

# Reef

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the natural outcroppings of rock, are 3 feet to 4 feet in height," he said.

Mr. Black said some artificial reefs can cause environmental problems if made from the wrong material.

A reef built near Oak Island with old tires in the 1970s turned into a major environmental headache. The tires began coming off in waves after a 1993 storm, leaving fishing nets and washing up on

beaches. The state has spent at least \$318,000 to clean up the tires since 1993.

Mr. Black said the reef balls are "extremely environmentally friendly."

The reef association has never used them before because it was waiting to see how they performed elsewhere, he said.

Larry Crowder, a marine ecologist at Duke University, said the debate over whether artificial reefs lead to new fish or merely concentrate fish remains unresolved.

He said artificial reefs can damage natural reefs by luring marine life away from them. But if there

are no natural reefs nearby, artificial reefs create new ecosystems and habitat, he said.

"The conventional wisdom is that these things are acceptable as long as they're basically adding a habitat," he said.

Mr. Black said the reef balls will not be placed near any natural reefs, but will instead be added to four current artificial reefs.

Artificial reefs tend to stagnate unless replenished, he said.

"It's like when you sell all the rooms in a condo, you have to build more rooms to add more people," he said.

Located between two and 30 miles offshore, the reefs where the reef balls will be sunk are the Yaupon Beach Reef, Tom McGlam-

mary Reef, the Brunswick County Fishing Club Reef and the Gary Ennis Reef.

The reef balls are a cooperative project of the reef association, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and the state port in Wilmington, Mr. Blatt said.

The reef association is paying the \$65,000 cost for the balls to be made by Florida-based Reef Innovations, Mr. Black said. The company is making the structures on space donated by the port. Marine fisheries will deploy the reef balls starting in January.

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