

29 January 2008 - 10:02AM

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Marine parks a 'win win': Gago

Stacey Dawes

ENVIRONMENT and Conservation Minister Gail Gago toured some Eyre Peninsula coastal towns last week on the eve of community consultation about the release of South Australian marine park boundaries.

Ms Gago spoke to stakeholders from the Natural Resources Management Board, Department for Environment and Heritage, and representatives from the fishing and aquaculture industries during a three-day visit.

"Any angst I have had in terms of feedback, nine out of 10 is because someone has received misinformation so once I'm able to provide them with correct information all say 'oh that's not so bad'; most people are positive," she said on the last day of her visit.

The South Australian Government is creating 19 marine parks in state waters by 2010.

The outer boundaries of these marine parks are due to be released for public comment in the second half of this year and zones within the parks will be developed with the help of local communities by the end of 2010.

"My message is that these 19 marine parks are most important for the conservation of our marine environment but also that we are approaching the planning of these parks in a very pragmatic way," Ms Gago said.

She said the State Government would be taking into account the current use of the marine environment and it was important to use local knowledge to help decide the park boundaries.

Changes to the Marine Parks Bill before it passed parliament in November included a commitment to develop impact statements to accompany each draft management plan to identify any possible social, environmental and economic effects on local communities.

"Commercial fishing and aquaculture operations are an important part of South Australia's economy and this is recognised in the Marine Parks Bill, which includes displaced effort arrangements," Ms Gago said.

"Marine parks will be a win, win for everyone; a win for the environment and a win for local industry and not just fishing, tourism as well."

South Australian Sardine Industry Association president Christian Pyke said as the industry had voiced its concerns about marine parks earlier on, and Thursday was a "good relationship building exercise".

"Today was a good opportunity to show the minister the land-based infrastructure that's related to sardine fishing and in doing that we showed freezing equipment and frozen storage and employment that's linked to the tuna food market," he said.

The Department for Environment and Heritage has appointed two new community engagement staff members to talk to Eyre Peninsula and West Coast people about the marine parks process and how they can be involved.

A former manager of the Great Australian Bight Marine Park, Simon Clark, has joined the marine parks community engagement team as a senior project officer, while Shelley Harrison is on board as a community

engagement officer.

http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2008/01/30/10899_news.html

Silence greets the dredging Queen

Danny Lannen

30Jan08



ROYAL ENTRY: The Queen of the Netherlands sailed through The Heads yesterday to start dredging Port Phillip Bay.

PROTESTERS were consumed by pregnant silence yesterday as they watched the dredge ship they so despised enter the bay it might forever change.

They stood in their dozens on Point Lonsdale pier, surrounded by campaign hues of red which symbolically shouted maritime distress.

Their flags and strident banners flapped in daybreak breeze but as the Queen of the Netherlands cut through The Heads at 7.47am voices were unable to fully measure the depth of their passion.

“Go home ya bitch,” someone yelled. “Shame,” called another.

A chant of “Queen of Netherlands go away, we don’t want you in our bay” faltered after two rounds. Uneasy silence spoke most.

The imposing Queen had arrived for her controversial mission to deepen shipping channels in Port Phillip Bay.

A flotilla of police boats and protest craft, some representing local businesses, greeted her without incident.

The Victorian Government and Port of Melbourne Corporation forecast the dredging will help create Australia’s biggest cargo port, generating almost \$2 billion in economic benefits.

Protesters believe it will ruin habitats and poison marine life and the businesses which work the waves.

“We’ve been fighting this for seven years just about to the day,” Bellarine Seastar protest group president Catherine Jones said as the dredge ship approached The Heads. “This is probably the saddest day of my life.”

About 50 protesters from throughout the Bellarine Peninsula and Geelong mustered at the end of the pier as allies of the Blue Wedge Coalition. They claimed the space from obliging recreational fishermen but people who rely on fishing for livelihood numbered among them.

“I’m one of the blokes who’s going to be put out of business,” Portarlington’s Col Edwards said.

“The toxins they dredge up and leave up the top of the bay are going to be the same as Sydney Harbour, now you can’t eat the fish from Sydney Harbour or anything.”

Ms Jones promised protest could make a difference. "Like the Franklin, that was turned around at the 11th hour, so people power can work," she said.

Sea-All Dolphin Swims operator Hank Renzenbrink agreed.

"It's not all finished, by being here we're showing we're concerned about it," he said. "And if dredging goes ahead we'll be watching every move."

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,23129837-661,00.html>

Port Phillip Bay dredging held up by red tape

Article from: **Herald Sun**



Grand entrance: the *Queen of the Netherlands* arrives in Melbourne. Picture: Mark Smith and Channel 7 helicopter

Nick Higginbottom, Ellen Whinnett and Holly Ife

January 30, 2008 12:00am

THE giant ship that will dredge Port Phillip Bay is sitting idle in the Yarra, because of a red tape tangle that could cost almost \$250,000 a day.

The *Queen of the Netherlands* was escorted by protest boats up the bay yesterday ahead of the proposed start of the \$1 billion project, due as early as tomorrow.

But the project cannot go ahead until federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett approves its environmental management plan.

The plan is still being processed by the federal Department of Environment, meaning it has yet to hit Mr Garrett's desk.

Mr Garrett, who previously confused Westernport Bay with Port Phillip Bay, is unlikely to tick it immediately to avoid any claims his approval was a rubber stamp.

It now seems likely dredging will not begin until next week.

The move could see the giant dredger idling at South Wharf as it waits for the red tape to be untangled.

Fines of \$1.7 million a week have been built into the contract if the project is delayed.

Mr Garrett's spokeswoman, Mali Stanton, said the environmental plan -- which went to Canberra last week - was still being reviewed.

"Dredging cannot begin until Minister Garrett is satisfied that the port's environment management plan meets all the conditions he laid down in December last year -- including stringent monitoring and reporting," Ms Stanton said.

Hundreds of protesters met the ship as it entered the heads about 8am.

More than a dozen kayakers and 40 protesters gathered under the West Gate Bridge to greet the giant dredger.

"Today's protest is a peaceful and symbolic protest representing the thousands of people who do not want to see the bay dredged," said Jo Samuel-King, from anti-dredging group Blue Wedges.

