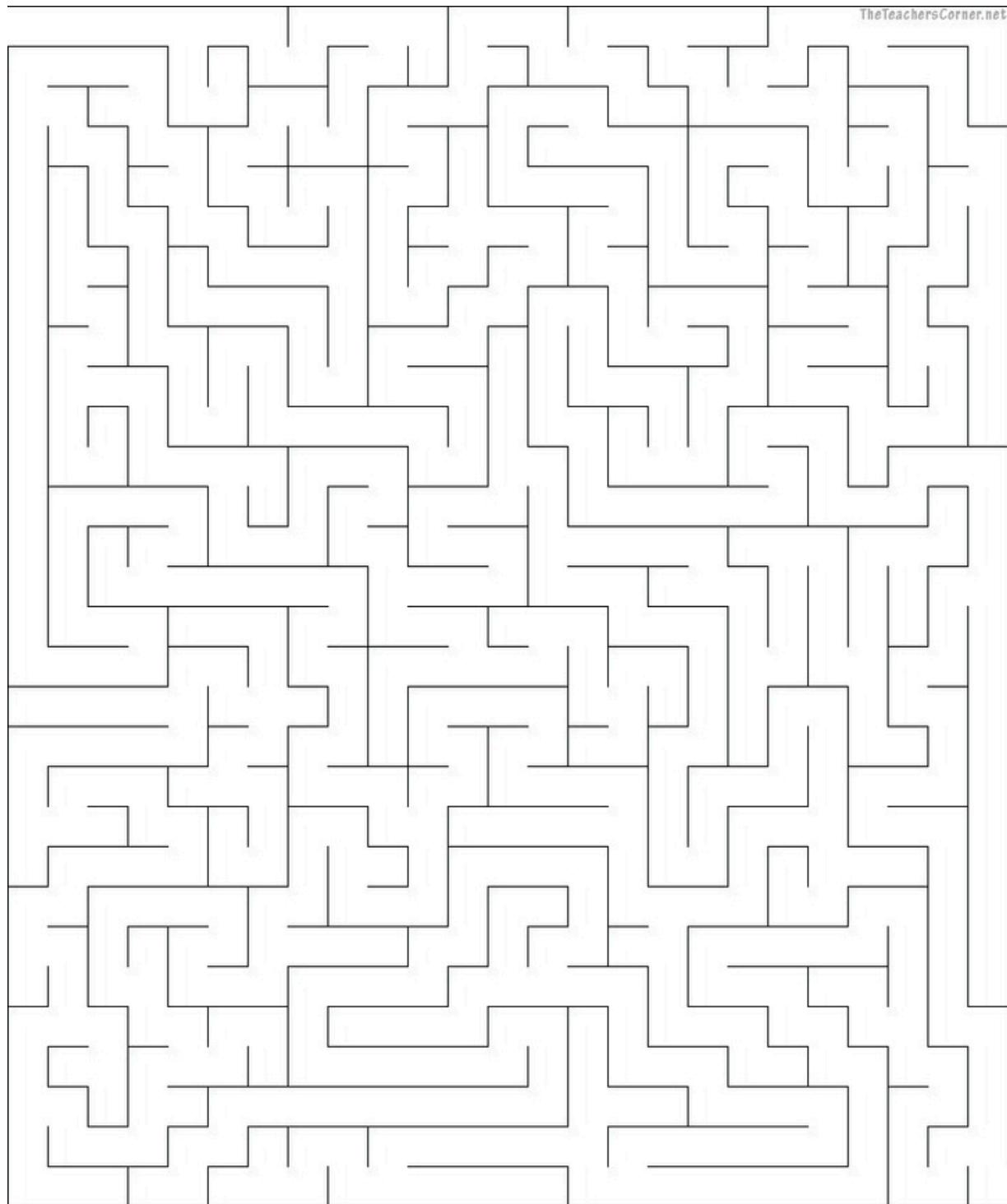
#FishOfTheYear | Vote for your favourite fish at www.fishoftheyear.org.nz

Send us a photo of your colouring in sheet to go in the draw to win some jaw-some
Fish of the Year prizes! Send your photo to: competitions@emr.org.nz

Can you help the fish migrate to the Marine Reserve?



