

Office of the Environmental Monitor

Fact Sheet: Ramsar-listed Wetlands Monitoring Program

What are Ramsar-listed Wetlands?

Wetlands are often low lying areas that are at or near the level of the water table and are regularly covered by shallow water. Ramsar-listed Wetlands are wetlands that have been recognised for their significance under the International Convention on Wetlands, which Australia signed up to in Ramsar, Iran in 1971.



Photo: White mangrove from Western Port

The Port Phillip Bay (western shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Wetland form the Ramsar-listed Wetland that was identified as being relevant to the Channel Deepening Project (the Project). The wetland includes areas of western Port Phillip Bay (the Bay) and the Bellarine Peninsula.

The wetland holds special significance for maintaining the ecological diversity of flora and fauna from the region, including migratory species.

The western shoreline of the Bay caters for a wide range of habitat types and is home to several important bird species, including trans-equatorial migratory shorebirds.

Ramsar-listed Wetlands Monitoring Program

Small changes to tidal levels, currents and hydrology around the Ramsar Wetlands as a result of deepening the Entrance to the Bay were predicted in the Supplementary Environmental Effects Statement (SEES). These changes were predicted to cause slight increases to the flushing of saltmarsh environments, resulting in an increase in the area of saltmarsh vegetation.

The Project has a rule book, the Environmental Management Plan, which limits how the Project can affect such wetlands around the edges of the Bay. It sets standards and controls to avoid and minimise effects on tidal heights in the Bay by limiting the extent of changes to the depth at the Entrance.

The rule book includes the Ramsar-listed Wetlands Monitoring Program, which is one of nine Baywide Monitoring Programs. The program's objective is to confirm that the Project's effects upon Ramsar-listed Wetlands are no greater than what was predicted in the SEES.

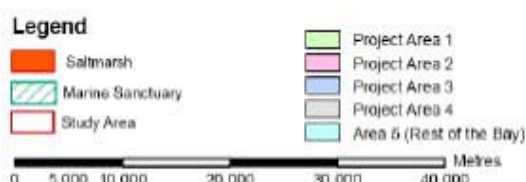
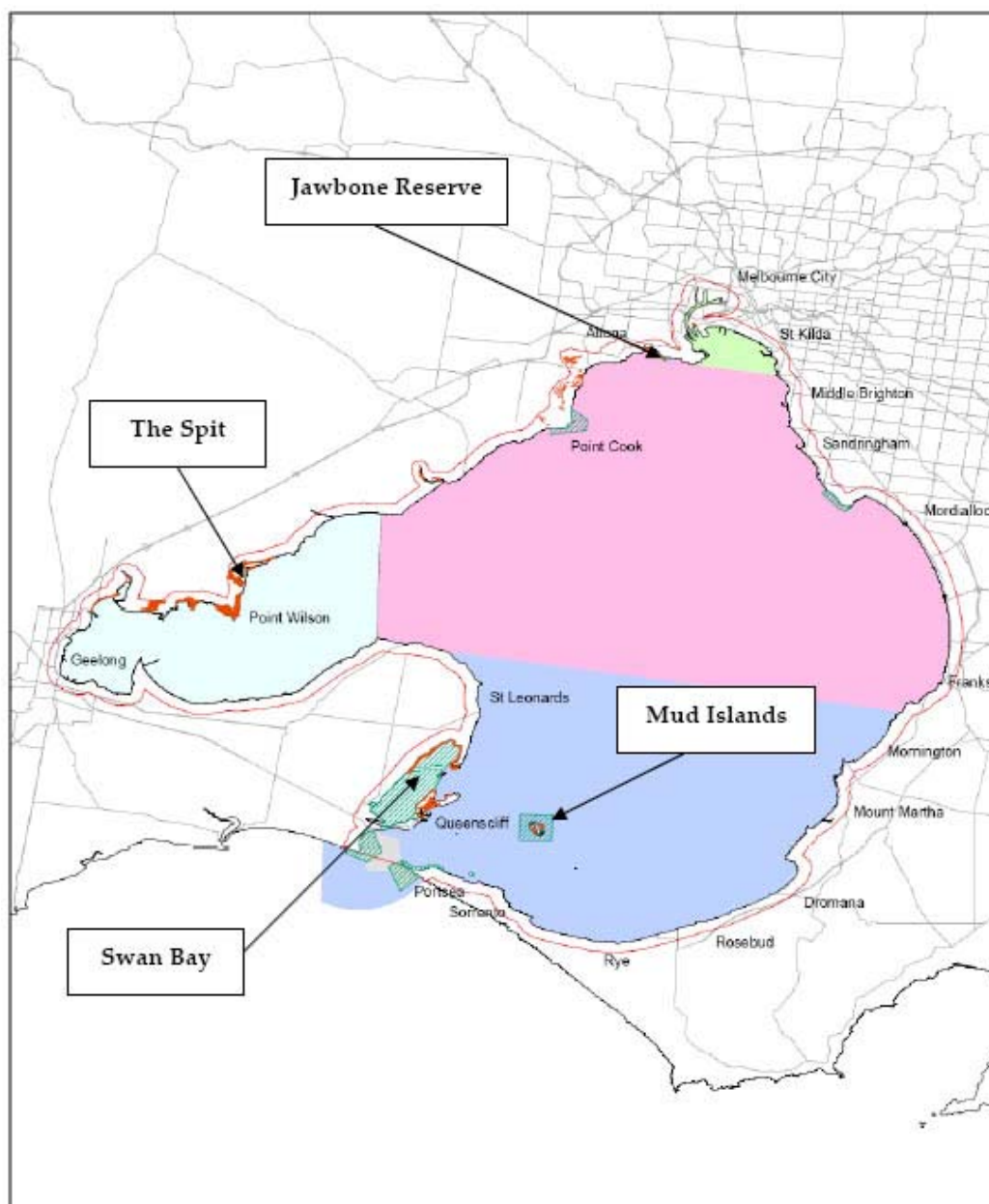
The program monitors the key coastal and intertidal vegetation communities including coastal saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats to detect changes in their extent and health. These vegetation communities are monitored at four locations within the Bay (western shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Wetland including Swan Bay, the Spit Nature Conservation Reserve, Jawbone Reserve, and Mud Islands (Figure 1).

