

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

Thursday, 11 September, 2008

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITOR DELIVERS ADVICE ON DREDGING OIL SPILL

The independent Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke, has recommended that the Port of Melbourne Corporation (PoMC) and other agencies who responded to last month's dredging oil spill in Port Phillip Bay attend a debrief to ensure the Channel Deepening Project continues to achieve its environmental requirements.

Providing his advice today, Mr Bourke said the Office had considered information contained in PoMC's investigation report and their assessment of modelling provided by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) to inform its recommendation.

"The Office of the Environmental Monitor takes all incidents that could affect the Port Phillip Bay environment seriously," Mr Bourke said.

"Oil spills in marine environments are unacceptable. Last month's oil spill by the *Queen of the Netherlands* at the Entrance to the bay is a reminder that when implementing significant projects such as the Channel Deepening Project incidents such as this may occur.

"As required in the Environmental Management Plan (EMP), it is vital that if incidents occur, immediate response and action must be taken to reduce any possible effects to the environment."

Mr Bourke said the Office was satisfied that PoMC acted in timely manner to stop the leak and notify the Project's regulators and the Office, as required in the EMP.

He said the EMP made it explicit that opportunities for improvement would be identified during the course of dredging operations.

"Today's recommendation formalises what has been learnt from the oil spill incident and attempts to bring together PoMC and all the relevant parties to review the management of this oil spill, with particular emphasis on improving communication across the group to ensure the Project continues to meet its environmental goals.

"I have discussed my recommendation with PoMC's management and they agree that an incident debrief would be helpful," he said.

Mr Bourke said modelling from AMSA on the incident showed that the 800 to 900 litres of hydraulic oil initially released into the water weathered rapidly, reducing to approximately 20 litres after 12 hours.

"The modelling also shows that the rapidly weathering oil spill was carried from the Entrance by the outgoing tide and currents into Bass Strait and away from environmentally sensitive areas," Mr Bourke said.

"The Office also noted that the hydraulic hose that ruptured had a life span of around six years. PoMC has provided the Office with its maintenance log book, which shows that the hose had been replaced in January this year."

To view the Environmental Monitor's advice please visit:

<http://www.oem.vic.gov.au/Officeinvestigationreportsadvice>.

Media contact: Laura Hill 9637 8235 / 0448 715 455/ www.oem.vic.gov.au