

At the Visitor we have been made aware of a level of unease in the community and tourism industry regarding this project and have provided this information in the public interest. If you are concerned about Channel Deepening write letters to the Editor of your local paper, contact your local member of parliament, tell your friends and register your support at [www.bluewedgedes.org](http://www.bluewedgedes.org)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Port of Melbourne Corporation proposes to deepen the main shipping channels in Port Phillip Bay to accommodate ships of up to 14 metres draught. Currently, around 30% of ships docking in Melbourne cannot load to their full capacity because of depth limitations in the Bay and Yarra River channels. An Environmental Effects Statement (EES) on the proposal was released by the Port of Melbourne Corporation on Monday July 5, 2004.

The EES showed that channel deepening can be undertaken in an environmentally acceptable way, and that Port Phillip Bay can be protected. "It shows that any impacts would be only localised and short term," the Minister for Major Projects, Peter Batchelor, said.

Despite this positive finding, Mr Batchelor said the Government would approach the project cautiously.

"Port Phillip Bay is a very important and precious asset for Victoria and must be protected," he said.

"It is the highest of priorities for the Bracks Government that any potential adverse impacts be carefully and comprehensively assessed before a decision is made on the future of the channel deepening project."

"The channel deepening project will only proceed if investigations show it is environmentally safe to proceed."

Mr Batchelor said the release of the EES was not the end of environmental investigations into the channel deepening project.

"The release of the EES instead brings us to the next stage of those investigations," he said.

"The EES is now being tested by an independent panel."

That independent, expert panel is currently considering the EES, together with submissions from the public and from environmental and other advisory bodies.

**The panel will determine whether it is in fact environmentally safe to proceed with the project & prepare a report for the Minister for Planning.**

Final environmental approvals will need to be provided by both the Victorian and Federal Governments.

*Supplied by Toby Hemming Premier's Media Unit*

## Victoria adds new marine jewels to her crown...

The waters off Australia's southern coast are special and unique. Over ninety percent of the plants and animals living here are found nowhere else on earth. November 16, 2002 saw Victoria proclaim 13 new Marine National Parks and 11 Marine Sanctuaries along Victoria's coast.

This world first achievement will ensure that representative samples of Victoria's diverse, distinctive and amazing marine environment are conserved for all of us to enjoy for generations to come.

Our own Port Phillip Bay includes Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary, Jawbone Marine Sanctuary and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary, comprising 4,015 hectares in total. These newly protected areas will protect a diverse range of sea life including seagrass meadows, diverse communities of algae, invertebrates and fish species and the largest occurrence of mangroves in Port Phillip.

With the introduction of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries there are now restrictions in place about what you can and can't do within the boundaries of these parks and sanctuaries.

In these areas it is no longer possible to fish, net, spear, take or kill any marine life. All methods of fishing, from the shore or at sea, are also prohibited. Taking or damaging animals, plants and objects (artefacts) within Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries is prohibited.

Phone Parks Victoria on 13 1963 or visit [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) for further information about our new parks and sanctuaries and how you can help protect and enjoy them.

**Article supplied by Parks Victoria and reprinted from Peninsula Visitor, Summer 2002**

# Victorian Channel

*In a letter addressed to the dive industry Peter Fear alerts us all to the possible consequences of this huge undertaking and the wide ranging effects on our Victorian Marine Heritage.*

## **Did you know has the potential to destroy Port Phillip Bays unique underwater environment and decimate the dive industry?**

The two main areas of concern are the removal of millions of tons of sand from the South Shipping Channel beginning just inside Port Phillip Heads to the other end of the channel off McCrae and the destruction of pristine reef from dive sites known as The Plateau and Rip Bank in the entrance.

The reason for this project is so that larger container ships with deeper draughts carrying more containers can enter the Bay and some container ships already visiting can do so fully loaded.

Did you know the entrance to Port Phillip is narrow with a bay of huge volume like filling and emptying a bottle creating strong flows at the neck. It is this along with the underwater topography that gives us our unique marine environment.

An environment so special that the State Government recently created several Marine reserves in the area to protect of which they so proudly boasted and promoted.

The removal of reef in the entrance has the potential to dramatically affect the level of water in the bay and the duration and timing of slackwater. Consultants commissioned by the Channel Authority claim their studies indicate the level of water in the bay will only increase by a maximum of 1cm, but nobody can predict the effects of nature.

