

## Fears of 'worst shark season ever' as sea heats up



A great white shark surges from the water off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa.  
Photo: AP

Winston Tan  
December 30, 2007

A SHARK expert has warned that Victoria's "shocking" approach to beach safety could put swimmers at risk as the state faces what could be its worst shark season, due to global warming.

Ric Wilson, from Shark Patrol Victoria, has called for a statewide revamp of beach patrolling, saying the current system is "abysmal" and swimmers' safety is "the luck of the draw".

He says the system is too fragmented, with "all the water safety organisations doing their own thing".

Mr Wilson — who has made voluntary patrols of Victorian waters using his own aircraft for the past 20 years — says he believes global warming could be behind an increase in the number of sharks encroaching on the state's beaches.

He also warned that tiger sharks could start appearing in Victorian waters as sea temperatures rise.

Mr Wilson said overfishing and depletion of fish stocks might also force the predators to come closer to shore.

Sharks had already come "frighteningly close" to humans this season, he said, citing accounts of sharks swimming under surfboard riders at Gunnamatta and Point Lonsdale.

Potential danger spots this summer include the surf beaches around Port Phillip Heads, according to Mr Wilson, as well as Gunnamatta and Point Lonsdale. He said people should also remain cautious in holiday hot-spots such as such Dromana, Rosebud, Rye and Phillip Island.

Mr Wilson said the key to running a successful beach patrol is to target the shallow areas around the bay. "You look at the types and sizes of the shark and watch the build up. It will peak around late March, but the time to step up the patrol is from late January," he said.

But Lifesaving Victoria's Greg Scott said his organisation provided an excellent service.

Lifesaving Victoria had two aircraft which patrolled beaches between Cape Otway and Venus Bay and, when required, along the patrolled beaches in Port Phillip Bay, he said.

"The aircraft patrol the beaches for all hazards, not just sharks — including vehicles and people in distress," he said.

The air service also worked closely with lifesavers on the beach and, when needed, with Victoria Police.

Assistant curator at the Melbourne Aquarium Ali Edmunds said a wide variety of sharks could be found in Victorian waters.

"A lot of sharks people come into contact with are harmless. The type of shark that is going to cause damage if you came across it is a great white shark," Ms Edmunds said.

Mr Scott said swimmers should be mindful that beach environments posed risks.

"If we look at data over the years, the risk factors of drowning or getting skin cancer are so significantly higher than the risk of a shark attack it is almost lunacy that people are so focused on whether I'm going to get bitten by a shark," he said.

"They should be thinking if they are swimming between the flags, is it a patrolled beach, or if there are any rips."

## Sharks in Victorian waters

■ **December 2006:** Torquay surfer Peter Galvin suffered severe leg injuries when attacked about 100 metres from Winki Pop Beach, near Bells Beach.

■ **December 2005:** Surfer Tom Burke punched and kicked a shark after it attacked him while surfing off Flinders.

■ **January 2005:** A three-metre shark bit a hole in an inflatable patrol dinghy at a children's sailing regatta on the Mornington Peninsula.

[http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2007/12/30/10062\\_news.html](http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2007/12/30/10062_news.html)

## Channel dredging debate in full detail

Rainie Fraser  
30Dec07



LOOK OUT: Queenscliff charter operator Andrew Malouf says Bellarine Peninsula operators may benefit from dredging in the bay. Photo: ALISON WYND

## **LOCAL tourist charter operators say it will ruin them.**

Big businesses say it's essential for the continued growth of Victoria's economy.

And it seems every group, body and authority in the state wants to have a say on its projected benefits and potential hazards.

But what is at the heart of the raging debate about dredging an enormous marine pathway for container ships through Port Phillip Bay?

Is there any way of determining whether channel deepening really is essential for boosting the state's trade, or is just a costly and environmentally irresponsible blow to local businesses and towns?

Naysayers highlight the potential destruction of marine life and a reduction in water quality; promoters emphatically assert the state's economy will suffer without increased port access for large vessels.

Queenscliff dive and fishing charter operators say the major project, to begin on February 1 and last at least 18 months, will effectively shut many of them down, temporarily killing business in a tourist-friendly town reliant on blow-in dollars throughout the year.

