

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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ENTRANCE DEEP REEF MONITORED

The Office of the Environmental Monitor has viewed recently submitted underwater video footage of the Entrance's deep reef canyon that shows the continued presence of healthy sponge and coral communities.

"The deep reef community is only found in the Entrance canyon and inhabits an area approximately 120 hectares in size," Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke said.

Following the Minister for Environment and Climate Change's recent decision to list Port Phillip Bay's Entrance canyon deep reef community under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, Mr Bourke said the detailed monitoring carried out for the Channel Deepening Project on the Entrance would be valuable in managing the deep reef community.

"The Department of Sustainability and Environment must prepare a plan, called an Action Statement, to continue to conserve and manage the community and the Office of the Environmental Monitor is well positioned to contribute to the plan," Mr Bourke said.

He said the underwater video footage, which shows sponges and coral are present in the deep reef canyon, was required by the Channel Deepening Project's rule book.

"The video supports a publicly available field work report on the methods used to assess the impacts and recovery of dredging on the Entrance's deep reef community," Mr Bourke said,

"The Office has read the report and viewed samples of 34-hour video footage that shows the continued presence of sponges and coral in the Entrance canyon.

"The Supplementary Environment Effects Statement predicted that some areas of the canyon would be affected by rockfall from dredging. It also predicted that the affected areas would recover in time.

"The video confirms that some rockfall from dredging has occurred. This preliminary finding is based on underwater video surveys of sites on the canyon walls next to the areas dredged on Rip and Nepean Banks, at the top of the canyon."

Mr Bourke said a report on the analysis of the video and other information collected during the underwater surveys was expected in June.

"The report will provide the Office with evidence-based information on the extent of the rockfall as well as information on the marine communities that live in the canyon and their recovery so far," Mr Bourke said.

"The report is being prepared and reviewed by marine scientists before being submitted to the Office and the project's regulators.

"It is important that the necessary time is taken to do this step well as it sets the foundation for future monitoring of this community scheduled to happen in four and 10 years time.

"The Office will consider the report as part of its job to scrutinise the environmental performance of the Channel Deepening Project. We will also make it available on our web site."

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