

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

Wednesday, 18 February, 2009

CHANNEL DEEPENING PROJECT MEETS ENTRANCE DEPTH LIMITS

A report by the Office of the Environmental Monitor has confirmed that no over-dredging occurred in the Entrance to Port Phillip Bay by the Channel Deepening Project.

Releasing its advice on Entrance dredging and clean up works today, Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke said the Port of Melbourne Corporation had complied with the dredging depth and width limits set out in the Environmental Management Plan.

“The Environmental Management Plan’s strict rules include limits on the depth and width allowed to be dredged at the Entrance. This rule is in place to prevent over-dredging and limits the extent that tidal changes may occur in the Bay,” Mr Bourke said.

“The Office has examined certified underwater depth data and found that dredging works fully complied with the controls put in place to prevent over-dredging from happening at the Entrance.”

Mr Bourke said the Environmental Management Plan required the Port of Melbourne Corporation to use underwater video footage to assess both Rip and Nepean Banks for remaining rock spill.

“Combined with detailed information on clean up operations, this footage helped the Office judge the completeness of Entrance clean up works, which it considered were adequate.

“The Office also concluded that the Port of Melbourne Corporation complied with the rules set to control and limit rock spill at the Entrance.

“The footage showed that while clean up works on Rip Bank were comprehensive, there were some rocks on one area of the bank, several hundred metres away from the Canyon edge.

“The Port of Melbourne Corporation has informed the Office that it will revisit the Entrance to undertake additional clean up works in this area. This work will be completed by the *Cornelis Zanen* by 19 March 2009.

“The Office believes the decision made by the Port of Melbourne Corporation to revisit the Entrance and undertake further clean up works is a sensible measure,” Mr Bourke said.

Mr Bourke said as part of its assessment of the Channel Deepening Project’s compliance with the Environmental Management Plan, the Office gathered and scrutinised a wide range of information on dredging and clean up operations at the Entrance.

“The Office has examined Port of Melbourne Corporation documents and reports, reviewed underwater video footage, commissioned independent audits on dredging operations and engaged independent experts to provide advice,” Mr Bourke said.

He said three months of Port Phillip Bay tidal height data was also considered by the Office.

“Modelling done during the Supplementary Environment Effects Statement phase of the project indicated that tides in Port Phillip Bay would slightly increase as a result of deepening the Entrance to the Bay,” Mr Bourke said.

“In response to strong community interest in the assessment of the actual changes against those predicted, the Office contracted the National Tidal Centre (NTC) to analyse the tidal data and prepare a report identifying changes to tide conditions in the Bay.

“Tidal data from October, November and December 2008 show that where slight increases were detected at Williamstown and South Channel Pile, they were consistent with those predicted in the Supplementary Environment Effects Statement.

“NTC will prepare 12 monthly reports on Bay tidal heights up to September 2009 and the Office will promptly report the results to the community.”

The Office’s advice on dredging operations at the Entrance and the latest tidal height data reports are available at www.oem.vic.gov.au.

Today Mr Bourke also said that Port Phillip Bay turbidity levels remained below the Channel Deepening Project’s environmental safeguards.

“The latest turbidity monitoring data, from 8 to 15 February 2009 did not reveal any exceedances of turbidity limits,” he said.

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