## *Did you know?*

- That areas of Rip Bank blasted in the 1980's to deepen have still not recovered.
- That the Plateau is almost surrounded by dropoff's to 90mts plus and any method of removal of reef from the top could cause a cascading effect of rubble down the walls further destroying this unique habitat.
- The boundary of the Lonsdale Wall marine reserve is only a matter of a few meters from the areas of The Plateau and Rip Bank they intend to destroy and consists of the same unique environment.
- The war grave and historic wreck of the Goorangai is in the middle of the south channel and rises above the depth required for these deep draught vessels.
- The wrecks of the Eliza Ramsden and the Hurricane lie next to the south channel and could be covered or partially covered by sand.

The view of the Maritime Heritage Unit is that it is of no consequence if these wrecks were buried under sand as it would preserve them longer!

Maintenance dredging to maintain the required depth and width of the south channel after deepening would be more frequent and extensive, zero visibility and further destruction. The last two maintenance dredging operations were six years apart, despite Mr Brack's claims it happens all the time. Sediment created by dredging does not travel out to sea before deciding to settle. It is distributed up to many kilometers out to sea and over the marine reserves, scallop and seagrass beds in the bay by the six hourly tidal changes.

Melbourne as a container port will be at it's maximum capacity by the year 2030, with the channel deepening.

Maintenance dredging was last carried out in the south channel December 2002 when visibility dropped from 25 mts plus to zero in a day. It took weeks to recover after the completion of dredging.

The spoil grounds for this dredging were just north of Popes Eye and an area of the scallop beds off Rye, although they claim there were no scallops there at the time. Who are divers to argue this area is dived almost daily by someone for a feed.

Whatever or however they decide to use or dispose of the spoil the cost is insignificant in the overall billions of dollars involved with this project.

# Deepening

The effects of continuous scallop dredging up to the early nineties decimated the sea grass and scallop beds and had a disastrous effect on fish stocks.

The public couldn't see the results so didn't care.

The scallop dredging was finally stopped after a concerted campaign and a then Minister Steve Crabb was taken diving to see the devastation for himself.

When scallop dredging was stopped the scallops and sea grass began rejuvenating, and all forms of life returned making the bay the healthiest today it has been for many years.

The trend in shipping is to build larger ships with shallower draughts. These container ships already exist but we are told they only work the east west world container route not the north south route, of which we are a part.

By the time this goes to print the government will have most likely, already announced funding for the project.

The Environmental Effects Statement commissioned by the government is yet to be completed or released.

The final decision will be made or controlled by a panel of government elected bureaucrats. Approval for the construction for new container walls to accommodate the increased volume of shipping has already been given and work commenced.

The project has the backing of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the unions and obviously the shipping companies to name a few. The deepening will take many months to complete and make it dangerous and impossible for recreational industries to operate.

Divers won't be able to dive, snorkellers won't be able to snorkel our marine reserves, with the dolphins and seals, the recreational fishing charter industry will cease and recreational fisherman will have a long lean spell. Professional cray and other fisherman will also suffer.

The long term affects of this project on these, industries and the health of Port Phillip could be catastrophic.

Consultants have been engaged to determine the affects on these industries and their right to compensation.

The flow on affect of a non functional Victorian dive industry will lead to reduced certifications, loss of sales, non existent dive charters, loss of industry jobs, closure of shops and undoubtedly bankruptcy for some.

Who cares? And who's doing anything? You tell me apart from concerned individual divers and a small number of dive shop owners, an environmental group called Blue wedges no one else seems to give a damn.

Maybe it's time the training agencies, dive industry and wholesalers that thrive in the industry pool their collective might and help save the Victorian industry and environment, but then it's not a tropical reef is it?

## Alternatives?

Several alternatives have been suggested but it seems they have all been studied and the costs are prohibitive, although try getting access to that information. From my point of view a deep water port already exists in Western Port if a container terminal was constructed to accommodate larger vessels which eventually has to happen anyway there may be, no need to destroy our marine inheritance, BUT WHO CARES?

**Information on the project can be accessed on [www.vicchannels.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicchannels.vic.gov.au)**

**Blue wedges can be contacted on [www.warfei@bigpond.com](mailto:www.warfei@bigpond.com)**

**Regards, Peter Fear [www.scubadoctor.@pac.com.au](mailto:www.scubadoctor.@pac.com.au)**