PREMIER John Brumby confirmed Dutch company Royal Boskalis Westminster, which owns the dredger, will be paid about \$500 million for the two-year project.

OPPOSITION Leader Ted Baillieu released a copy of a private member's Bill to call for more monitoring of the project, saying there needed to be a "big red button" to push in case of an environmental disaster.

BLUE Wedges launched further Federal Court action in an 11th-hour bid to halt the project, but a spokesman admitted the "odds are really stacked up against us".

Mr Brumby confirmed that work on the project could not begin until Mr Garrett approved the port's environmental plan.

"The final plan was submitted last week," he said.

"I understand it will meet the concerns that have been raised, so we look forward to its approval."

Port of Melbourne Corporation chief executive Stephen Bradford admitted the plan had been relodged with Mr Garrett after he requested more stringent monitoring of the effects of the dredging.

"Hopefully Mr Garrett will approve it this week," Mr Bradford said.

"We expect to start dredging on Friday.

"We were hoping to start on February 1, but we can't start until the final EMP approval."

Mr Bradford said the *Queen of the Netherlands* would start dredging at the city end of the bay before moving to the south.

It will be joined by another Dutch dredging vessel, *Cornelius Zanen*, in March.

Dredging will take place around the clock, with breaks for maintenance work and crew changes, until the job is finished at the end of next year.

Mr Bradford said suggestions the *Queen of the Netherlands* had been speeding in the bay were incorrect and he was sure the vessel had obeyed speed limits.

Mr Baillieu called on the Government to be more open with reporting of the environmental effects of the project.

"This project, while being necessary, must meet environmental standards and must be transparent in its reporting," he said.

"And if something goes wrong, we need a big red stop button so we can correct any problems which emerge environmentally."

Asked when the button should be pushed, Mr Baillieu said: "If there is damage being done which is out of control."

He did not say who would make the decision on when damage was out of control.

http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2008/01/29/10883_news.html

Channel dredging ship arrives

29Jan08



The Queen of the Netherlands cruises past Point Lonsdale this morning. Picture: Herald Sun/Channel 7 helicopter

Protesters' craft were dwarfed and outnumbered as the hulking Queen of the Netherlands dredger received a hostile but muted welcome to Melbourne today.

About 40 protesters, campaigning against a channel deepening project, lined the shore or took to the water as the giant dredger passed under the West Gate Bridge today.

But they were overshadowed by the dredge ship and outnumbered by police and media as three hovering helicopters drowned out their chanting.

"Go home, Queen, save the bay," they chorused from a pier at the water's edge. Outside the protest huddle, their cries could not be heard.

Placards reading "our bay is priceless" and "don't bugga our bay" lined the pier, while about 10 kayaks and protesters on surf boards took the campaign to the water.

Earlier, a flotilla of about 25 protest boats swarmed the Queen of the Netherlands as she sailed into Port Phillip Bay.

The Blue Wedges Coalition had vowed the protest would be peaceful, and police were out in force to make sure.

Two police patrol boats, three inflatables, a police dive boat and two officers on jet skis monitored the protest, backed up by five uniformed officers on shore.

Even one protester remarked: "We've got more police than protesters."

In a few fleeting minutes, the ship passed by and then it was all over.

Surfers scrambled to shore, people packed away their placards and the protesters swiftly departed.

Just days remain until the dredging starts, and a second Federal Court challenge has little chance of overturning the \$1 billion project.

"I really, in my heart of hearts, thought that we might not get to this day, that it might not get this far," Blue Wedges spokeswoman Jo Samuel-King said of the ship's arrival.

"But it's always been a huge David and Goliath struggle and we've got huge forces against it."

Craig Jones and his mate Oscar Hall, both 13, joined the protest.

The pair had been fishing by the pier and, as if on cue, retrieved a sickly-looking fish from the river with a net.

The fish had dark cloudy eyes and red lesions behind its head, provoking concern about toxic silt to be dredged and dumped back in the bay.

"If somebody didn't say something, I would have probably taken it home and eaten it because I like fish," Oscar said.

"I'll end up getting a disease if I eat the fish."

Protester Jim Walter said the fish would be sent for testing, not for dinner.

"It's a matter of concern to us that you've got diseased fish here and no one can give us an explanation why," he said



Port of Melbourne hopeful bay dredge will start this week

Posted Tue Jan 29, 2008 5:00pm AEDT

Updated Tue Jan 29, 2008 7:42pm AEDT

◀▶ Slideshow: Photo 1 of 2



Protesters on jet skis follow the Queen of the Netherlands as it enters the Yarra River. (ABC News: Timothy Marshall)

The Port of Melbourne Corporation is hopeful the dredging of Port Phillip Bay will start as planned later this week.

The Corporation's chief executive, Stephen Bradford, says he is waiting for approval from Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to final changes to the project's environmental management plan.

The controversial dredging project is due to start on Friday but Mr Garrett wants stronger environmental conditions before he approves the channel deepening.

Mr Bradford says the extra conditions will not affect the \$1 billion cost of dredging.

The first dredging ship, The Queen of the Netherlands was greeted by a flotilla of protesters as it arrived in Melbourne this morning.

Demonstrators in kayaks and on jet skis were kept back by water police.

The ship is one of several that will remove millions of cubic metres of sand, rock and contaminated silt from the Bay to allow larger container ships to berth in the Port of Melbourne.

Opponents say the dredging will have disastrous environmental consequences and today lodged another appeal in Melbourne's Federal Court to try to have the project halted.

Meanwhile, Port of Melbourne officials have defended the level of financial disclosure surrounding the channel deepening project.

It emerged today that the contract is worth \$500 million to the Dutch company Boskalis. The figure was announced in Europe, but not in Australia.

The Victorian Government has repeatedly claimed the contract details are commercial-in-confidence.

Mr Bradford says the overall cost is what matters.

"I think Victorians have greater interest in the total cost of the project, not the individual payments to contractors," he said.

"The total cost of this very important project is \$969 million."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/30/2149903.htm>



Barramundi fishing season starts in Gulf

Posted Wed Jan 30, 2008 12:01pm AEDT

Updated Wed Jan 30, 2008 12:00pm AEDT

- [Map: Karumba 4891](#)

Carpentaria Mayor Ashley Gallagher says all roads are now open to the Gulf region towns of Normanton and Karumba, with the barramundi fishing season now underway.

