

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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SAMPLING NETS GOOD SIGN FOR FUTURE SNAPPER FISHING

Increased numbers of snapper larvae collected during a Channel Deepening Project Baywide Monitoring Program could point to excellent snapper fishing in three to four years time, Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke said today.

Releasing the Baywide Fish Egg and Larval Monitoring Program report today Mr Bourke said monitoring data showed Port Phillip Bay continued to be a key spawning habitat for important fish species such as snapper and anchovy.

“The Baywide Fish Egg and Larval Monitoring Program aims to detect changes in the number of fish eggs and larvae, including snapper and anchovy, outside what is considered normal for the Bay,” Mr Bourke said.

“The data from the program along with the results from other baywide fish monitoring programs is reviewed collectively to understand the overall status of fish stocks in the Bay. The data is also used to measure recruitment and the likely status of future fish populations, particularly the popular recreational species snapper.”

Anthony Hurst, Acting Executive Director Fisheries Victoria, said field sampling carried out by Fisheries Victoria during November 2008 to January 2009 collected more than 220,000 fish eggs and 33,000 fish larvae from the Bay.

“The information generated from the monitoring program shows more snapper larvae were collected in 2008-09 compared to the same period in 2007-08. The numbers of anchovy larvae collected were within the range observed over the past five years,” Mr Hurst said.

“Fisheries Victoria research has shown there is a relationship between the numbers of snapper larvae collected during sampling and the number of adult snapper recruited into the fishery three to four years later.

“Good numbers of snapper and anchovy larvae were collected, so we expect to see excellent snapper and anchovy stocks in the years to come,” Mr Hurst said.

Mr Hurst said the program’s results also showed the total numbers of fish eggs and larvae collected in 2008-09 were within the range recorded in previous years.

“Monitoring of fish egg and larval abundance in the Bay started in 2004, and data collected since has shown that the number of fish eggs and larvae in the Bay does vary from year to year,” he said

“For example, numbers of anchovy eggs recorded in 2008-09 were lower than 2007-08, but similar to 2006-07. Variation between years is expected in a dynamic ecosystem like Port Phillip Bay,” Mr Hurst said.

Sampling for the monitoring program took place at known snapper spawning locations including Hobsons Bay, Point Wilson, central Port Phillip Bay and in the water off Frankston and between Queenscliff and Portsea.

The eggs and larvae were collected using a modified plankton net that was lowered into the water at different depths and towed behind a fishing boat.

The Baywide Fish Egg and Larval Monitoring Program will run until 2011 with the results scrutinised and made available by the Office of the Environmental Monitor at www.oem.vic.gov.au.

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