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## **Anna Maria considers artificial reef under city pier**

*By Laurie Krosney  
Islander Reporter*

The Anna Maria City Pier could be home to an artificial reef as early as January 2001. The reef would provide habitat to young fish species and help them grow to maturity.

Bob Fluke, coordinator of Manatee County's Ad Hoc Reef Committee, spoke at the Anna Maria City Commission meeting Sept. 28. He said the county's reef project has been under way for two years now.

"The program grew from the need to increase and enhance recreational fishing and diving in addition to eating and restoring marine habitat lost to development," he said.

Manatee County has seven reefs now. Two are more than 10 years old. The existing reefs are primarily made of concrete rubble.

Another nine are in the permitting process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The proposed city pier reef would be made of artificial "reef balls." According to a brochure from the Reef Ball Foundation, "a reef ball is an artificial reef module that imitates the appearance and function of natural coral reefs.

"The reef balls have openings and canals that make up an ideal living environment for a great variety of marine species. A special concrete mix, with a pH similar to sea water, assures compatibility with the ocean."

Commissioner Jay Hill said he thought the reef ball project sounded like an excellent idea. He was especially interested in the effect of the project on snook.

"The pier is famous for snook. Snook is an inshore type of fish that hang on the sandy bottom and fishermen free line them with shrimp or pinfish," Hill said.

Fluke replied there would be a monitoring program to look at the type of species that would be attracted.

"We're not sure what type of fish we'll attract in our artificial reef," Fluke said. "We're looking for fishery enhancement - a place for juvenile fish to grow - because we've lost habitat from development."

Ernie Moon of Pine Avenue questioned whether anyone has placed reef balls beneath a pier before.

Fluke replied, "One of the big ideas is deploying them under boat docks. This has been done many places to try to give habitat back to the fish."

City Attorney Jim Dye suggested that the city check with the pier's restaurant tenant to see if he has

any objections to the project.

He also suggested a "hold harmless" clause if the city goes ahead --- something he said could be looked into as the permitting process moves forward.

Commissioners decided to postpone a vote on the artificial reef project until checking - with Mario Schoenfelder, who holds the lease for the pier, and until they have time to look over the reef ball materials offered to them by Fluke.

Anyone wanting more information about reef balls can log onto the foundation's website at [www.reefballcoalition.org](http://www.reefballcoalition.org).

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