But from a wider perspective, dredging in the bay will create at least 2000 jobs and reduce the likelihood of losing major companies to more port-friendly cities such as Brisbane, according to the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Port of Melbourne Corporation channel deepening executive manager Nick Easy says the "critical marine infrastructure project" will service ships with drafts up to 14m until 2037.

"The port currently has access to 12.1m vessels with the tide and both Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide have deeper draft vessels," Mr Easy said.

"Melbourne is the largest container port in Australia and in order for us to maintain our competitiveness and continue to encourage exporting from Melbourne to other parts of the world it's absolutely critical that we cater for deeper draft vessels."

The Port of Melbourne Corporation says a deepened channel will add billions to the Victorian economy and allow more ships to pass through Melbourne's port, resulting in an increase on the almost \$72 billion in trade it currently handles.

The project will reduce freight costs when complete, decreasing the cost of imported goods and boosting the competitiveness of Australian exports, and allow the port to cope with the ever-increasing size of container ships.

From an economic perspective the benefits seem too good to be true but will booming business and burgeoning trade outweigh the detriment to small tourist operators and the environment?

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce says it will.

Executive director Lawrie Miller points to the aftermath of dredging in 1994 as an indication of how well Port Phillip Bay can bounce back from the process of loosening and disposing of materials from the sea floor.

"If you look at Corio Bay and the way it came back after dredging there were absolutely no effects whatsoever," Mr Miller said.

"It's going to be great for the Geelong economy, the Victorian economy and the whole southern part of Australia economically . . . the impact it will have on the economy of Victoria if we don't dredge and don't let ships in is mammoth."

He said the chamber did not believe dive and fishing operators' claims their businesses would be ruined by an inability to use the bay as a result of tidal plumes and murky water.

But Geelong Otway Tourism executive director Roger Grant, who staunchly believes charter operators should not be forced to seek compensation for lost business through the courts, disagrees.

The head of Geelong tourism is calling on the Port of Melbourne Corporation to fund marketing campaigns promoting the region's other industries and tourist attractions to counterbalance an anticipated drop in tourist numbers.

Some Queenscliff businesses stand to lose up to 70 per cent of their business while dredging is carried out, and will not be eligible for monetary compensation unless they can prove their operations have suffered as a result.

"We do understand the net economic benefit to the state. I think there's no doubting it is a critical issue for the well-being of the state but . . . this will really decimate a number of small businesses," Mr Grant said.

"And when you consider 73 per cent of the bay's dive sites, including those real hero sites, are simply out of action for two consecutive prime trading periods it is going to have a huge impact on charter businesses.

"I don't think as a community we can let them get away with it."

But some Queenscliff operators, like Gamerec Charters operator Andrew Malouf, are trying to look on the bright side.

Mr Malouf figures the more Melbourne fisherman put out of business by turbidity, tidal plumes and murky water, the stronger demand will be for seafood from one of the Bellarine Peninsula's biggest fishing towns.

"Fish need clean water to live and once they don't have clean water they will go and search for clean water which throws the whole (food chain) pattern out," he said.

"We've still got Bass Strait to fish in, even if it does cut out 50 or 60 per cent of our fishing grounds, but dive charters, the dolphin swims and boats in Melbourne will be greatly affected."

Despite very vocal support from many corners, including the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Victorian Transport Association, environmental groups are not looking forward to the commencement of dredging.

Blue Wedges Coalition spokesman Neil Blake said the group was worried about sand movement and tidal changes as well as the survival of marine life as the food chain was disrupted by the desertation \_ and devastation \_ of some species.

"The scour at the Heads will change the hydrodynamics in the bay so they're predicting the channel could deepen by 22m and that will alter tidal levels in the bay," Mr Blake said.

"In relation to the (\$100 million) environmental bond, if the Port of Melbourne Corporation has to pay the bond it will basically be the Victorian community that's paying it, so that's just an additional cost to the public to have the bay wrecked."

The bond will be used for restorative action or post-dredging recovery if the project encounters funding problems, according to State Environment Minister Gavin Jennings.