To provide a baseline, data was collected before dredging commenced. This will be used to compare information on the health and extent of vegetation recorded during and after completion of the Project.

How the Port of Melbourne Corporation will use the data

The Port of Melbourne Corporation (PoMC) will use results from the Ramsar-listed Wetlands Monitoring Program to confirm the Project's effects on the Bay (western shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Wetland are no greater than what was predicted in the SEES.

Where significant changes outside the predictions are detected, and are considered to be due to the Project, a risk assessment will be undertaken and appropriate management responses will be employed. Information from other Baywide Monitoring Programs including the Seagrass Monitoring Program and the Plume Intensity and Extent Monitoring Program, and data from tide gauges within the Bay will also be used in the assessment.



Port Phillip Bay / Channel Deepening Project		
Figure 1: Saltmarsh in Port Phillip Bay		
Client: Port of Melbourne Corporation		
Project No.: 8036	Date: 22/05/2006	Created by: J. Wu / C. Doughty
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The role of the Office of the Environmental Monitor

The Office of the Environmental Monitor (the Office) will scrutinise the Channel Deepening Project's effects upon Ramsar-listed Wetlands to confirm they are no greater than what was predicted in the SEES.

The Office will also monitor all data relating to PoMC's compliance with the management actions specified in the Environmental Management Plan that have been designed to minimise effects on the Ramsar-listed wetlands.

These include Environmental Controls relating to when, where and how dredging can take place. The Environmental Controls have been designed to minimise the extent of the changes to the depth at the Entrance.

The combination of the monitoring results will provide the Office with an understanding of potential changes to the health and extent of vegetation at the Ramsar-listed Wetlands. The Office will use the results to judge the environmental performance of the Channel Deepening Project.

For further information on the nine Baywide Monitoring Programs visit www.oem.vic.gov.au/Monitoringprogramsandresults.