

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

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BEACH WATER QUALITY TO TAKE A HIT FROM WILD WEATHER

Changes to Port Phillip Bay beach water quality are expected over the coming days as a result of the current wild weather, dredging Environmental Monitor, Mick Bourke said today.

Mr Bourke said that despite sound results from a beach monitoring program that had run since late February, elevated levels of enterococci, metals and organic chemicals could be recorded.

“The Office of the Environmental Monitor (the Office) reports that to date, water quality at 36 Port Phillip Bay beaches has not deteriorated from what would be expected as a result of the Channel Deepening Project (the Project),” Mr Bourke said.

“Since February water quality results from EPA Victoria’s expanded beach monitoring program have been within the investigation levels established for this program.

“However, the community can expect to hear of changes to beach water quality from the rainfall and damaging strong winds that have occurred,” Mr Bourke said.

Mr Bourke said that since February the expanded beach monitoring program had monitored a range of water quality parameters including metals and pesticides at 36 of the Bay’s beaches including St Leonards, Altona, Port Melbourne, Frankston, Mornington and Rye beaches on a weekly basis.

“This program complements the suite of monitoring programs operating across the Bay, which are required under the Project’s rule book,” he said.

“The weekly results provide the Office with further information to judge the environmental performance of the Project and give the community the most up-to-date information about water quality at Port Phillip Bay beaches.

“The results are available on both the Office of the Environmental Monitor and EPA Victoria web sites,” Mr Bourke said.

Stuart McConnell, Director – Science and Technology, EPA Victoria, said the beach monitoring program included testing for a range of metals as well as common organic chemicals such as pesticides, and algae.

“EPA Victoria has a long history of monitoring water quality at Port Phillip Bay beaches. From this we know that storm water is the biggest influence in beach water quality and therefore beach users should avoid swimming near stormwater drains and creeks after rain,” Mr McConnell said.

He said some metals reported slightly elevated concentrations in the week of 27 March 2008.

“This was associated with strong winds and heavy rain. These levels were not at a level to trigger further investigation,” Mr McConnell said.

“During the same week, enterococci results were elevated. This was directly related to heavy rainfall moving through the catchments to Port Phillip Bay.

“Both these results illustrate the way in which beach water quality can be affected by such events and similar effects could be expected following this week’s storms,” Mr McConnell said.

The EPA has advised the Office that this week’s beach water quality sampling was delayed as a result of the storms, which will delay the release of laboratory results.

Mr Bourke said the Office acknowledged that the dredging program was still in its early days.

“The Project is nearing the end of its second quarter and although the results from water quality testing at the Bay’s beaches are positive, the Port of Melbourne Corporation must remain committed to delivering the Project in line with the Environmental Management Plan – the rulebook that exists to avoid minimise and control effects to the Bay’s water quality from dredging,” he said.

Mr Bourke also announced that dredging continued to operate well within the turbidity limits set to protect sensitive Port Phillip Bay marine plants and animals.

He said the latest results indicated that turbidity levels across the Bay remained below the environmental limits.

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

To access results from the beach monitoring program visit:

[Beach Monitoring Program - Office of the Environmental Monitor](#) or
[Beach monitoring program – EPA Victoria](#).

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