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## Artificial coral reef project to protect marine environment

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DOHA • Qatar University's Environmental Studies Center (ESC), in collaboration with Qatar Petroleum (QP), has initiated the project for the introduction of artificial coral reef, a method which is fast becoming approved internationally to encourage the growth of coral reefs and ultimately enhance their ecosystem.



An expert setting in place an artificial coral reef.

"The reefs, an important part of Qatar's ecosystem, are protected, but are themselves facing the ongoing global threat such as global warming; modification of coastal areas by reclamation and wide-scale construction; oil exploration and production; fishing using explosives; raw sewage dumping and; mass diving," said Dr Mohsin Abdulla Al Ansi, Director of the ESC.

Reef balls that mimic natural reef limestone are constructed using cement of the same pH value as salt water along with special admixtures and micro silica. These balls contain neither toxins nor other biologically active compounds that can leak into the water — additionally; they remain stable on the sea bed in spite of strong undercurrents. The study is based on the choice of the right locations followed by a comprehensive mentoring programme to detect any changes in the ecosystem.

Dr Mohsin said that the objective of the artificial reefs is not to replace the existing natural ones but to assist in developing and strengthening the reef environment.

The ESC is well-experienced in manufacturing reef balls according to international standards and through its divers and research vessel, Muktaber Al Behar, has the capability to deploy and monitor the artificial reefs. "The vessel is critical to our research — without its facilities, we would not be able to carry out the work we do", Dr Mohsin said.

Under this project, hundreds of reef balls were deployed in many areas of the coastal waters of Qatar and as recent monitoring programmes show, are playing a significant role in enhancing the growth conditions and recovery of the reefs.

The one-year monitoring programme followed the deployment of the reef balls to study the settlement rate of the reefs and the types of plant and sea life that are attracted to the reef areas.

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