Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL MONITOR HANDS DOWN ENTRANCE ADVICE

The Bay dredging Independent Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke, has today made three recommendations to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to help ensure the Channel Deepening Project achieves its environmental goals.

The advice comes after the Office last week received the Port of Melbourne Corporation's (PoMC) investigation report into last month's dredging clean up incident at the Entrance to Port Phillip Bay.

Mr Bourke said his advice formalised what had been learnt from the environmental incident at the Entrance.

"The incident in the Entrance was the first non-conformance by PoMC and the Office has followed through on its role to ensure that it will not occur again," Mr Bourke said.

The Office's advice includes:

- Amending the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to require PoMC to notify the Office and the Project's regulators of a verified non-conformance within one business day;
- Bringing forward the deep reef habitat assessment of the Entrance to as soon as practicable; and
- Amending other documentation to include that PoMC's office-based quality checks are conducted and completed before the *Queen of the Netherlands* recommences dredging in the area subject to the clean up at the Entrance.

Mr Bourke said the community had the right to know if the Entrance's sensitive marine environment had experienced any unexpected environmental effects as a result of the dredging activity.

"PoMC's remedial action, which included a make-up clean up of the Entrance was done promptly and based on the information available to me, I am satisfied with the corrective actions taken by PoMC," Mr Bourke said.

"The Office believes it would make sense to bring forward the assessment of the impacts of dredging on deep reef communities at the Entrance.

"I have recommended that the assessment should begin as soon as practicable and no later than 30 days after the Minister for Environment and Climate Change has approved the final clean up at the Entrance, currently scheduled for mid-September 2008.

"Furthermore, the results must be reported as soon as practicable following the completion of the survey and its analysis."

He said a key learning from the clean up incident at the Entrance was the need for prompt reporting.

"After discussions with PoMC, its management team have committed to promptly notify the Office of any non-conformances against the EMP and this will occur within one business day," Mr Bourke said.

"I believe this is a reasonable ask and I am confident PoMC can meet this expectation."

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Mr Bourke said he had discussed the Office's recommendations with the PoMC's management and understood they were agreeable to the changes.

"PoMC's adoption of the Office's recommendations, combined with the operational changes PoMC has already made in response to the incident, will help ensure the dredging project's currently expected environmental goals will be achieved," he said.

Mr Bourke also announced turbidity levels continued to remain below the environmental limits, despite a response level being triggered by a monitoring meter located in the south of the Bay.

He said an elevated turbidity reading was recorded for a short period on the morning of 15 August 2008.

"Response Level 1 - a trigger level set out in the EMP - was activated by a conformance meter located near the south east Dredged Material Ground," Mr Bourke said.

"The turbidity limit set to protect seabirds in that area is 17 nephelometric turbidity units (NTUs). Turbidity peaked at nine NTUs, which triggered Response Level 1, but no further response levels were activated.

"The Office notes that the turbidity level had returned below the trigger level by midday that day. Despite the rise in turbidity, there was no breach of the environmental limit that was put in place to protect sensitive marine plants and animals in that area."

To view the Environmental Monitor's advice please visit: Office investigations, reports & advice - Office of the Environmental Monitor

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