Start
here



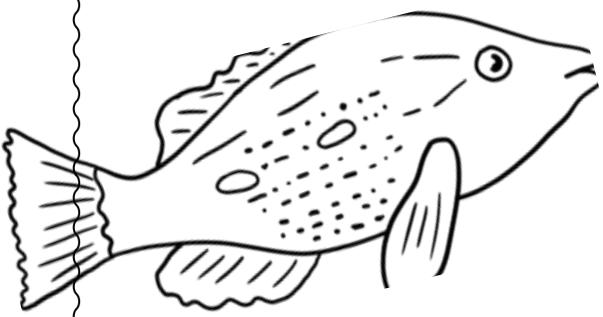
A place where an animal normally lives is called a habitat. There are many different kinds of habitats from the cold mountain tops, to the deep sea, to dry deserts in Africa and Antarctica to the moist rainforests of South America!

Activity:

Where would these animals normally live? Draw a line between each animal and it's habitat.

Kelp forests

**Streams
and
Lakes**



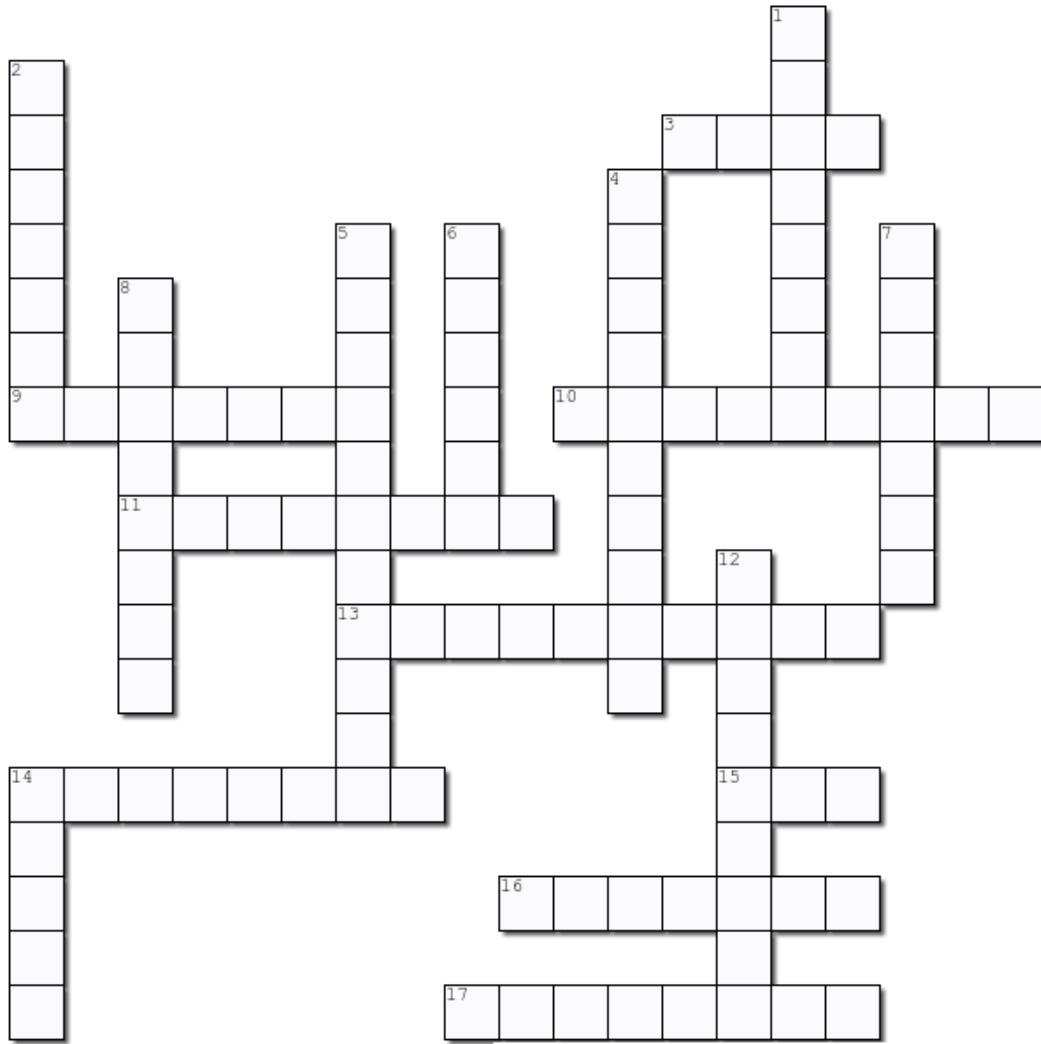
Crested weedfish
Great white shark
Inanga
Goatfish
Stargazer
Common bully
Yellow moray eel
Longfin eel
Olive rockfish
Snapper
Lamprey
Flounder
Hapuka
Hiwihiwi
Butter fish
Common bully
Torrentfish
Oceanic manta ray
Shortjaw kōkopu
Leat herjacket
Red moki
John dory
Pigfish