It is one of three conditions imposed on the Port of Melbourne Corporation by Mr Jennings when he approved the project earlier this month.

He also charged the corporation with establishing an environmental management plan before dredging begins and appointing an independent environmental monitor, Environment Protection Agency chairman Mick Bourke, to oversee channel deepening in the bay.

"The impact upon the surface of the floor of the bay with the size of the bay and channel is comparatively small. The issue will be when turbidity occurs and the relocation of dredged material how long it takes to settle and enable the natural floor of the bay to return," Mr Jennings said.

The concerns of Queenscliff business owners were foremost in his mind when "focusing on protecting environmental values", Mr Jennings said, and he wanted to minimise the loss of employment and economic opportunities in the region.

"I take the interests of these businesses very seriously. I know a number of them are involved in environmental-type activities and are trying to make an honest living out of the bay and its marine features.

"I want to do whatever I can to protect environmental values and the viability of their businesses."

Unsurprisingly, the State Opposition says the project has endured cost blow-outs and delays because of the State Government's bungling of finances, pointing to a doubling of container fees for port users as evidence operations are suffering.

Opposition spokesman for Industry David Davis was blistering in his critique of the State Government's "clearly inadequate" \$150 million contribution.

"The concern is the Government's dithering and delays has added to the cost of the project and this will ensure the total cost is greater and increases the impact on Victorian trade," he said.

"We've supported channel deepening but we've seen there needs to be proper environmental protections and better processes for the examination of issues."

But for Mr Grant the battle is simply ensuring Bellarine Peninsula business owners are shielded from the damaging side effects of the biggest dredge ever undertaken.

"We're not saying stop dredging \_ they can't do that. All we're saying is for heaven's sake, show some humanity and provide compensation for operators who have invested dollars, equipment and marketing and all of a sudden their livelihood's gone."

[http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2007/12/30/10056\\_news.html](http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2007/12/30/10056_news.html)

## Vigil to light up channel dredging protest

Rainie Fraser

30Dec07

## **OPPONENTS of channel deepening in Port Phillip Bay are being invited to attend a night-time vigil to protest the Port of Melbourne Corporation's dredging project.**

The Blue Wedges Coalition, which will next month take the corporation to the Federal Court in an attempt to stop the project, supports the torch and lantern vigil.

The Rye environmental group Bay Vigil organised the protest which could see thousands of residents, fisherman and environmentalist lighting up beaches on the Mornington and Bellarine peninsulas to demonstrate their opposition.

Founder and spokeswoman Hilary Allen said the vigil was a simple way for people to lodge their opposition to plans to open Port Phillip Bay to large container ships.

"It's for the little people who aren't usually involved in demonstrations and are a little bit reluctant to head off their MPs but are very concerned," Ms Allen said.

"One of the attractive things about holding a vigil of light is its anonymity \_ people can stand there with a light and it doesn't matter who they are or what their backgrounds are.

"It's going across all ages and all kinds of people . . . it's not attacking anybody but it's this common awareness that we don't want this to happen to the bay."

Blue Wedges Coalition committee member and spokesman Andrew King said Ms Allen asked the larger group to organise the vigil but its members were not in a position to commit to any protest actions due to the pending court action.

"This is how we can act locally and it's something we really need to act on," Mr King.

"We want the people of Melbourne to show they care."

## **Fishing for a new resolution**

Article from: **Sunday Times**

<http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,21598,22985840-5005374,00.html>

Joe Spagnolo, writing in *The Sunday Times*

December 28, 2007 10:00pm

### **I HAVE never been one for fishing. The truth is, I have never actually GONE fishing.**

The closest I got to fishing was when I was a kid and Dad used to take me and my brothers to the Leschenault Estuary in Australind, near Bunbury, to catch crabs.

Dad and my older brother, using scoop nets, waded waist-high in the water, looking for crabs.

My job was to carry the catch, so to speak.

Dad used to tie this oval-shaped container to my waist and I'd walk behind him in the water. He'd put the crabs in the container and my job was to look after the catch until we got back to shore.

The problem was that in those days, I was a bit of a daydreamer.

