

# Reef balls to protect marine life in Qatar

by MOHAMMED IQBAL The Peninsula

**T**HE Qatar Scientific Club has launched a project to make reef balls to create artificial reefs in Qatari waters.

The project has been undertaken by the marine section of the club as part of its efforts to protect the marine life in Qatar, Mohammad Al Jaidah, head of the section, said yesterday.

"The increased shipping activity in the relatively small Gulf has caused a great threat to its marine life. Natural coral reefs, an essential for the sustenance of the marine bio-system, have been badly damaged due to the sound pollution created by shipping," Mohammad

said. "The increase in the consumption of fish by a rising population and the introduction of commercialised fishing has drastically reduced the fish resources in Qatari waters. This, added with the loss of natural reefs, may cause the extinction of several species of fish in the near future.

"Artificial reefs are useful tools for resorting the reef systems to a natural and productive balance," he added.

Reef balls are effective in building artificial reefs, Mohammad said. They are made by pouring concrete into a fibreglass mould, chemical additives are used to give the

reef balls high strength and to make the concrete suitable for marine life, Mohammad said.

The first reef ball was made at the marine section of the club a fortnight ago, with the assistance of experts from Occidental Petroleum in Qatar.

Two US experts, Todd Barber, president of the Georgia-based Reef Ball Development Group, and James Douglas Strack, a trainer from the Group, conducted a training programme for club members to instruct them on the making of reef balls. The fibreglass mould to make reef balls was supplied by Occidental.

Reef balls are of various sizes and weight, ranging from 200 kg to two tonnes. The expected life span of these reef balls is 500 years.

The club is planning to make reef balls on a large scale with the assistance of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture and sponsoring companies in Qatar, Mohammad said.

"In this project, we are closely co-operating with the Department of Environment at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture," Mohammad said.

"We have selected certain areas in the sea off Doha, Mesaieed (Umm Said) and the north of Qatar, for building artificial reefs. Building and repairing the reefs is a continuous and long-term project. After a reef is built in a certain area, it will take at least two years to establish a marine bio-system around it," he added.



A reef ball made at Qatar Scientific Club recently. US experts Todd Barber (right) and James Douglas Strack (left) are seen with Mohammad Al Jaidah, head of the marine section at the club.

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**The Peninsula  
May 26, 1997**

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