

7 June 2019

Outer Harbor channel widening begins

Work has begun on dredging to widen the Outer Harbor shipping channel.

Environment Protection Authority Director, Regulation, Peter Dolan, said the EPA had placed strict conditions on Flinders Ports' environmental licence in order to protect the Gulf St Vincent environment and marine life.

"Seagrass is a vital part of the marine ecosystem, so protecting it by controlling turbidity, or cloudiness in the water, is a primary concern during this operation," Mr Dolan said.

"The environmental licence stipulates that dredging take place in winter when seagrass is less active and naturally receives less light due to the shorter days.

"Real-time monitoring is being undertaken at two sites, and we have set 'alarm' and 'hold' levels to protect the seagrass.

"It's important to remember that water may still appear cloudy around the dredging operation without reaching these trigger levels."

If turbidity reaches the alarm level, Flinders Ports will be required to manage the operation, checking its dredging equipment and modifying operations until turbidity has returned to an acceptable level.

This could involve changing the dredging location, altering the overflow to reduce the amount of fine silt being spilled, or altering the dredging plan to take into account tidal conditions.

If turbidity reaches the hold level, then dredging must stop.

Once it falls under the hold level, modified operations will apply until it returns to an acceptable level again.

Under the licence conditions, Flinders Ports must make real-time information collected from the monitoring sites publicly available.

Online graphs showing current turbidity levels compared to the alarm and hold triggers can be found at <https://www.flindersports.com.au/turbidity-monitoring/>

Mr Dolan said Flinders Ports was also required to have trained marine mammal observers on vessels at the dredge site to prevent harm to the Port River dolphins.

"The disposal of the dredged material has also been carefully considered," he said.

"Silt and other material removed from the channel will be placed in an area about 30km off shore, which was the location used during the 2005-06 channel widening operation.

"This was determined to be the safest option, as disposing of the spoil on land would have placed mangroves and other delicate coastal environments at risk."

For more information on the environmental licence conditions, including a link to the real-time monitoring data visit, https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/business_and_industry/industry-updates/flinders-ports