Estuaries

Rockpools

Open Ocean

Guess the answers to complete the crossword!



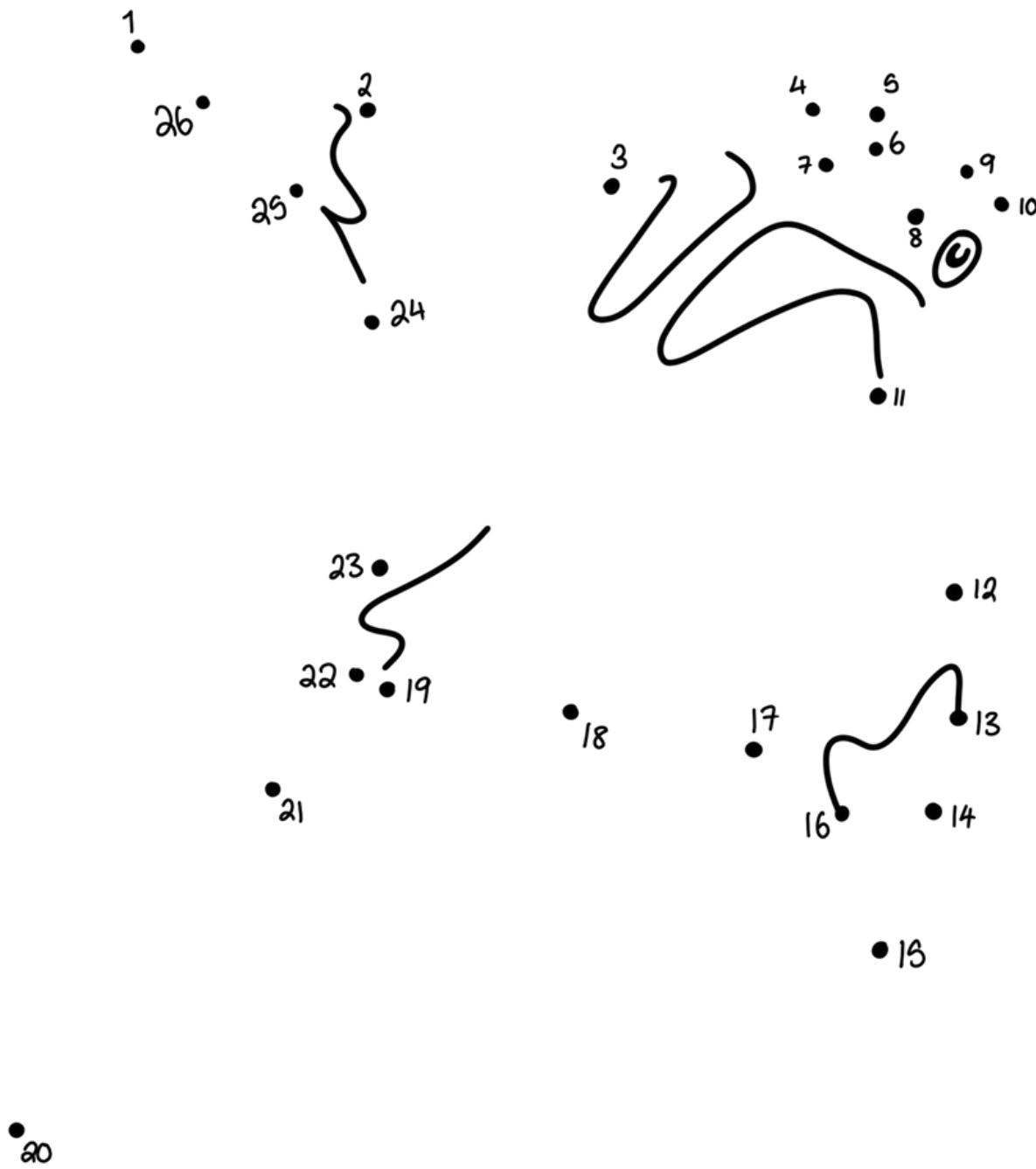
Across:

