

## ENVIRONMENT REEFBALLS

A year after they were put in place, the reef balls are being colonised by coral and fish.

**T**wo new sites off Fahal Island are in the process of being 'seeded' with reef balls in an attempt to grow coral.

The extension of the reef ball project comes just a year after the first of the reef balls were positioned in the sea bed off the beach at Bss. Al Hamra.

And the success with which coral and marine life has been attracted to these year-old artificial reefs has delighted those involved with the project.

"The reef balls off the RAH beach are like jewels in the sea," said Nic Heymans, Head of HSE Management

System Development, and a keen diver.

"One year on we already have soft coral growing on the reef balls. There are also sponges and a variety of algae."

Marine life, too, seems to be enjoying the reef balls.

"Every two months we are photographing and videotaping the sites and we have logged 11 species of fish, a variety of shellfish, and rocky shells," said Nic. "It's so good a result as we could have hoped for."

The latest deployment of the reef balls brings to 30 the total now in the sea. The two new sites are Fahal Island - one shallow,



**ALIEN ATTACK!** Like an army from outer space the reefballs wait on the quayside

one deeper - were chosen to see what effect the different environments will have on coral growth.

Reef balls have also been put in position at different times of the year to see

what effect seasonality has on growth.

The reef balls, which are made of concrete containing microcytina, are designed so that they become pH neutral with their environment over time. Without this design feature, coral would not grow on them.

Plans are now under way to locate another 25 reef balls off

the RAH site.

The next step, says Nic Heymans, is to attempt to plant coral onto the reef balls.

"In South America they have had a 90% success rate with one type of coral. Although that species is not found in the water off Oman, we are confident that we can success transplant some of the types native to this area.

"The area around Fahal is one of the most diverse coral areas in Oman, and the planting project will be very exciting."

"The reef balls off the Island have already been timed with pests, so we are ready to start."

**Pictures by  
ABDULLAH HALL**

# Welcome to the ball!



**HARD TO SPOT:** A stone fish finds a reef ball to its liking