Councillor Gallagher says the official end to the spawning season means anglers can legally catch and keep up to five fish each.

He says with good floods in some river systems, the fish should be biting well.

"People are out fishing and now's a good time to come up. It's the best time to come up and try and catch a barra," he said.

"A lot of people from Mount Isa and Cloncurry and those areas, the tablelands, all come and fish at this time of the year before all the southern tourists get here.

"Now that the rivers have had a big flood in them, there should be more barra around."



Fishing closure extended at Lock 11

30 Jan 2008

Fishers are reminded that the fishing closure lines below and above Lock 11 at Mildura have been extended and are now in place permanently.

Anyone caught fishing illegally in the area could be hit with a \$500 fine.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Supervising Fisheries Officer, Peter Tilbrook, said the closure is both upstream and down stream of the weir wall.

"The downstream closure line is the yellow buoys across the river below the weir wall. On the upstream side of the weir wall the area closed to all fishing is from the weir wall upstream for 50 metres.

"The closure, which is applicable to all methods of fishing, was extended to provide further protection for aggregating spawning fish below the lock, and also for safety reasons.

"New signage has been erected in prominent locations adjacent to the closure advising people of the fishing restrictions within the closed area," Mr Tilbrook said.

Since its implementation in September last year most fishers have been doing the right thing and fishing legally outside the closure lines.

During this period DPI Fisheries Officers have primarily adopted an advisory and education approach to those fishers found fishing in the closed area.

"Our ongoing patrols and surveillance of the area have resulted in a small number of fishers apprehended in the closed area and any future non compliance will result in the issuing of a \$500 infringement notice or the matter may go to court," Mr Tilbrook said.

Further information can be found at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/closures, in the [freshwater fishing guide](#) which is available on line or at bait and tackle shops, or by calling NSW DPI at Dareton on 03 5019 8400.

Media contact: (02) 8289 3949

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/Port-pays-a-solemn-tribute.3716249.jp>

Yorkshire's National Newspaper
YORKSHIRE POST

- **Published Date:** 28 January 2008
- **Location:** Yorkshire

Port pays a solemn tribute to the trawlermen who never returned



A young girl casts a single red rose on to the River Humber at the Lost Trawlermen's Day service on St Andrew's Dock in Hull.

By [Simon Bristow](#)

THE haunting refrain of Abide With Me carried on the breeze to those who could not find room around the bull nose of St Andrew's Dock.

And the murky River Humber carried countless floral tributes, slowly, but surely, to the sea.

The 19th annual Lost Trawlermen's Day service, a tribute to all who have perished sailing from Hull to put fish on the nation's tables, paid particular attention to 58 of those thousands of lives yesterday.

The open air service, attended by about 300 people, coincided with the 40th anniversary of the city's darkest hour.

In the space of just a few weeks in 1968, three Hull trawlers sank with the loss of 58 men. The episode became known locally as the Triple Trawler Disaster and inextricably linked the names St Romanus, Kingston Peridot and Ross Cleveland with maritime tragedy.

But while those who have suffered or served assemble on the dock each year to remember, they have no memorial at which to lay flowers, no monument at which to grieve.

A year ago, the Yorkshire Post launched a campaign to support an appeal fund set up by Hull fishing heritage group Stand to erect a fitting memorial at the bull nose – often the last thing fishermen would see as they left the dock.

And Stand chairman Adam Fowler, who began yesterday's service, reissued his appeal for help in making it happen.

He said: "The strength of feeling today shows how, more than ever before, the families of those involved in the fishing industry want and deserve a permanent, lasting tribute in the form of a memorial.

"We hope today people will finally fund and support this permanent tribute.

"The fishing industry was like no other. What other community has suffered such loss of life, with 7,000 men lost? Today we especially remember the 40th anniversary of the Triple Trawler Disaster, even though it is just one of so many tragedies suffered by Hull's fishing community."

After reading the opening prayer, the Rev Tony Cotson, of St John's Church, Hull, addressed the gathering. He recalled how as a boy growing up in the area he would meet returning fishermen to carry their bags home "for a few bob or sweets".

Gazing up at the ruined buildings around him, he added: "There is also dereliction and dereliction is a cause of pain. Whatever buildings rise in their place, let us hold firm to a lasting memorial for these men. They were honest, hard-working men who toiled in unimaginable conditions to put food on our table."

After the singing of Eternal Father Strong to Save, which Mr Cotson called the "fishermen's hymn", wreaths were placed at a small plaque at the site.

Jacqueline Barker, 53, whose brother, Kenneth Suffling, was a fortnight short of his 18th birthday when he was lost with St Romanus, wiped away tears as she laid her family's flowers.

"It still hurts," she said. "He was a happy-go-lucky lad."

Stand is asking the people of Hull to observe a minute's silence to commemorate the Triple Trawler Disaster at noon on Tuesday February 5.

The full article contains 530 words and appears in n/a newspaper.

Last Updated: 28 January 2008 8:30 AM

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2008/01/29/013.html>

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Wednesday, January 30, 2008 / Updated Moscow Time

News

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Tuesday, January 29, 2008. Issue 3830. Page 3.

Far Eastern Fishing Official Wounded in Attack

The Moscow Times

An unidentified assailant Monday shot and wounded the deputy governor of the Far Eastern Primorye region who oversaw the region's murky fishing industry.

Sergei Sopchuk was shot as he was walking from the entrance of his apartment building to his car at around 8 a.m. in Vladivostok, local police said, Interfax reported.

Sopchuk was hit in the arm and shoulder and was rushed to the hospital, where he remained in stable condition Monday afternoon, Interfax said.

Witnesses said a man dressed in camouflage fired the shots from a Makarov pistol equipped with a silencer, Itar-Tass reported.

The assailant remained at large Monday. Authorities have not speculated on possible motives for the attack.

Part of Sopchuk's mandate as deputy governor is to oversee the fishing industry, Itar-Tass reported.

Vladivostok has been plagued by criminal disputes linked to widespread poaching that have often ended in shootings, bombings and disappearances.

n The former head of the presidential administration of North Ossetia has been shot and wounded in Vladikavkaz, Interfax reported Monday.