3. A prickly animal found all around Aotearoa, a tasty meal for a snapper
9. A large fish which is an important predator of kina
10. A jelly-like marine creature with stinging tentacles
11. A flat fish which lies on the ground and has both eyes on one side of it's body
13. The name of the Island at Aotearoa's oldest marine reserve
14. An animal with a large pouch to hold its babies
(Hint: only the males raise the babies)
15. The Māori name for fish
16. An animal that lives in rockpools and has many tentacles (hint: Nemo and Marlin live in one)
17. A fish which has a big spot on the side of its body which looks like an eye. and anal fins

Down:

1. An ocean voyager which grows to 7m wide and feeds on plankton
2. An animal which has 8 arms and 3 hearts
4. A fish which has a wavy mohawk of broad dorsal and anal fins
5. The _____ Islands are a marine protected area in Northland
6. A marine reptile with a large bony shell
7. The name of the biggest ocean on Earth
8. This animal is sometimes called a lobster
12. A big volcanic island in the Hauraki Gulf
13. Something a hermit crab makes its home with

Connect the dots to discover one of Aotearoa's fishes



This graceful ocean voyager reaches 7m long! It is a filter feeder and uses a filter to feed on plankton and crustaceans in the water. They feed by somersaulting through the water, showing off their bellies which have unique spots, like a fingerprint which tells scientists who it is!



