

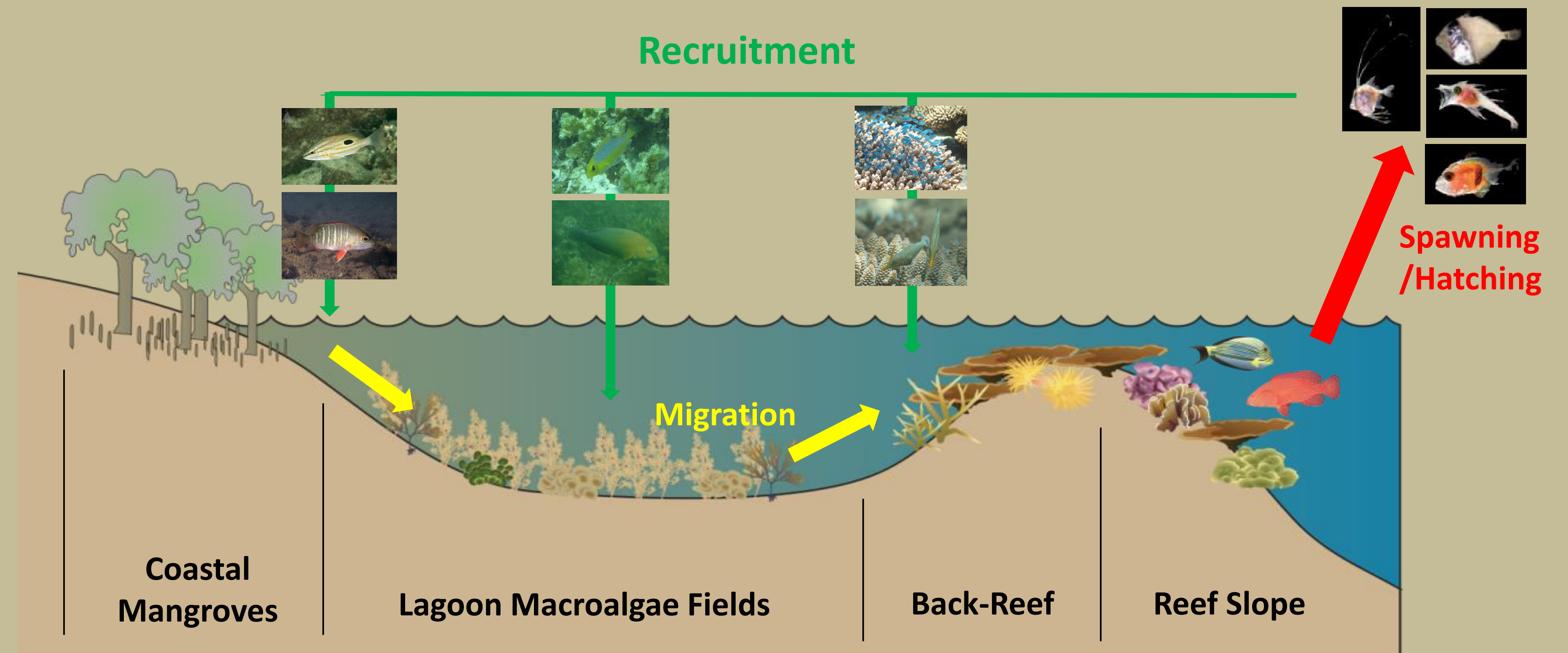
# Fish Recruitment at Ningaloo Reef

## What is Fish 'Recruitment'

- Most coral reef fish have a two stage life cycle: an **open ocean larval stage**, followed by a **reef associated stage**
- 'Recruitment' is the point where fish return from the open ocean and settle into their reef associated life
- Occurs during summer when water is warm
- Characterised by rapid changes in fish colour, shape and behaviour
- Less than 0.01% of larval fish make it to the point of recruitment



## A coral reef fish life cycle at Ningaloo



## Do all fish 'recruit' to the same locations?

- No. Different species of fish recruit to different habitats
- At Ningaloo, the most common recruitment habitats are the **diverse coral back-reefs** and **lagoon macroalgae fields**
- These habitats provide the greatest protection for tiny fish
- Which habitat a fish species chooses depends on their size at settlement, food preferences, swimming ability and competitive ability



Lagoon macroalgae fields



Corymbose coral heads

## Do fish recruit at the same time and in the same numbers each year?

- No. Recruit numbers **vary dramatically from year to year**, and the peak time of recruitment will vary within a year (generally December – February)
- The major driving factors generally relate to water temperature and weather conditions across summer
- Years with stronger Leeuwin Current flow are related to higher fish recruit numbers

