



SEAFOOD
NEW ZEALAND

DEEPWATER **BENTHIC ID GUIDE**

AUGUST 2026

Cover image: Gorgonian coral – photo credit: Peter Marriott, NIWA

Version history – replaces the 2022-23 version and removes the link to the Coral ID quiz which was retired when the app's platform ceased to exist. Adds Black Ball Sponge image on page 7. (updated 11 August 2026)

Tuesday, 11 August 2026

[https://seafoodnz.sharepoint.com/sites/Deepwater/Protected Species/Operational_Procedures/GUIDES/Current_Published/Coral_ID/Deepwater Benthic ID Guide 090226.docx](https://seafoodnz.sharepoint.com/sites/Deepwater/Protected%20Species/Operational_Procedures/GUIDES/Current_Published/Coral_ID/Deepwater%20Benthic%20ID%20Guide%20090226.docx)

CORAL (COU)

- Corals are tiny inter-connected individual 'polyps' that sit on an exoskeleton made of calcium carbonate. The polyp is shaped like a tube with a mouth surrounded by tentacles at one end and is the living part of the animal.
- Corals have very diverse shapes, including sea fan, bushy, tree, spiral and reef-building forms. Most of them are protected species.
- Use code COU for all unidentifiable corals.



CORAL (COU)



Stony branching coral



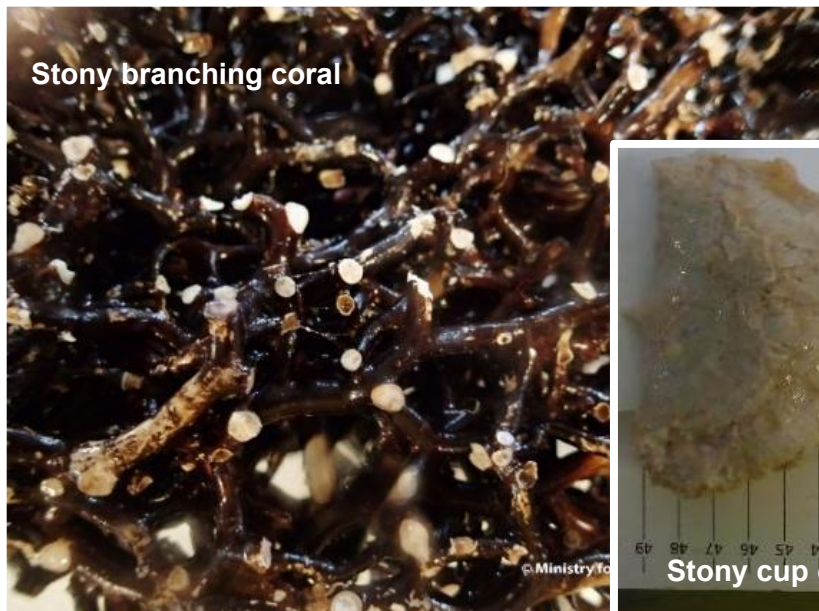
Anthothelid coral



Stony cup coral



Bubblegum coral



Stony branching coral

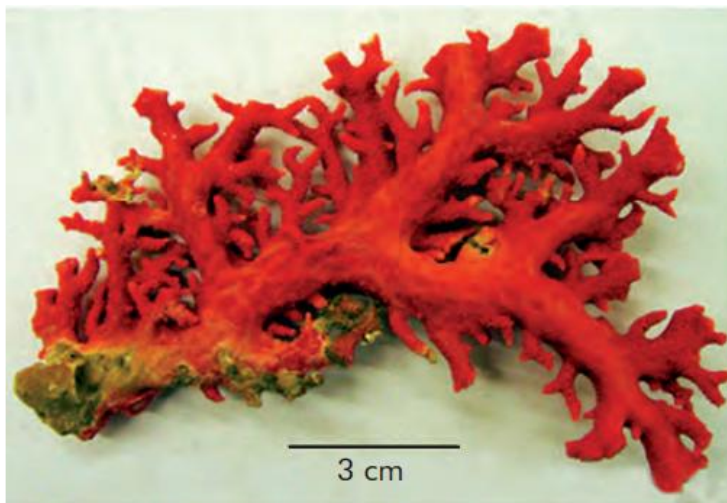


Stony cup coral

CORAL (COU)

Red hydrocorals (ERR)

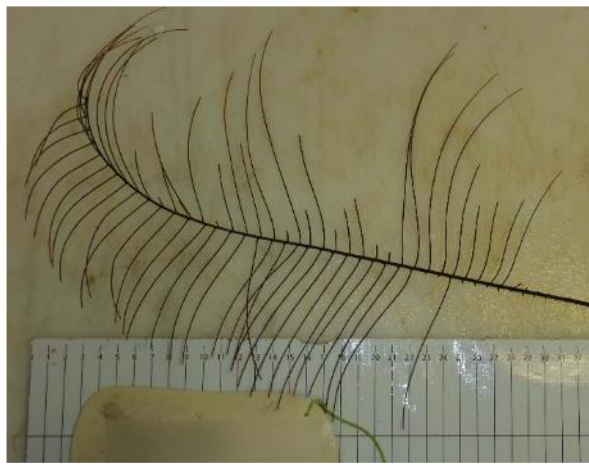
Only use this code if you are certain of the coral type. **If you are uncertain of the coral type, use code COU.**



CORAL (COU)