Sergei Takoyev was shot by unidentified assailants in central Vladikavkaz after exiting his car to buy a newspaper, Interfax said. He remained hospitalized Monday but was in stable condition.

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/investigations/blue-wedges-tagged-with-sea-pirates/2008/01/27/1201368944836.html>

Blue Wedges tagged with sea pirates



Main Members of the Blue Wedges Coalition, which has been listed as a threat to shipping. Insets: Somali pirates.
Photo: Shannon Morris

Latest related coverage

- [Vote Should the Blue Wedges Coalition be added to a US threat list?](#)

Richard Baker
January 28, 2008

ANTI-CHANNEL deepening group the Blue Wedges Coalition has joined Somali pirates, Peruvian raiders and Gulf terrorists on the US Office of Naval Intelligence's international threat list.

Blue Wedges is included in an Office of Naval Intelligence's worldwide threat to shipping document, which details active violence against shipping, credible threats to vessels, or situations that have the potential to develop into direct threats.

Dated August 2005, the intelligence document includes reports of attempted terrorist attacks on Israeli cruise ships in the Middle East, armed robberies of Italian merchant vessels, and shots being fired at tankers in Somalian waters.

Blue Wedges joins Greenpeace as the only groups included in the threat list under the section headed: Environmental and Economic Non-State Activist Groups.

"Protesters plan to surround the dredger (Queen of the Netherlands) as it arrives in Port Phillip Bay, Australia, on 02 Aug (sic) to begin a controversial trial dredging project for the Port of Melbourne Corporation," the Office of Naval Intelligence warned.

"The Greenpeace ship (Rainbow Warrior) is due in port the same week but Greenpeace denies they are planning to block dredging operations. The Blue Wedges Coalition, which is leading the opposition, is consulting lawyers over possible action in the Supreme Court to block the trial dredging."

Blue Wedges, which has not had a history of violent protest, has also recently been monitored by a Victoria Police division that includes the counter-terrorism unit. The group says police have been monitoring its email communication via the Facebook internet site regarding an Australia Day protest.

Close monitoring of Blue Wedges appears to go back several years, with *The Age* obtaining confidential Victorian Government documents that show the group's activities were watched and evaluated by Port of Melbourne Corporation staff and contractors in 2004.

Minutes from meetings of the Government's channel deepening project advisory committee show rallies and events organised by Blue Wedges have been attended and reported on by corporation or government staff.

Presented at monthly meetings of the Government's channel deepening committee, which is attended by several departments, the minutes describe the opinions of those attending a 2004 Blue Wedges event to be "ideological in nature" and founded on "simplistic notions".

According to the minutes, the general view of those attending the Blue Wedges meeting was that channel deepening was a "classic example of economy over environment ... (the) only benefit would be profits for international shipping companies".

Another 2004 rally at Sorrento hosted by Blue Wedges was reported to the Government committee as unsuccessful due to a relatively poor turn-out.

"The audience comprised about 50-60 people at its peak, most of which were organisers of, and performers in, the event," the minutes state.

"The objective was to rally local opposition to the project. However, because the event was quite 'alternative in nature' ... it appeared to alienate the more mainstream attendees."

Blue Wedges spokeswoman Jo-Samuel King said the group was concerned to be perceived as a threat to shipping. But she also said that they could see a humorous side. "What we are on about is protecting the bay through legitimate and non-violent means," she said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/drought/floods-bitter-harvest/2008/01/25/1201157668512.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap2>



Flood's bitter harvest

January 26, 2008

Fish died in their millions on the Richmond - again - and farming practices are to blame, writes Ben Cubby.

No one had ever seen so many dead fish. "You looked all along the bank of the river and it was just white with fish," said Dallas Johnson, a commercial fisherman at Ballina on the North Coast.

"Then you saw that it was all white underwater too. It's mind-blowing the [number] of fish that got killed."

The Richmond River, winding through some of the state's richest farm land and joining the sea just south of Byron Bay, with its pristine marine park, was the scene of a huge number of fish deaths earlier this month.

Millions of fish of all types, and hundreds of thousands of prawns, oysters, eels, sharks and stingrays, have simply been obliterated from the Richmond River ecosystem, leaving the river almost without life.

In one representative 500-metre stretch of river, wildlife officers estimated that there were 88,000 dead fish longer than five centimeters mouldering on the bank. There were several times as many smaller fish in the same area.

The causes are complex, but there is no doubt that human activity is responsible. When heavy rains inundated pastures along the Richmond River floodplain they triggered a chain of events made inevitable by intensive agriculture that has radically changed the topography and plant mix across the region in the last century.

Soaked and rotting non-native plants, unable to resist the flood, were swept into the Richmond through an ingenious system of drainage ditches that have allowed generations of farmers to turn what was once swamp into productive grazing land. Between January 7 and 10, tonnes of vegetation decomposed in the river, stripping it of oxygen. Unable to breathe, and with nowhere else to go, the fish died.

And now Ballina faces his its own fight for oxygen as the disaster hits local economically. The Department of Primary Industries closed the river to all fishing for two months - it had little choice - and many believe the fishing ban will be extended.

Commercial fisherman along the affected stretch of the Richmond have been left with little but boats and unpaid bills, while the township of Ballina, heavily dependent on summer tourism, is facing a grim autumn as caravan parks sit empty and shops lay off staff. One bait shop has already closed.

Most heartbreaking of all, it has all happened before. In 2001 most of the river's fish were exterminated in exactly the same way - by de-oxygenated water after a flood run-off from farming land. "I'm now unemployed. All the fishermen are unemployed, so it's not too hard to see how this is going to affect the town," said Garry Joblin, the chairman of the Ballina Fishermen's Co-operative.

"Plus," he added, "you're not going to see people wanting to come to the town when there is the smell of rotting fish all over the place. Recovery was hard enough after 2001, so who knows what will happen now. This is much bigger than the fish kill in 2001."

Joblin pins his hopes on a meeting with the Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, on Tuesday, in which he hopes to secure some payment for commercial fishers as assistants and guides in survey work to take place along the river. "I'm very confident that that can happen, just to get them a bit of something to keep them going," he said.

