

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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DREDGING REMAINS WITHIN ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS

After five and a half weeks, dredging operations remain within environmental limits, Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke announced today.

Mr Bourke said the Channel Deepening Project had not breached any turbidity limits and that the Office of the Environmental Monitor was keeping a close watch on dredging activities to ensure all work conformed to the 'rule book'.

"Turbidity levels in the north and south of the Bay remain well below the environmental limits set to protect important Bay assets such as seagrass and fish," Mr Bourke said.

"Turbidity monitoring in the Bay measures the level of cloudiness or murkiness in the water, which is caused by suspended particulates such as sand and microscopic plants and animals.

"The recent hot weather drew many people to Port Phillip Bay beaches to cool off and despite strong winds on some days; the Office did not receive any information regarding community concerns about reduced water clarity at beaches," Mr Bourke said.

Turbidity results released today by the Port of Melbourne Corporation cover a seven day period from March 10 to 17. Nine buoys located in the south of the Bay and one in the north have monitored turbidity levels continuously since dredging began on February 8.

Mr Bourke said turbidity levels in the Bay naturally fluctuated and were affected by tide, weather conditions, such as wind and rain fall and microscopic plants and animals living in the water.

"The latest results indicate that on March 12 a slight rise in the turbidity level in Swan Bay, off Queenscliff was influenced by the ebb and flood of the tide and wind," Mr Bourke said.

"Turbidity levels peaked at around six nephelometric turbidity units (NTUs), well below the limit of 30 NTUs set to protect the Bay's seagrass.

"The Office of the Environmental Monitor is aware of the affects of turbidity on important Bay assets such as seagrass, fish and seabirds and we will scrutinise turbidity results every week to ensure channel deepening activities do not exceed set environmental limits," Mr Bourke said.

The OEM provides an around-the-clock independent and transparent view on the environmental performance of the Channel Deepening Project.

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