My wife reckons I still am.

Catching crabs wasn't my idea of a good time.

One day I was walking behind Dad with this container full of crabs, wishing I was somewhere else, and I didn't notice that the container had started taking water.

By the time I gathered my senses, the container had sunk and the crabs escaped.

Dad let out some creative Italian swear words that day and my job as crab supervisor came to an abrupt end.

It wasn't until recently – three decades later – that the bug to go fishing bit me.

I wanted to introduce my 13-year-old son to the pastime. So I bought him a fishing rod for Christmas.

The other night, he asked me when we were going to test it out.

Trying not to let on that I knew nothing about fishing, I took him into the back yard and told him he needed some lessons on how to cast a fishing line before we hit the water.

I tried to bluff my way out of an embarrassing dad situation and pretended I knew what I was doing.

Just seconds before I was about to show off the old man's casting technique, Benny the dog appeared in the yard.

My son named Benny after Ben Cousins and idolises the pooch and the footballer.  
After cricket and football, Benny the dog is my son's greatest love.  
As I cast the rod with a hook and sinker attached, Benny got in the way.  
So instead of hooking a pretend fish, I hooked Benny.  
The dog yelped, my son turned white and screamed: "You've hooked Benny, you've hooked Benny."  
My wife and son ran after the dog to unhook him.  
Afterwards, my son and wife looked at me, I looked at them and we burst into uncontrollable laughter.  
It was a magic moment to remember and I am sure Benny will, too.  
Looking back at 2007, I wish I had made time for more fun moments.  
When I think of that funny moment the other night, I realise that there probably weren't enough funny moments during what has been an incredibly hectic year.  
Work has come first yet again. Not for the first time, I have put nearly all my energies into trying to become the world's greatest journalist.  
Again, I sit here at the end of another year, wondering whether I spent enough quality time with my family. Actually, I don't need to wonder. I know I haven't spent enough quality time with them.  
Yet again, I am making new year resolutions that I have made before.  
Yet again, I am wondering where the years have gone and how it is that a little girl has become a young woman almost overnight and how it is that a little boy, who used to reach my waist, is now taller than me.  
Again, I am left thinking of the many times I never made time to watch a movie with my wife or have a coffee with her, chatting about whatever she wanted to chat about.  
Yet again, I am left wondering whether I should have gone home to Bunbury more to see my parents and brothers.  
Yet again, I am left wondering if I have enough balance in my life.  
My new year's resolution is to stay true to my resolutions.  
Each year, I make promises to myself and each year I break them.  
Hopefully, 2008 will be different.  
Today I start my annual leave and, yes, I will be taking my son fishing.  
Hopefully, this will be the start of something new for both of us.  
Thanks to the people who have read this column and given me feedback during the year.  
Thanks for both positive comments and the criticisms. All are welcome.  
Have a safe and happy new year.  
PS: Benny the Dog is doing fine. He just won't come near me now when I have a fishing rod in my hand.

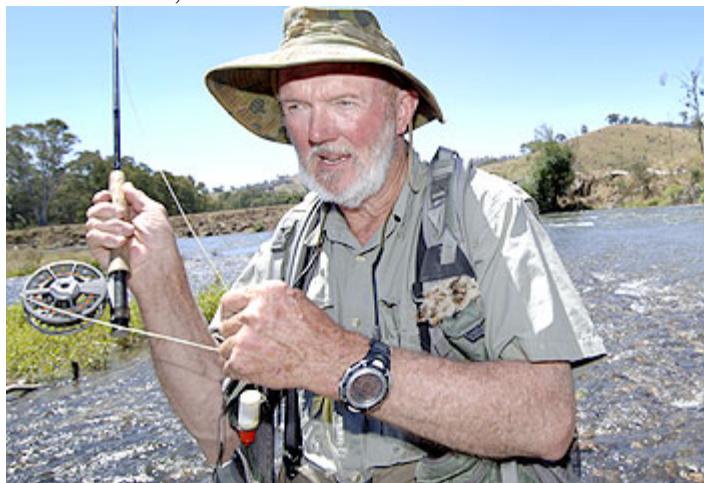
## Trout declared an "alien species"

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22984974-661,00.html>

Article from: Sunday Herald Sun

Peter Rolfe

December 30, 2007 12:00am



David Pickering, left, and Geoff Hall are outraged at plans to cull trout. Picture: Tony Gough

## **TROUT could be banned from Victorian waters under a plan to eliminate the state's rivers of foreign fish.**

The popular game fish has been declared an alien species and put on a hit-list for eradication in a move that has outraged anglers.