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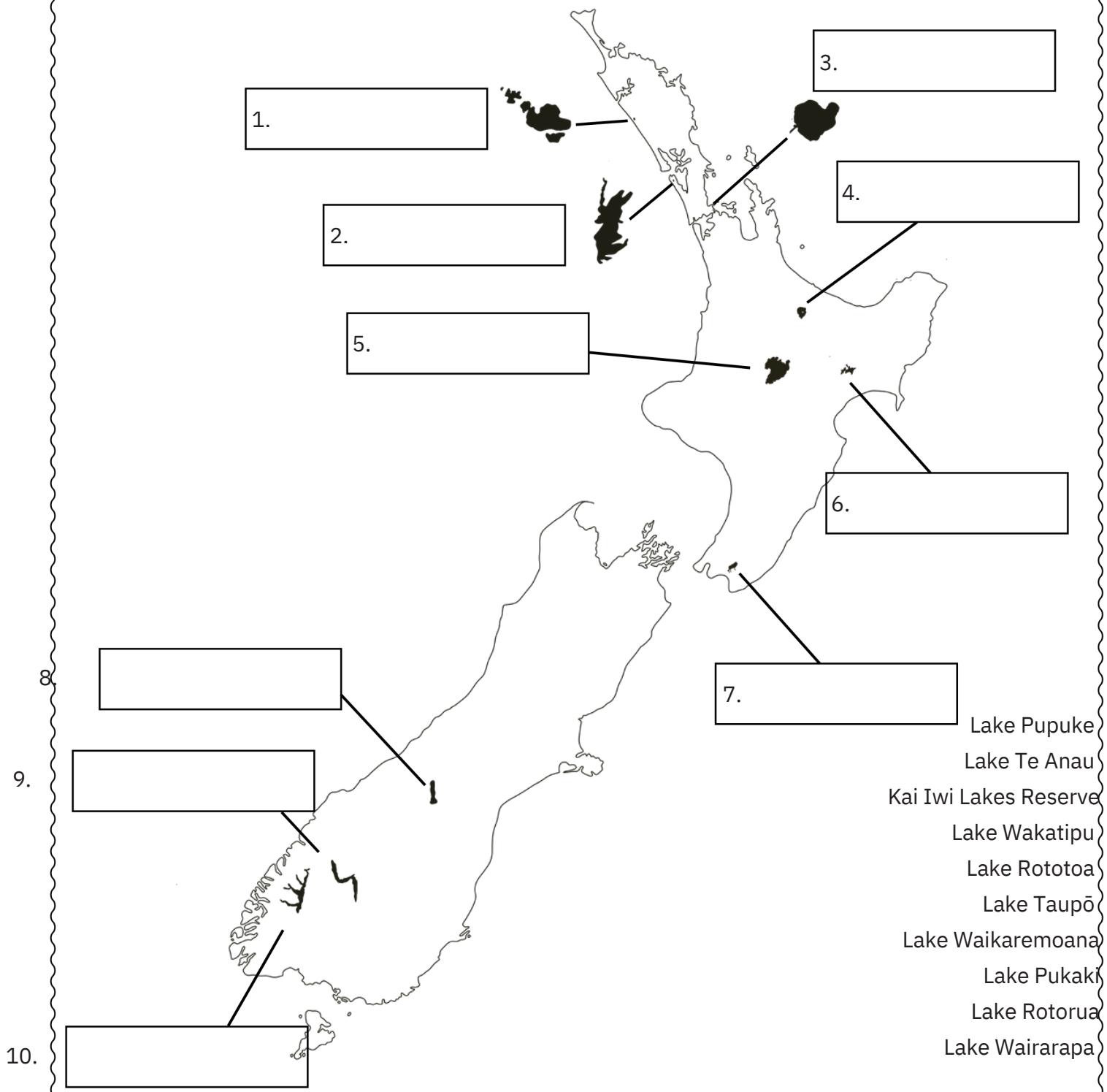
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