

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

REPORT RELEASED ON SOUTH CHANNEL DREDGING NON CONFORMANCE

Wednesday, 24 June, 2009

The Office of the Environmental Monitor this week released its report and advice on an incident that involved the *Queen of the Netherlands* dredging outside a set area in the south of Port Phillip Bay on 19 April, 2009.

Victoria's Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke said the incident was a partial non conformance against one of the Channel Deepening Project's Environmental Management Plan (EMP) rules.

"The EMP has 58 rules about where, when and how the project can be delivered. The partial non conformance happened when the *Queen of the Netherlands* dredged sand from outside the approved work area in the South Channel, near Hovell Pile, about three kilometres off the coast of Rosebud," Mr Bourke said.

"For around one and a half minutes the vessel dredged outside the set area for a distance of about 90 metres."

Mr Bourke said following the Port of Melbourne Corporation's (PoMC) notification of the incident, his Office sought information on the partial non conformance to help inform its report and advice to the project's regulators.

"We were satisfied with the information provided by PoMC and investigations by the Office concluded that because the incident occurred within the existing shipping channel, the environmental impacts of the partial non conformance on the Bay's plants and animals were negligible," Mr Bourke said.

"Prevention is better than cure and our main focus was to understand how the incident occurred and whether or not any changes needed to be made to dredging operations to help prevent it from happening again during the remainder of the project. Due to the unique features of the dredging works where the incident occurred, the Office did not consider that project-wide changes needed to be made."

Mr Bourke said the Office had also released its latest review of dredging operations.

"*Quarterly Review No.5* provides an independent and transparent view of the project's environmental performance from 1 March to 31 May, 2009," he said.

"Results from the Plume Intensity and Extent Monitoring Program showed that the turbidity plume generated during dredging over summer in Port Melbourne and Williamstown channels did not deviate beyond modelled predictions. Also, last month the results from the 2009 Lower Yarra River Fish Study were released, showing fish caught in the Yarra are still safe to eat at the recommended levels," Mr Bourke said.

Turbidity monitoring data for 15 to 21 June, 2009 showed low turbidity across monitoring sites in the Bay.

Both reports and all the latest monitoring data on the Bay are available at www.oem.vic.gov.au.

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