Trout would be culled from major Victorian rivers such as the Murray, Goulburn and Yarra, despite the Brumby Government pouring about 400,000 trout into our waterways each year.

Industry experts warn any ban could cost the Victorian economy up to \$300 million a year and threaten small towns, which rely on tourism.

The Murray Darling Basin Commission is pressing ahead with the investigation.

It has advertised for tenders for "native fish recovery following the removal of alien species".

The commission will launch a study next month into the impact of reducing numbers of trout, redfin, carp and oriental weatherloach in Victorian waters.

It will also analyse the cost and impact of removing the fish.

Goulburn Valley fishing guide David Pickering said the move was "extreme and stupid" and anglers around Victoria would fight it.

"We need trout because they drive a huge tourist dollar and could drive an even bigger tourist dollar," he said.

Commission chief Wendy Craik conceded the removal of trout was a sensitive issue.

"I can understand that fishing people might be upset about this but we need to look at what is best for our rivers and native fish," she said.

Australian Trout Foundation president Geoff Hall said Victoria's fishing industry was worth \$1.3 billion a year.

Rainbow and brown trout alone were worth about \$288 million.

"This will devastate local and regional communities," Mr Hall said.

"And it's absurd because trout have been in Victorian waters since 1870 and they're beneficial - unlike carp, which are a pest."

## **Wonthaggi desalination environment study costs millions**

Article from: [Herald Sun](#)

Ellen Whinnett

December 28, 2007 12:00am



Wonthaggi farmer Clive Hollins is leasing out this 41ha property.

**PLANNING Minister Justin Madden is today expected to announce a major environmental study into the \$3 billion desalination plant planned for Wonthaggi.**

Mr Madden has until 5pm today to say whether there should be an environmental effects statement into the plant, which is scheduled to start piping 150 billion litres of fresh water a year by 2011.

It's expected that the Government will go ahead with the study after both Premier John Brumby and Water Minister Tim Holding made encouraging comments about the process over the past month.

Mr Holding has said an EES had been built into the budget of the proposed plant, and that it would not delay the plant being built.

The move is likely to be welcomed by locals, who will get a chance to make submissions to the EES.

The study will examine the proposed location of the plant -- at Powlett River near Kilcunda -- and its impact on rare and endangered birds and fish, including the orange-bellied parrot and the penguin colony at Phillip Island.

It will also examine any potential impact on the 115 million-year-old dinosaur fossils that have been discovered in a rock shelf in front of the proposed site.

The main environmental problems caused by the desalination plant are the billions of litres of brine it produces as a waste product.

This very salty water will be warmer than the sea it is pumped back into.

The plant will also produce about 30,000 tonnes of sludge a year that will be dumped in landfills.

EES studies can be very expensive.

Two EES studies costing \$114 million were held before the decision was made to dredge the shipping channel in Port Phillip Bay.

The Government walked away from plans for a proposed toxic dump at Nowingi, near Mildura, after a \$14 million EES criticised it being put between two national parks.

Mr Brumby said yesterday Mr Madden would make his decision based on advice from departmental officials.

"If you look at projects of this type and scale, typically they would involve an EES," Mr Brumby said yesterday.

"But every project is different, the minister is required under the Act to look at

all of the circumstances and make his decision and my understanding is he will make his decision in the very near future."

The Government has not yet decided whether to hold an EES into the \$625 million pipeline that will bring water to Melbourne over the Great Dividing Range.

On other water matters, Mr Brumby said he was expecting to hold talks with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd early next year on the future of Canberra's proposed \$10 billion Murray-Darling Basin take-over, which was moved by former prime minister John Howard, supported by Mr Rudd and the other Murray-Darling states but rejected by Victoria.