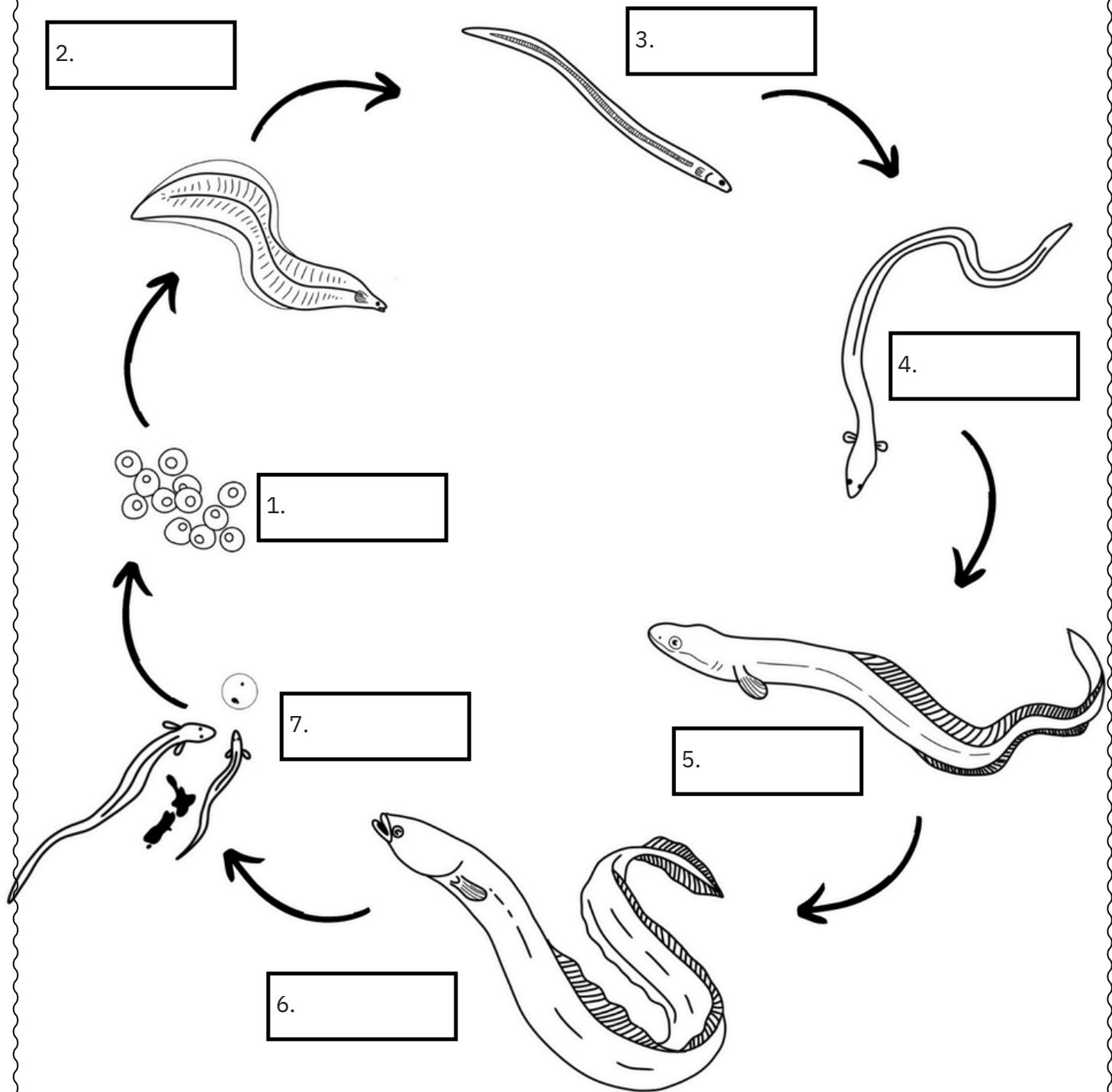
Did you know Aotearoa has 775 lakes? These lakes are home to a variety of fish including eels, inanga and kokopu.