Farmers are angry because they feel they are being blamed for following some of the same practices that have kept the area productive for generations. In some areas, improvements to drainage had been made in an attempt to ward off disaster, though this month's disaster showed their shortcomings in devastating fashion.

Jock Laurie, the president of the NSW Farmers Association, reacted fiercely to assertions that agriculture is at fault.

"It's bloody frustrating that everyone starts blaming the industry without taking into account all the good work that has been going on there for years," he said. Farmers along the Richmond had been working with groups such as Landcare to attempt to flood-proof land along the river, Laurie said.

"We don't dispute the causes of this particular fish kill, but what it does show is that we need to continue our work to manage the land there. The reality is that things like this are going to continue to happen whatever we do if you get [weather] events like this."

But a thorough study undertaken by scientists from nearby Southern Cross University and the NSW Department of Primary Industries after the catastrophic kill in 2001 pointed to agricultural practices as a leading cause, including the large-scale draining of swamps to provide more arable land.

The event "most likely resulted from the death of pasture grasses inundated by floods, which removes oxygen from the water, and the rapid drainage of this floodplain water into the river," the report said.

"Acid sulfate soil-derived drainage sediments were also a likely contributor of low dissolved oxygen in the water."

The whole hydrology of the floodplain had gradually been changed by farming, the report said, leading to more and deeper drainage ditches and rashes of weeds, such as lantana, along the river banks, field boundaries and surrounding creeks. Acidic ooze gathering along the bottom of deep ditches, which was washed into the river after heavy rains, also contributed to the disaster.

The report recommended the replacement of non-native grazing grass with native grasses that have evolved to withstand floods; shallower drainage channels, and regular opening of floodgates to flush out the ooze. Some recommendations have been implemented, but often in an ad-hoc way, some of those on the ground say.

"The department's own scientists say this is a problem caused by agricultural land," said Matt Landos, of the Aquatic Animal Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists. "They really need to act now, but the strength of the farming lobby has been preventing that from going ahead."

Landos said that while some farming branches, such as the sugar cane industry, had done a lot of work to rectify the damage caused by flood run-offs, the problem needed NSW Government leadership.

Some pastures were unsuitable for farming and should be bought out, he said.

"Today's farmers have been left with a legacy that is very difficult to manage, based on generations that have gone before. So they are justifiably very defensive."

OceanWatch Australia, a non-profit organisation that promotes a sustainable seafood industry, believes the fish kill could have been prevented if more action had been taken after the 2001 kill. "It's not the first time it has happened, and it could happen again," said the chief executive officer of OceanWatch, Anissa Lawrence.

"The government needs to get serious about this. It needs a serious, long-term investment to make the whole area sustainable. It can be fixed up, but what we don't want to see is a situation where the Government just buys out the commercial fishing industry."

The Department of Primary Industry said more than \$1 million had been spent to correct water problems on the floodplain in the past five years and implement the recommendations of its report after the 2001 kill.

The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, said in a statement: "DPI continues to work with landholders to improve land management practices using the best available science, and work with land managers to encourage the adoption of best practices for improved water quality."

Forty floodgate systems had been retrofitted so that they could be opened in non-flood periods to improve water quality, and drainage had been modified to provide for waterbird habitat as well as improve water quality, Macdonald said. He encouraged local fishers to apply for loans from the rural assistance authority where possible.

"NSW DPI is working with the Richmond Floodplain Committee, involving commercial and recreational fishers, farmers, local government and other agencies to map out a strategy for the future."

Bruce Thurlow, a spokesman for EcoFish, a recreational fishing lobby group, said fishers in the region were willing to donate \$30,000 from their licence fees to improve more of the drum gates that control water flow from some of the key drainage ditches near the river.

"We're trying to do what we can, but it is going to need massive funds from the government level to sort this out properly once and for all," Thurlow said.

In the meantime, commercial fishermen like Dallas Johnson are casting around for a way to feed their families. The best estimate is that a year will pass before fish stocks will begin to reach levels that allow for sustainable harvesting, but no one knows for sure.

"Right now, we're just having to survive as best we can," he said. "My wife has a job but it's only a few hours a week. It's going to be extremely difficult. It gets annoying because this shouldn't be occurring. Man created this, and we can stop it."

Another way, another bay



Alternative vision: The Port of Hastings at Stony Point.
Photo: *Craig Abraham*

Advertisement

Royce Millar and Peter Ker
January 26, 2008

A PUBLIC relations blurb for "the deck" rooftop bar at the fashionable Waterside Hotel on the corner of Flinders and King streets describes the bar as "alfresco eating and drinking at its best. Order your favourite drink and take in the sweeping views from the open-air deck while enjoying a selection of tasty tapas."

Had that view been available to drinkers 100 to 150 years ago, it would have been dominated by a hive of activity on the Yarra River opposite as sailing ships dropped and collected cargo, and wharf workers lugged everything from silk and sugar to tea and tobacco.

Melbourne's port was in the heart of the city. The Waterside serviced the rugged wharfies who drank Abbots lager, not Campari, and who would have been wary of any bloke named Al Fresco.

Things change. The cargo boats shed their sails and got too big, too plentiful, for the river. The port was pushed back to Victoria Dock on the city's western fringe, and then further downstream to Swanson and Appleton docks, making way for a Docklands residential and commercial precinct. But there it stopped. And with Docklands extending the city westwards, Melbourne's port remains, more or less, at its heart.

To keep it there, the State Government has opted to spend almost \$1 billion — it will almost certainly be much more when the project is done — and embarked on a dredging program that it acknowledges will damage Port Phillip Bay, a good many businesses, beaches, fish and seagrasses with it, for two years. That's at best.

Despite a \$100 million, 15,000-page environmental study, debate rages around the environmental safety of the project, especially the dredging of 2 million tonnes of toxic sediment — a 150-year-old mess of zinc, mercury, lead, DDT and dieldrin — from the mouth of the Yarra. The movement of this toxic cocktail, and its storage in the middle of the bay off Mordialloc, brings with it unknown risks to the marine ecology and the reputation of this city.

All agree Port Phillip Bay is simply not deep enough for the new breed of mega-cargo ships. It is a port for the 19th or 20th centuries not the 21st. Many international cities have faced the same problems and resolved them with bold, difficult decisions that created major opportunities along the way. But not Melbourne.

