

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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MONITORING ACTIVITIES ANNOUNCED FOR DREDGING OF CONTAMINATED MATERIAL

Scrutinising dredging works during the movement of contaminated material for the Channel Deepening Project (the Project) will be a major priority for the Office of the Environmental Monitor (the Office) over the coming months, Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke said today.

Observing dredging works by the *Goomai* at the Yarra River this morning, Mr Bourke, announced details of the Office's latest Work Program, which includes monitoring activities designed to judge the Port of Melbourne Corporation's compliance with the Project's rule book, the Environmental Management Plan, to avoid and minimise risks to Port Phillip Bay (the bay) and public health by dredging.

"The updated Work Program builds on previous monitoring activities identified for dredging in the Entrance. The contaminated material monitoring activities demonstrate how the Office can provide information that stakeholders and communities concerned about the management of contaminated material have requested," Mr Bourke said.

"The Office considers this part of the Channel Deepening Project (the Project) as the number one concern for the community and in response, the Office will diligently scrutinise three particular issues. The construction of the bund, work methods used to remove and place the contaminated material and the capping of this material.

"The Office will use a variety of information to assess the Project's compliance with the rule book, the Environmental Management Plan.

"We will do this by examining information such as bathymetric surveys on the stability of the bund, equipment tracking reports, survey results and inspections on the bund's capping layer.

"Additionally, Office personnel will go aboard the CoZA to observe works. The Office has no reservations in conducting its own investigations if necessary."

Mr Bourke said that under the Environmental Management Plan or rule book, the Office had access to any information that would help it conduct its assessment activities.

"The rule book includes many standards and controls to ensure that all contaminated material is identified and managed accordingly, that dredging techniques used minimise re-suspension of the contaminated material into the bay, and that the contaminated material is permanently confined within the bund," Mr Bourke said.

"Our job is to scrutinise the Project and to provide stakeholders and the community with regular information on how it is tracking against the rule book."

Mr Bourke said the Office would also assess and publicly report results from all relevant water quality programs in a timely fashion.

"This includes the weekly reporting of the plume intensity data recorded by turbidity monitoring meters and the expanded beach water quality monitoring program, which includes testing for a range of metals, common organic chemicals and algae at 36 beaches.

Dredging of contaminated material began on 24 April and is scheduled to end by the end of September 2008.

Mr Bourke said the rule book had multiple layers of controls and standards to avoid and minimise risks during the dredging of contaminated material.

“At the very top, the large ocean going dredge that will remove most of the contaminated material must dredge in non-over flow mode and the Port of Melbourne Corporation must use a specifically designed pipe-end to gently place the contaminated material within the bund,” Mr Bourke said.

“Then there is the design of the bund. It must be built in a particular way to stop contaminated material from spreading across the seafloor, while a capping layer of clean sand must be placed at a pre-determined thickness over the material to prevent marine animals from burrowing into it.

“These are just some of the controls in place that the Office will carefully scrutinise.

“As a back-up, a continuous review of water quality results and an evaluation of the contaminants in fish monitoring program will alert the Office of any changes to the quality of the bay’s water,” Mr Bourke said.

“The community can be assured the Office will publicly inform the Regulator, the Secretary of the Department of Sustainability and Environment of any concerns or underperformances by the Project.

“The Offices findings and advice will be reported in a timely fashion and summarised in its quarterly reports. The first one is due out in June 2008,” Mr Bourke said.

The Office’s website [www.oem.vic.gov.au] will be a one-stop-shop for project updates, monitoring results and reports.

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

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The latest Work Program can be found at <http://www.oem.vic.gov.au/WorkPlan200812WorkProgram>