Fill in the boxes to name 10 of Aotearoa's Lakes!



Can you name the different life stages of the longfin eel?

Eels migrate up stream as elvers to find suitable streams to live out their adult lives. After many years, they migrate to the pacific ocean to breed and die. The females lay millions of eggs that are fertilised by the male. These larvae are leaf shaped and float back to New Zealand by themselves on ocean currents.



Mature Adult - Glass Eel - Egg - Migrant Eel - Elver - Larvae - Juvenile

Pick 3 fish you would like to vote for and use the Fish of the Year website fill in the boxes and learn something new!

What three fish are you going to vote for?

Pick your favourite and learn more about it!

Name of fish: _____

What is its Māori name?



What does it look like?

Where does it live?

What does your animal like to eat?

What is something unique about your animal?



Draw a picture of your favourite animal!

As kaitiaki how can you help this animal?

Unscramble the letters:

Kingfish, Pigfish, Snapper, Weedfish, Leatherjacket, John dory, Red moki

Crossword:

1. Ika
2. Seashell
3. Snapper
4. John Dory
5. Ika
6. Goat Island
7. Flounder
8. Octopus
9. Anemone
10. Seahorse
11. Manta ray
12. Butterfish
13. Turtle
14. Crayfish
15. Pacific
16. Poor Knights
17. Kina
18. Rangitoto

Name the Lakes

1. Kai iwi lakes reserve
2. Lake Rototoa
3. Lake Pupuke
4. Lake Rotorua
5. Lake Taupō
6. Lake Waikaremoana
7. Lake Wairarapa
8. Lake Pukaki
9. Lake Wakatipu
10. Lake Te Anau

What habitat does the animal live in?

Kelp forests: Crested weedfish, goatfish, yellow moray eel, snapper, hiwihiwi, butterfish, leatherjacket, red moki, john dory, pigfish. **Open ocean:** Great white shark, hapuka, oceanic manta ray. **Freshwater:** Inanga, longfin eel, lamprey, common bullies torrentfish, short jaw kokopu. **Estuarine:** Flounder, Stargazer
Rockpools: Olive rockfish

Great Migrations!

1. Egg
2. Larvae
3. Glass eel
4. Elver
5. Juvenile
6. Mature adult
7. Migrant eel

Native, endemic, and introduced fish

Draw a line to match the term with its definition, and write two more fish species for each definition (look on the fishoftheyear website!)

Term	Definition	Examples
Introduced	Occurs naturally in our environment, and is also found in other countries	Snapper/tāmure
Endemic	Didn't live in Aotearoa until it was brought here by humans	Atlantic salmon
Native	Is found nowhere else on earth	shortjaw kōkopu

Introduced fish species can cause problems for our native and endemic species. What do you think some of the problems might be? Write 3 possible problems, and discuss the answers as a class.

Freshwater vs marine environments

Fish live in fresh water (most rivers, creeks, and streams) and saltwater (marine) environments.

Most species prefer one or the other. Circle whether the environment below contains saltwater, fresh water, or a mix of both.

Stream



River mouth



Beach



Saltwater *Freshwater*

Saltwater *Freshwater*

Saltwater *Freshwater*

Sea



Saltwater *Freshwater*

River



Saltwater *Freshwater*

Write down three New Zealand fish species you think live in each of the three environments: saltwater, freshwater, and a mix of both.

Freshwater	Saltwater (marine)	Both
Common bully	Snapper/tāmure	Longfin eel/tuna

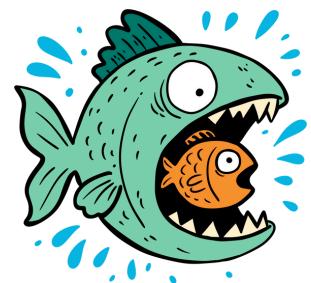
Threats to freshwater and marine environments

Habitat loss



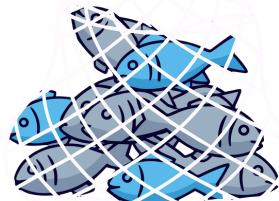
Habitat loss is the destruction or pollution of a natural environment, like coral reefs (marine) or rivers (freshwater), making them unusable for the plants and animals that live there.

Invasive species



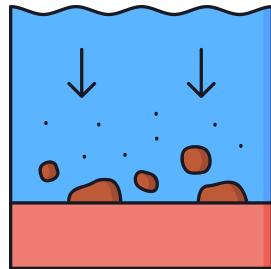
Invasive species are non-native plants or animals that outcompete native ones for food and space, often causing great harm to the balance of freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Overfishing



Overfishing is catching aquatic life faster than it can naturally reproduce. It collapses fish populations and disrupts the food web, with long term impacts.

