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SUCCESSFUL TRIAL DREDGE COMPLETED

The most closely monitored dredging project ever conducted in Port Phillip Bay has been successfully completed two weeks ahead of time and within budget, the Port of Melbourne announced today.

Eight weeks after embarking on a trial to dredge small sections of existing shipping channels, the technologically sophisticated dredger, the *Queen of the Netherlands*, officially finished today. The trial, which began on August 6, was conducted in small sections of the south and north of the bay as well as The Heads.

The trial program was subject to the strictest environmental controls ever seen in over a century of dredging in the bay and will provide important information to resolve some of the key issues as part of a Supplementary Environment Effects Statement (SEES) process.

Stephen Bradford, Port of Melbourne Corporation CEO, said preliminary analysis indicated the trial had been successful and showed that the dredging vessel could operate effectively and safely in the entrance and in the bay without disruption to commercial shipping.

“Early indications reveal that the trial has achieved its expectations,” Mr Bradford said.

For the first time in the history of the port it was revealed earlier this month that the entrance to the bay could be deepened without using explosives.

“From the outset we have maintained that the Port of Melbourne is committed to delivering a sustainable project which is backed by the best available science, monitored independently together with stringent environmental safeguards and delivered by world-class technology,” Mr Bradford said.

“All the findings will be subject to peer review and assessed by independent experts as part of the SEES process. This information will also be available to the public.”

In the meantime, assessments will continue to be conducted by an expert marine ecologist and geologist at the Heads following the previously announced fall of rock debris in an area known as the Canyon.

For more information

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Mr Bradford reiterated that channel deepening was regarded as an important investment in the future of Victoria.

“Without channel deepening Melbourne’s status as Australia’s number one container port would be jeopardised, risking trade and jobs,” he said.

“The risk is that ships will bypass Melbourne in favour of interstate ports. Melbourne would become a feeder port and business, farmers and consumers will bear the increased cost for the extra handling of cargo.”

Trial dredging vessel, the Queen of the Netherlands, is schedule to leave Port Phillip Bay on Tuesday, October 4. Photo opportunities on the departure of the dredger to be advised.

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