He said the two issues to be discussed included ensuring there was enough water available for "critical human needs" in the short term.

Longer term, he said Victoria would not cede its rights to manage its share of the Murray's water.

"Those discussions will be held much later in January or February," he said.

[http://www.fin24.co.za/articles/default/display\\_article.aspx?ArticleId=1518-1786\\_2242345](http://www.fin24.co.za/articles/default/display_article.aspx?ArticleId=1518-1786_2242345)

## **Fishing rights draft published**

Dec 23 2007 02:48 PM

Cape Town - The environmental affairs and tourism department has called for public comment on the draft policy for transferring commercial fishing rights, gazetted on Friday.

The draft policy sets out criteria and requirements for transferring commercial fishing rights in the period following the allocation of long-term fishing rights.

Since the allocation of medium-term fishing rights in 2001, the transfer of rights was generally not favourably considered during the first two years from the date of allocation, the department said in a statement.

This was intended to discourage "paper quotas".

The criteria taken into account were the extent to which "paper quota" holders were created or prolonged, transformation performance, and the degree to which rational consolidation of and stability in the fishing industry would be achieved.

The general criteria in the draft policy included two broad and key transformation principles that would be considered in the assessment of applications for transferring fishing rights.

Firstly, whether the transfer would lead to a consolidation of right holders and effort in the sector, and secondly the degree to which the black ownership of the transferee and the black ownership of the total allowable catch (TAC) and total allowable effort (TAE) would change, should the transfer be approved.

Interested and affected parties may submit written comments to the department, under the heading "Comments on Draft Policy for the Transfer of Commercial Fishing Rights" to: Customer Services Centre, Private Bag X2, Roggebaai, 8012.

Written comments can be hand delivered under the same heading to: the customer services centre, Ground Floor, Foretrust Building, Martin Hammerschlag Way, Foreshore, Cape Town.

E-mail should be addressed to: [rightstransfer@deat.gov.za](mailto:rightstransfer@deat.gov.za) and faxes sent to: 021-421-5151.

The closing date for comment is 4pm on February 1.



## More people hooked on fishing

Posted Mon Dec 24, 2007 11:42am AEDT

A record number of recreational fishing licences have been sold in Tasmania as the search for Christmas crabs and abalone continues.

The Primary Industries Minister, David Llewellyn says 1500 more permits were snapped-up between October and December this year.

Mr Llewellyn says one-three Tasmanians participate in recreational fishing each year with more than 21,000 people licenced last year.

**Fairfax Digital**

<http://news.theage.com.au/garrett-approves-port-phillip-dredging/20071220-1iar.html>

## Garrett approves Port Phillip dredging

December 20, 2007 - 6:54PM

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett has approved the controversial dredging of Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay in one of his first major decisions since coming to office.

Mr Garrett's blessing for the \$763 million project came after Victorian Environment Minister Gavin Jennings gave the state's go-ahead.

But Mr Garrett has given only conditional approval.

The minister has called on the project's overseer, the Port of Melbourne Corporation, to meet 16 additional requirements.

Among them are a demand that \$500,000 be put aside for the protection of sensitive wetlands and further amounts be reserved to protect migratory birds and fish common to the bay.

Mr Jennings had already called for a \$100 million environment bond, \$6.65 million in environmental initiatives for the bay and the appointment of an independent environmental monitor.

The Port of Melbourne Corporation plans to dredge 23 million cubic metres from the bay to allow access to bigger and heavier ships.

The Victorian government has backed the project from the start, citing a projected \$1.7 billion a year boost to the economy.

But opponents fear it will cause irreparable damage to the bay, particularly from the stirring up of toxic sediment.

One opponent, the Blue Wedges Coalition, said Mr Garrett has been irresponsible.

"What Mr Garrett has done is endorse the Port of Melbourne's efforts to exclude the latest version of the dredge project from proper scrutiny," the coalition said in a statement.

"It's like approving a 10 storey building when the planning permit describes a single storey one.

"No responsible minister could allow that.

