

# Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

---

Thursday 30 July, 2009

## **WEIGHT WATCHERS, LITTLE PENGUIN STYLE**

Weight watching of Little Penguins at Victoria's most popular natural wildlife attraction, Phillip Island Nature Parks (PINP), has shown the birds recorded healthy weights, while dredging in Port Phillip Bay continued.

Victoria's Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke said that during April to June 2009, the weights of hundreds of Little Penguins were recorded as part of a four-year Baywide Little Penguin Monitoring Program.

"Some community groups were concerned that dredging may affect the penguin colony's food supply and water clarity at sites where they look for food," Mr Bourke said.

"The Channel Deepening Project has a number of controls in place to avoid or minimise environmental effects to Little Penguins from dredging, and monitoring is in place to provide assurance that the birds are adequately protected.

"The monitoring program, run by the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Arthur Rylah Institute and PINP, uses an automated weigh bridge to record the penguins' body weight. The data gives researchers an indication of the birds' body condition and overall health," Mr Bourke said.

PINP Research Manager Dr Peter Dann said information from more than 3500 individual weigh-ins of Little Penguins coming ashore on Phillip Island between April and June this year was used to look for any changes to the birds' weights against the long-term average.

"The average weight for male Little Penguins is approximately 1.2 kilograms and 1.1 kilograms for female penguins," Dr Dann said.

"The results show that during the last three months of monitoring the Little Penguins' body weights fluctuated but stayed above the long-term average, meaning both male and female penguins experienced favourable feeding conditions," he said.

Dr Dann said the health of Little Penguins largely depended on the availability of food, their ability to find it and on the distance they had to travel while searching.

"A Little Penguin's body weight also fluctuates considerably according to the stage of a bird's annual breeding cycle," Dr Dann said.

"Moulting generally occurs from February to April, at which time penguins don't go to sea for at least 17 days, and therefore lose a considerable amount of weight. Following this, the birds forage at sea for long periods of time and typically gain much of the weight that was lost during the moulting period. Renovation of burrows and courtship behaviour occurs during May and June, after which time the penguins may make longer foraging trips throughout winter," he said.

The body weight of Little Penguins has been continuously monitored by PINP since 2001, providing a solid background of data to compare current and future results.

The penguins' body weights are monitored daily using an automated weigh bridge located on one of the pathways the birds use to return to their burrows.

The latest report on the Little Penguins' body weight and a short video on the monitoring program are available at [www.oem.vic.gov.au](http://www.oem.vic.gov.au).

Mr Bourke said results from a separate monitoring program that used satellite tracking devices to monitor the foraging habits of Little Penguins during winter 2008 showed up to 60 per cent of the birds entering Port Phillip Bay remained there on foraging trips lasting up to several weeks.

It was the first time the tracking program had been run during the winter non-breeding season," Mr Bourke said.

"A report on the results as well as some very entertaining animations of the penguins' foraging movements in Port Phillip Bay can be found at [www.oem.vic.gov.au](http://www.oem.vic.gov.au)," he said.

-ENDS-