By the 1960s, London's 1000-year-old East End port on the Thames was dying while trade boomed in Rotterdam and Hamburg. The port was moved downstream to Tilbury, 38 kilometres from London Bridge, allowing access to a new generation of container ships. London has now re-established itself as one of Europe's busiest ports.

Closer to home, Australia's third-busiest container port, at Brisbane, began on the banks of the Brisbane River in the 1840s. Like many other cities, Brisbane outgrew its riverside docks and moved to the purpose-built Fisherman Island facility 22 kilometres downstream in 1976. Brisbane is now a challenger for a share of Melbourne's port trade.

Victoria's key port remains at the core of its capital, poorly connected to the rail network, generating more than 1 million — and rising fast — truck trips into metropolitan streets a year, creating a headache for residents and transport planners alike.

Clearly the dredging project has support. It is not surprising that business, unions and farmers have backed it. Of course they want the increased trade, investment and jobs that flow from it — they weren't given a realistic alternative.

But both publicly and behind the scenes in the corridors of state power, some leading figures in business and infrastructure are arguing there is an alternative — if not immediately, at least in the medium term.

This week trucking magnate Lindsay Fox reiterated his call to the Government to bring forward its long-term proposal to move a substantial part of Melbourne's port activity to Hastings, 72 kilometres from central Melbourne. Speaking to *The Age* Fox described the dredging as a "stupid" short-term fix. "If it was my money, I'd be going straight to Hastings. I wouldn't have done the bay." Fox acknowledges that, having spent years and millions of dollars preparing for dredging — and with a contract signed with dredging companies — there is no stopping channel deepening. But the \$1 billion outlay is for this round of dredging only. It does not count for the fact that the channel will refill with sand, that ships will get even bigger and heavier, and that ongoing financial and environmental costs of constant re-dredging are frighteningly unknown.

The main advantage, says Fox, of a move to Hastings is that it would dramatically reduce the port traffic that already clogs the streets of inner Melbourne, and which will grow exponentially, courtesy of the estimated quadrupling of yearly container movements from the current 2 million to 8 million by 2035.

Now most containers are transported by truck to industrial hubs in Melbourne's north, west and south-east. Fewer than 18 per cent travel by rail, although the Government says it wants to increase rail's share to 30 per cent by 2010 and beyond. Sceptics, especially residents in the truck-saturated streets of Yarraville and Seddon, fear this won't happen. Even if it did, a 30 per cent share would leave a mammoth freight load on Melbourne's road network.

The Government is already considering a long-term, in-principle plan to move much of the port to Hastings. This week Premier John Brumby said such a move could cost up to \$10 billion. Yet the plan is vague and the Government envisages a three-stage move that could take up until 2055 to complete.

Ports Minister Tim Pallas said the Government wanted to develop Hastings, but added; "This requires proper planning, community consultation, environmental studies, land reclamation, improving rail and road connections and building the necessary land and sea infrastructure, which will take years to plan and deliver."

The Port of Hastings already has a declared channel depth of 14.3 metres at low tide (much of the channel from the Flinders entrance is deeper than this) — the level that dredging is trying to achieve at Port Phillip. Western Port has about 180 calls each year of vessels of various sizes up to 100,000 tonnes carrying oil, steel and LPG.

The Hastings draft port strategy, anticipates a 50/50 rail-road split for shifting containers, a vast improvement on what is envisaged at Melbourne. So, why wait nearly 50 years, especially if maintaining Melbourne's port means the financial and environmental costs of constant dredging and building more roads to service trucks?

Fox is not on his own in his impatience for the Hastings option. Some big names in business, and in infrastructure planning, are asking the same questions. Professor Bill Russell, director of Melbourne University's Australasian transport centre, backs the Fox proposal and the speeding up of Hastings as an important move. Fox's vision is to make Hastings the premier port and to develop large, rail-linked depots at Dandenong, Somerton and Laverton as distribution points into the suburbs and regions. Where Fox and Russell part company somewhat is in Fox's belief that the rail, road and distribution network is already in place to achieve this.

Russell — who has advised the Government on a wide range of matters including port strategy — says the infrastructure is "half way there", pointing out that to move containers out of Hastings the only existing rail option is via the Frankston line that runs to platform 10 at Flinders Street. To move containers efficiently they have to be double stacked and, says Russell, double-stacked containers simply will not fit under Federation Square.

He says linking Hastings to the city's rail network and to outer suburban distribution points needs careful thought and planning; various options are possible. To get Hastings moving, says Russell, detailed planning work should be done now as part of Sir Rod Eddington's current inquiry into east-west transport needs.

Russell says Eddington's current brief is too restricted, both in geographic scope and its emphasis on roads. If Eddington were able to come up with a plan, says Russell, it would be possible to get Hastings under way in time to reconsider to minimise dredging into the future. He says the Government should be working now on a solution to the transport connection to allow it to bring forward the Hastings plan.

The economics of the Government's current port plan are also coming under scrutiny. Prominent economist Peter Brain from the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, this week questioned the cost-benefit figures for dredging. In the past Brain himself estimated the cost at \$100 million. He now argues that, given the blow-out to almost \$1 billion, the Hastings option needs to be reassessed and maybe brought forward. The State Opposition has already declared its view that the port be moved to Hastings within 10, not 50, years.

Flinders MP and Federal Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt this week embraced the Hastings alternative. The whole port matter is a political minefield for Hunt because his electorate covers both Port Phillip and Western Port bays. Hastings has its own environmental and political problems, with local seagrasses a concern. Community groups fear "environmental devastation". Catherine Manning of the Southern Victoria Community Action group says locals are also concerned about preserving the local Ramsar wetlands and the potential impact on human health through increased traffic. At Hastings, however, dredging would be limited to the development of swing basins. Any dredged material would be used in port infrastructure, that is, berths.

For Hunt, Hastings is a better environmental — and no doubt political — option than the ongoing dredging of Port Phillip. And, he says, there is no reason why it should not be sped up.

Despite its enthusiasm for the Port Phillip dredging project, the Government clearly sees the merits of Hastings as the country's major shipping port. The soft sell of the project has been under way around the Mornington Peninsula for some time, including the release of a glowing "economic impact study" last November which prompted Ports Minister Tim Pallas to declare the project would employ a generation of peninsula school children.