Sedmentation



Sedimentation is when tiny particles of soil, sand, or pollution settle in the water. This smothers plants and habitats like coral reefs and fills in riverbeds, harming aquatic life. Deforestation and habitat destruction make this process much worse.

Plastic and rubbish



Plastic and rubbish clogs our streams, rivers, and oceans. Fish and other wildlife mistake it for food, or become tangled in it. It also releases toxins into marine and freshwater ecosystems.

Wastewater/stormwater



Wastewater is used water (sewage) full of pollutants that must be treated, though sometimes overflows into our waterways. Stormwater is untreated runoff that collects debris and chemicals, polluting rivers and marine habitats.

Fish of the Year

Why are fish different from each other?

Focus: Living World (Ecology), English (Oral Language, Written language).

Short unit: Home, sweet home – Y1-4

Activity 1: Allocate each student a *different* fish from the 'Fish of the Year' website. Get students to draw a picture of their fish and write a description that includes the name, environment, threat status, and three interesting facts about their chosen fish.

Activity 2: In groups of 4, students read their profiles to each other and ask questions, keeping a written record of what's the same, and what's different in comparison to their own fish.

Activity 3: Divide the classroom into three areas: Deep sea, coastal, and freshwater. Tell students to stand in the zone where their fish lives. *Note: some fish travel between zones, which leads to interesting discussions and kids standing in between zones!*

Activity 4: Students vote for three fish of their choice on the Fish of the Year website. In their writing journal or similar, get them to explain why they voted for each individual fish.

Fish of the Year

Short action unit Y1-6

The objective of this activity is to examine your local freshwater and marine environment, discover what fish life might live there, and challenges they might be facing to their ongoing survival.

Protect your local fish habitat

Choose a local freshwater, marine, or estuary environment (which might have both marine and freshwater areas) and work through the following questions:

- 1) What sort of environment is it? What characteristics does it have in terms of weather and land use (is it in or near forests, a city, close to farms)? Get students to draw an annotated diagram.
- 2) Based on the list of environmental threats listed in this document, what are some of the threats to your local aquatic environment? Write a list as a class.
- 3) In groups, choose a fish from the Fish of the Year website you think might live in your local aquatic environment. Create a presentation of your choice (eg poster, digital presentation) that profiles the following about your fish:
 - What it looks like
 - What it needs to survive
 - What threats it might be experiencing locally (be specific!)
 - Actions you and your community can take to protect it
- 4) As a class, choose an action idea you can all do, and organise class or lesson time to actually do it!

Fish of the Year

Research Y5-8

The objective of this short unit is to examine threats to our fish species in Aotearoa, and how we can address those threats at a local and national level. (Note: this activity requires the internet!)

Threats to our ika

Choose one of the threats listed in the Fish of the Year activity book and answer the following questions about it:

- 1) Find an example of how this threat is affecting the environment in New Zealand. Write a one-page analysis on what is happening, where it's happening, and how it might be affecting fish and wildlife populations.
- 2) Based on your answer for number one, what actions can you take in your local area to help address this challenge?
- 3) Write a letter to your local council, member of parliament, or a the Minister for the Environment/Primary Industries asking them to support the actions you're proposing in your area. And make sure you send it!

Fish of the Year

Focus: Living World (Ecology), English (Oral Language, Written).

Short unit: Campaign manager – Y1–8

Activity 1: Get students, in pairs, to pick a fish from the Fish of the Year website. Each pair needs a different fish - first in, first served!

Activity 2: In pairs, students discuss/write a list of things they like about their chosen fish.

Activity 3: Students to create campaign materials to promote this fish inside and outside the classroom. That could include a radio ad, a short video, a poster, or a multimedia presentation.

Activity 4: Students present this information to other classes, or at assembly, to encourage other students to vote for their preferred fish. Artwork and posters can also be put up around the school.