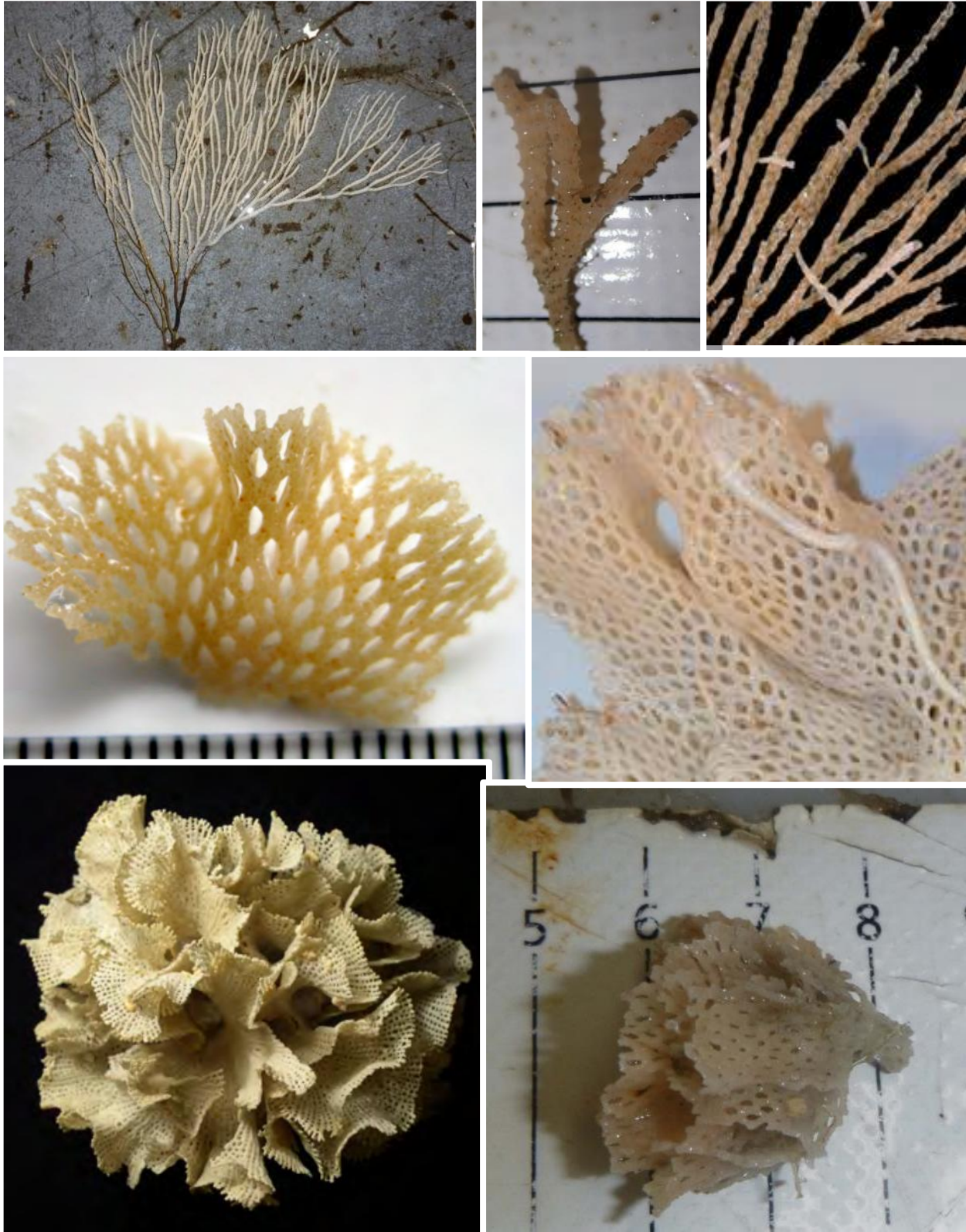
Black corals (COB)

Only use this code if you are certain of the coral type. **If you are uncertain of the coral type, use code COU.**



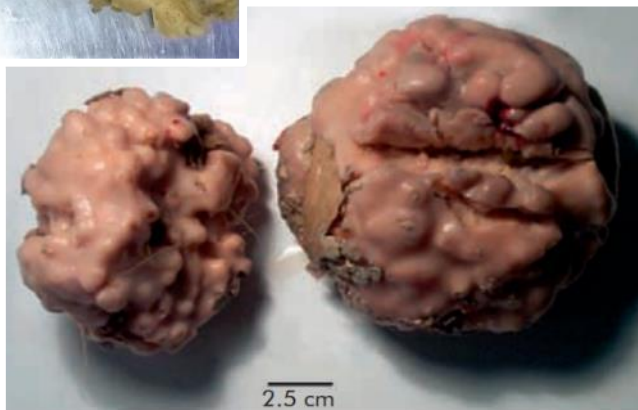
BRYOZOANS (COZ)

- Plant-like with branches and trunks but 'crunchy', can also be flat, encrusting colonies also 'crunchy'; skeleton made up of many tiny individuals called zooids.
- All structures within one colony are identical. Often resemble hard corals.



SPONGES (ONG)

- Spongy, no definite appendages, some with obvious glass spicules.
- Variety of shapes and structures including encrusting mats, tubular, round, fan-shaped, vase-shaped and branching.
- If unsure break off a small piece, internally should look like and feel like a bath sponge.



SPONGES (ONG)