Senior Government figures have confirmed to *The Age* that the dredging plan was largely driven by warnings from the big shipping companies that they would abandon Port Phillip and dock elsewhere — Brisbane — because of its shallow shipping lanes. And the option of moving to Hastings sooner rather later has been opposed by the Port of Melbourne's existing stevedoring duopoly, Asciano and P&O. Hastings would be a greenfields port, opening up stevedoring to newcomers.

No doubt the wily transport magnate Fox sees opportunities here for his own business. He regards Asciano and P&O as his business "enemy" and would love nothing more than to break their stranglehold on the industry. But Fox's proposal to fast-track Hastings has too many backers to be dismissed as self-interest alone.

Clearly Western Port Bay cannot be readied in time to avert dredging of the bay. Port Phillip has to remain the major port, at least for the short to medium term. But Hastings proponents say that bringing forward Western Port does raise the possibility of minimising the environmental risks at Port Phillip.

The Government has other options which, arguably, could prevent the riskiest part of channel deepening — the dredging of the Yarra mouth. Webb Dock, between Port Melbourne and Williamstown at the Yarra mouth, is an underused wharf now controlled by Asciano and P&O. It currently handles just 20 per cent of port trade including cargo to Tasmania and cars in and out of Melbourne. Port experts have argued that with some redevelopment, Webb could accommodate the largest of the ships now handled at Swanson and Appleton docks.

Richard Clarke, a Melbourne-based international shipping consultant with 50 years' experience, has told *The Age* that deep container ships could be accommodated at Webb Dock. This could remove the need to dredge the Yarra River section, says Clarke, who has retired from a shipping consultancy business. Under this plan, Swanson Dock could remain open to smaller ships. This would also avoid the acknowledged problem that Swanson dock itself will not be large enough to cope with the projected traffic, even with deeper channels.

Such a scheme would come at a cost. The Kennett government ripped up the Webb Dock rail line that once connected Webb to the Dynon railyards to make way for Docklands. That line may have to be rebuilt, including a span across the river at a cost estimated at \$100 million. It's expensive, but the Government has looking at reinstating the rail line in 2017 anyway. Why not bring it forward?

The upsides of moving much of the port's activities to Hastings, say supporters of the idea, are potentially massive. And Lord Mayor John So has argued that existing terminals occupy highly valuable land that could be turned over to housing and commercial development. Docklands has shown that the demand is now for waterside living and working.

This week John Brumby responded to Fox but missed his point. "So to come out now, a week before dredging is about to start, when the dredger is in the bay, is unusual to say the least, but he's entitled to his opinion," he said.

Fox, Russell and Brain are not calling for the dredges to be stopped. They are questioning whether they should be called back over and over again at big financial and environmental cost to both the bay and — through trucks on city streets — wider Melbourne. Port Phillip Bay, it could be argued, was given its name for a reason. But so too was Western Port. There is another way, say some, another bay.

With **STEPHEN MOYNIHAN**

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<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/brumby-to-critics-bay-dredging-debate-is-over/2008/01/22/1200764265928.html>

Brumby to critics: bay dredging debate is over

Paul Austin
January 23, 2008

MEMO Lindsay Fox, Ted Baillieu, Blue Wedges and all those other channel-deepening opponents or sceptics: John Brumby is not for turning.

Victoria's self-styled decisive, can-do Premier decided years ago that making Port Phillip Bay's shipping channels deeper was crucial to the state's continuing prosperity, and now he's going to do it.

Brumby's message to the doubters is that the debate on whether the bay should be dredged is over: the economic benefits are irresistible and the environmental dangers are manageable.

All that remains is for the Government to ensure the bay is not bugged up by the dredging. Brumby harbours no doubts it can be done.

"The best port infrastructure we've got is the Port of Melbourne — we've had that debate," Brumby declared.

"We've spent two years putting in place the most stringent environmental safeguards, right?" he said yesterday during several public appearances to talk up the increasingly contentious project.

"We want to do the job. We want to do it in a way that causes least damage to the bay and sustains us environmentally. But this is about jobs and economic security for the future of Melbourne and Victoria."

In other words, the opponents cannot and will not be allowed to win. This proudly pro-business Premier is holding his nerve.

Brumby is irritated at Fox's late intervention in the debate, and the Government is irritated that Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu — who in fact supports channel deepening — has been able to gain some traction in the debate by calling for increased transparency about environmental monitoring of the dredging.

Brumby says that when he was treasurer, he and former premier Steve Bracks used to meet Fox about once a year, yet the trucking magnate had never raised his argument that it would be "stupid" to go ahead with channel deepening because it would add to Melbourne's traffic congestion.

"To come out now, a week before the dredging is about to start, when the dredgers are in the bay, is, I think, unusual, to say the least," Brumby said of Fox.

The Premier makes these points: the bay has been deepened "many times" over the past century, the debate about this particular project began a decade ago and the decision to go ahead with it was made in 2004.

Since then, an unprecedented amount of work had been done on environmental safeguards.

As for the Hastings option, it was considered and dismissed as prohibitively expensive — perhaps as much as \$10 billion — until about 2030 to 2050.

Expect the dredgers to begin their work in Port Phillip Bay within weeks.

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/in-depth/pr-win-vital-to-plans-smooth-sailing/2008/01/25/1201157667808.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1>



PR win vital to plan's smooth sailing

Richard Baker
January 26, 2008

TEN years ago, the world's biggest shipping companies began writing to the Victorian Government. Like all good mariners, they could see a problem on the horizon. Bigger ships would soon be coming to Melbourne but the Port Phillip Bay channel was too shallow to accommodate them fully laden. Something had to be done, the shippers warned, or Melbourne could be bypassed in favour of deeper Australian ports.

"The scenario was made pretty clear to us by the shipping companies ... no government was going to allow Melbourne to lose trade to Sydney or Brisbane," recalls a senior Victorian government figure.

It was these late-1990s letters that set in motion the divisive, expensive and, at times, torturous channel deepening process that starts in a few days when the Queen of the Netherlands dredge starts scouring the bay floor. Confirming the messages from shipping lines such as P&O Nedlloyd, Contship, the Chinese-owned OOCL and the Mediterranean Shipping Company was a government review of Victoria's ports that began under Jeff Kennett in 1998 and was completed soon after Labor took office in late 1999.

