

# Reef

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remains an open question. Figley, however, believes the creation of more artificial reefs ultimately will mean more revenue for the state. The reefs are 100 to 200 times more productive as habitat than plain sandy bottom, the prevailing conditions along the Jersey Shore.

Within two weeks of being sunk, a reef structure bristles with barnacles, with mussels, sea anemones and sponges taking up residence gradually. Sea bass, blackfish, hake, cod,

pony, flounder and lobster eventually follow suit. The state's 14 artificial reefs, begun in 1984, are home to some 330 million fish on any given day.

"Reef fishing is phenomenal," said Figley, who estimates the sites generate \$15 million a year in recreational spending from fishing parties and divers.

"And that's not counting the cost of the boats, fuels and charters," he said.

Ed Bogert, chairman of the New Jersey Council of Dive Clubs and a charter dive boat captain, said that he, too, supports the installation of reef balls.

The state has yet to replace some

of the in-shore wrecks and jetties that were covered over by beach replenishment during the past three years, but the artificial reefs have been a boon for observing marine life, he said.

"It's not the Caribbean or Florida," Bogert said. "But New Jersey is blessed."

Figley said there's little risk of up-sea clutter with reef balls. Artificial reefs are permitted in a 24-square-mile area off New Jersey, but less than 2 percent of the area is covered now.

"We haven't put much of a dent in the ocean floor," he said.

Staff writer Jeff Mey contributed to this report.