

# Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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## **BAY'S NATURAL PROCESSES REMAIN HEALTHY**

Nutrient processing – one of Port Philip Bay's key vital signs – is functioning in a healthy range, according to the latest dredging monitoring report.

Releasing the positive results from the Nutrient Cycling Monitoring Program today, Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke, said the Bay's health depended on a fine balance of nutrients.

"The latest results from the program are consistent with data that dates back to 2002 and indicates that the Bay's natural process for recycling nutrients is operating in a similar range to previous years," Mr Bourke said.

Nutrients regularly enter the Bay through rivers, streams and the Western Treatment Plant. The Bay's healthy balance is kept in check by a naturally occurring process called denitrification, which removes nitrogen from the water.

Mr Bourke said the Channel Deepening Project's rule book, the Environmental Management Plan, included standards and controls to avoid harmful affects to the Bay's nutrient cycling process from dredging.

"The Port of Melbourne Corporation must adhere to strict project delivery and environmental controls to prevent any deterioration of the Bay's vital nutrient cycling process," he said.

"The monitoring program along with other information such as water quality data gives the Port of Melbourne Corporation an early warning if the Bay's nutrient cycling process is not running as expected so that adjustments can be made.

"Too much nutrient in the water such as nitrogen could be harmful to the Bay, causing algal growth. While not enough nutrients stunt plant growth, which animals rely on for food and protection from predators, Mr Bourke said.

The monitoring program is run by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and uses world class technology developed in Victoria in 2002 and remodelled in 2007.

Andy Longmore, Manager Benthic Ecosystems, DPI, said the key to monitoring nutrient cycling was measuring how efficiently nitrogen was recycled in the Bay.

"An instrument called a benthic chamber sits on the sea floor at three locations around the Bay and collects a number of water samples over a 24 hour period," Mr Longmore said.

"We monitor this water to measure how quickly nutrients are recycled and in what form they are released into the Bay's ecosystem."

Mr Bourke said a short video on the Nutrient Cycling Monitoring Program could be viewed on the Office's web site [www.oem.vic.gov.au](http://www.oem.vic.gov.au).

"Through discussions with Project stakeholders and the community the Office has noted that many groups and individuals have a keen interest for information on the monitoring programs and the timely release of meaningful information," Mr Bourke said.

“The web video on the Nutrient Cycling Monitoring Program shows the community how the Nutrient Cycling Monitoring Program is conducted and explains why it is an important monitoring program.”

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**Photo captions:**

**Photo 1:** Andy Longmore, Manager Benthic Ecosystems, Department of Primary Industries, lowering the benthic chamber onto the boat.

**Photo 2:** Andy Longmore, Manager Benthic Ecosystems, Department of Primary Industries, taking water samples from the benthic chamber, which measures how quickly nutrients are recycled in Port Phillip Bay.