"The original channel deepening referral to the federal government was for a two million cubic metre dredge plan but it has morphed into a 20-plus million cubic metre dredge project and we still haven't seen the final plans or any assessment of the future maintenance dredging required to keep the channels open."

The Blue Wedges Coalition will return to the Federal Court on January 10, to argue that Mr Garrett should order a new, independent assessment of the project.

They say he is relying on a 2002 application which relates to a less extensive project to the one proposed.

"Our lawyers will need to amend the application but the case remains essentially the same and we are confident that the Federal Court will overturn Garrett's decision," the coalition said.

Dredging is due to begin next month.

## Dredge threatens seal, dolphin swim Christmas gifts

Article from: [Herald Sun](#)

December 24, 2007 12:00am



**Bashful:** Hundreds of Victorians are giving the chance to swim with dolphins and seals in Port Phillip Bay for Christmas, but the practice could be threatened by dredging. Picture: Jay Town

**RUBBING noses with dolphins and seals rather than with stressed shoppers in overcrowded stores makes for a more tranquil celebration of Christmas cheer.**

Hundreds of Victorians have shouted their loved ones a swim with the playful sea animals, with Polperro Dolphin Swims for Christmas rather than putting a wrapped package under the tree.

Judy Muir has taken thousands of keen swimmers, many of them overseas tourists, out into the southern end of Port Phillip Bay at Sorrento over the past 21 years.

She describes the sensation of swimming alongside the dolphins as majestic and scenic.

While Ms Muir plans to take many more locals and tourists on to the bay to meet the dolphins, she fears the start of dredging of the bay just kilometres from her tour site in February will damage the local ecology.

"It's so special, one of the great sights, but I have grave concerns this project will affect the dolphin population," Ms Muir said, adding she had no plans to close her business.

Despite receiving assurances from the Port of Melbourne that her tourism business would still be able to operate during the dredging, Ms Muir still has concerns.

Ms Muir urged people to dive into the dolphin experience before dredging altered the natural landscape.

For more information on the tours, call 5988 8437.

Article from: **Herald Sun**

## Taxpayers to dig deep for port dredging

By Ellen Whinnett

December 22, 2007 12:08am

**THE cost of dredging the Port Phillip Bay shipping channel has blown out to almost \$1 billion, more than double the original estimate for the controversial project.**

The Victorian Government confirmed the cost had ballooned to \$969 million, including its own taxpayer funded \$150 million contribution.

The overall cost of the project is significantly higher than the \$400 million figure provided by the Port of Melbourne Corporation in its original estimate in July 2004.

Dredging work is due to start at the height of summer on February 1 after Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett gave the project the final go-ahead on Thursday.

Ports Minister Tim Pallas confirmed the PMC would almost double port user charges to pay for the project.

"Port fees on every international container will increase by approximately \$31.67 to \$67," Mr Pallas said.

He said the Government's \$150 million handout meant fees would remain cheaper than in Brisbane and Sydney.

Mr Pallas said the project was vital to ensure the port could accept larger ships and it would generate \$2 billion in economic benefits.

PMC chief Stephen Bradford said the dredging would allow ships with a draught of up to 14m to enter the bay, compared with the current draught of 12.1m.

"Forty-three per cent of ships docking in Melbourne are under-loaded because of draught constraints and that cost is borne by the Victorian community," Mr Bradford said.

He said that the project, due to be completed by December 2009, was the most critical marine infrastructure project in Victoria and was of national significance.

The anti-dredging group Blue Wedges Coalition warned the \$150 million taxpayer funded contribution would be just the start.

Spokeswoman Jenny Warfe said the group had always expected the costs would blow out.

"If taxpayers get out of it for \$150 million they will be doing well," Ms Warfe said.

"It's appalling the taxpayer has to pay but it will be more appalling when the taxpayer foots the bill for compensation when things go wrong."

Environment Protection Authority chairman Mick Bourke was appointed as the independent environmental monitor to oversee the project.

Giant ships will start arriving in Port Phillip Bay in January, ready to start dredging up hundreds of thousands of tonnes of rock and sediment from the shipping channel, and dumping it elsewhere in the bay.

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry described the February start date as an overdue Christmas present.