The Victorian Ports Strategic Study found the major users of the Port of Melbourne, such as stevedores Patrick and P&O Ports, wheat exporter AWB and dairy giant Murray Goulburn, all wanted a deeper channel and larger ships.

"Farmers, exporters, importers, we were all supportive of it ... the port is our gateway to the world," says National Party state MP Peter Walsh, who was Victorian Farmers Federation president when momentum for channel deepening was building.

The most vocal and prominent supporter of dredging was the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Channel deepening soon became its top priority. For the new Labor Government desperate to show its

pro-business credentials, channel deepening presented a unique opportunity to impress the big end of town, the farmers, stevedores and manufacturers all at once. The fact that trade unions also liked the idea made channel deepening all the more attractive.

According to several government figures close to the project, the broad view in Steve Bracks' cabinet at the time was: "Dredging has been done many times over the last 100 years. So why couldn't it be done again, particularly as technology had improved so much."

By late 2001, preliminary studies had indicated channel deepening could and should be done. The Government soon gave in-principle support. The only question remaining was when dredging could start. For its proponents, the sooner the better.

But if work was to begin as fast as the Government, the Port of Melbourne, the shipping companies, stevedores and farmers wanted, a victory in the public relations war breaking out over the merits of the project was required. The economic imperatives of dredging had to be seen as greater than the environmental risks.

This PR battle saw new alliances form between Labor and the business community. VECCL's president at the time, Melbourne businessman Peter O'Brien, recalls the then major projects minister, Peter Batchelor, coming to visit him and his chief executive, Neil Coulson, several months before the 2002 state election.

"Batchelor asked if we would take a role in forming a private sector coalition to get behind channel deepening," O'Brien recalls.

"From there, we invited at least 12, maybe 20, leading exporters and importers in the state to a working lunch with Peter Batchelor."

Together, the Government, the Port of Melbourne Corporation and the business coalition honed their message on channel deepening.

The public was told of the tens of thousands of jobs that directly relied on the port. The project was touted as one that would benefit every household in the state. Whatever environmental concerns existed could be managed.

Sections of the Victorian bureaucracy also became emotive supporters for channel deepening. This was most evident within the Department of Infrastructure, which is home to an agency called the Victorian Freight and Logistics Council. Not surprisingly, the council's membership consists of many of channel deepening's biggest backers.

Though not well known to the public, the council has considerable influence behind the scenes. It promotes itself as an "independent advisory body that provides advice to government on the development, planning, regulation and operation of freight and logistics transport, infrastructure and services in Victoria".

It is actually a taxpayer-funded agency. Confusing matters is the fact that the council's website has a com.au address. However, to contact it by email you must use an address that ends in doi.vic.gov.au.

Its publications are not as balanced as you would expect from a public sector agency.

Its regular newsletter on channel deepening is called "Boomtown or Backwater".

For many in Victoria's business and manufacturing community, the title is apt. O'Brien, the former VECCL president and Melbourne Aquarium owner, says: "If you want Melbourne to become Adelaide, don't do this project. But if you want to pay your teachers and nurses more, if you want to invest in a decent public transport system, you've got to have a strong state economy. Simple as that."

Premier John Brumby couldn't have said it any better.

Richard Baker is an Age investigative reporter

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gZsMxoyqTtKaTcLDGiBpVOza-fKw>



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Tuna are hauled off a fishing boat

Japan says still eating tuna amid US scare

1 day ago

TOKYO (AFP) — Japanese officials and experts said Thursday they had little concern about the nation's passion for tuna after revelations in New York of dangerous mercury levels.

The New York Times said Wednesday that laboratory tests conducted for the newspaper showed that eight of 44 sushi pieces bought in the city had mercury levels above the legal limit.

Amid a global craze for Japanese food, the newspaper warned that "a regular diet of even two or three pieces a week at some restaurants could be a health hazard for the average adult," based on US environmental guidelines.

But Japan, which eats a quarter of the world's tuna, said it does not plan to review advice to the public.

Japan's health ministry only advises that women believed to be pregnant limit bluefin tuna consumption to 80 grams (2.8 ounces), or about five pieces of tuna sushi, per week.

"We encourage pregnant women to limit the amount of tuna they eat, but it should not be a problem for the average adult to eat tuna so long as it's a sensible amount," a health ministry official said on customary condition of anonymity. "We will go with the standard for now."

The New York Times reported some tuna samples had mercury in excess of one part per million, the level for the US Food and Drug Administration to take action on the market.

According to the Japanese Fisheries Agency, which conducted research on mercury levels of fish in 2004, an average 0.68 ppm of mercury was detected after testing 60 samples of naturally grown and 30 farm-raised bluefin tuna.

"Mercury concentrations differ in various part of tuna meat," noted Junichi Kowaka, director of the Japan Offspring Fund, a non-governmental consumer group.

For example, the red meat of tuna tends to contain less mercury than the more fatty "toro" part, which is more expensive and popular among sushi lovers.

Kowaka, who described himself as usually critical of the Japanese government's food safety standards, was calm.

"It would be different if we saw damage to consumers, but there haven't been any reports on disorders due to tuna consumption," he said.

"Considering that Japanese people's diet heavily relies on fish, I have to say the safety standard is still appropriate," he said. "At least I'd eat tuna if I have sushi for dinner tonight."

http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/latest/200801250624/high_dollar_worrying_for_fishing_industry

High dollar worrying for fishing industry

Posted at 6:24am on 25 Jan 2008

The Seafood Industry Council predicts the fishing industry will become a sector of old men if the New Zealand dollar maintains its strength over the coming years.

The council's general manager, Alistair McFarlane, says the dollar's five-cent increase against the United States currency over the past year has wiped \$100 million off the value of the fishing industry.

Mr McFarlane says if the dollar continues at a high value, the prospects for the industry are very worrying.

"You'd be getting seriously concerned about new investment ... new younger people chancing their arm and coming in as start-up ventures. There's not a lot of evidence of that occurring now.

"If that's the trend for the future this is going to be a greying group of fishermen and not a lot of young people will want to come into the business," Mr McFarlane says.

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