



Diving during the Channel Deepening Project

**Recommended guidelines for planning and
conducting recreational scuba diving and related
activities during the period of the Port of Melbourne
Corporation Channel Deepening Project (CDP)**

March 2008



Background

The Port of Melbourne Corporation (PoMC) has commenced deepening the shipping channels in Port Philip Bay in a major-works program called the Channel Deepening Project (CDP). The CDP involves dredging activities will affect the water quality for diving and the logistics of conducting recreational diving activities in some areas, particularly in the southern area of the bay, and specifically in the Heads.

The SCUBA Divers Federation of Victoria (SDFV) is a member of the Dive Industry Liaison Group (DILG), established by the PoMC to communicate directly with the peak-bodies in the SCUBA diving fraternity and explore opportunities to minimise the impact of the CPD on the recreational diving fraternity.

The following guidelines have been prepared to assist members plan and conduct dives during the period of the CDP. These Guidelines are in two parts:-

- (1) General, which practical and safety recommendations to apply throughout the duration of the CDP, and
- (2) The Entrance, which pertain to the protocols for diving in the Heads during the period of dredge works in The Entrance.

The SDFV purpose for these guidelines is to enhance and emphasise diver safety, and these guidelines are intended to be supplementary to existing SDFV Codes of Practice. Member associations to the SDFV are encouraged to generally adopt the guidelines. In particular, members are requested to follow the new protocols when diving in the Heads area during the scheduled period of dredging in the area (Mar-Oct 2008).

Members should have not hesitate in contacting the PoMC CDP Team (go to www.channelproject.com or telephone 1800 731 022) to clarify any aspect or issue of the project.



1. General guidelines for diving during the period of the CDP

Preamble

The CDP involves dredging material from the bottom of the bay. This activity creates a high level of water turbidity in the immediate vicinity of the dredging vessel from dislodged sediment and sand (known as the plume), which slowly extends and dissipates into the surrounding waters. The plume can be responsible for greatly diminished underwater visibility. SCUBA diving can be at a higher risk in low visibility conditions due to the potential for directional disorientation and dive-buddy separation. Generally, the quality (*i.e.* purpose) of a recreational SCUBA dive in low or very low visibility conditions can also be greatly diminished. That said, water turbidity caused by dredging operations in a given area can be expected to generally clear after approximately 3-5 days if the dredging operation has moved out of the area, although the time to achieve improved water visibility will depend on tide and wind movement, and the nature of the material in the plume.

The SDFV strongly recommends that recreational diving activities are not undertaken or continued:-

- within the declared 200m Restricted Access Area (RAA) of the dredging vessel,
- in areas of the plume beyond the 200m RAA where the horizontal visibility is known or found to be less than 1m.

The following general guidelines are recommended for diving in locations other than in the Heads:-

In relation to diving pre-planning:-

- Check the CDP dredging schedule to determine the general area of operation for the three-five days preceding the planned dive day,
 - If dredging operations have occurred in the immediate vicinity of the target dive location, consider selecting an alternative location,
- Check the CDP website for update on dredging activity and location of the dredging vessel on the planned dive day.
 - If dredging operations are to occur in the immediate vicinity of the target dive location, select an alternative location or cancel the planned dive.

In relation to conducting the dive:-

- Follow the SDFV General Code of Practice for Recreational Diving and Diving in Shipping Channels,
- Do not enter any declared RAA or dive within 200m of the dredging vessel.
- Prior to water entry, be prepared to cancel the dive or move to an alternative dive site should the surface water quality/colour visibility indicate the arrival or presence of the plume,
- Be prepared to terminate the dive should water visibility conditions rapidly deteriorate during the dive.

In relation to post-dive:-

- Report location and general dive conditions to the SDFV via e-mail or website.



2. Diving in the vicinity of the dredging vessel operating in The Entrance

Preamble

Recreational divers currently enjoy the ability to dive in the shipping channels during periods of no shipping traffic via a long-established Code of Practice protocol under co-operative arrangements with the Port of Melbourne Corporation. The Heads, in particular, is an important and very popular diving area. To minimise the impact of the CDP on diving in the Heads, the PoMC has identified a way to extend the existing arrangements with divers to allow access to dive sites in the area during the period of dredging the Entrance. The extension involves increased communication with the Point Lonsdale Signal Station to relay movement requirements of the dredging vessel which will move in the defined works area on a daily basis (as operational requirements dictate) and periodically 'move out of the way' to allow normal shipping traffic to transit the Entrance.

The defined works area is illustrated in a map found at www.portofmelbourne.com (and follow channel deepening links). Point Lonsdale Signal Station (Lighthouse) will periodically broadcast information to mariners on VHF Channel 12.

SDFV members ***should not undertake*** dive activities in the Heads area while there is dredging operations of the Entrance:-

- if the dive group can not receive VHF Channel 12 broadcasts,
- within the declared 200m Restricted Access Area (RAA) of the dredging vessel.

The following procedure is recommended for diving in the Heads:-

In relation to diving pre-planning:-

- Check the CDP website for update on the scheduled dredging activity at the planned dive time.
 - If planned site location is within 200m of the scheduled activity, cancel the dive at that location

In relation to approach to the dive site:-

- As per the SDFV Code of Practice for diving in shipping channels of Port Philip, contact the Point Lonsdale Signal Station on Channel 12 or by telephone on (03) 52581252 to obtain information on the movements of the dredging vessel and any other shipping.
 - If diving can proceed, advise the Signal Station of intention

In relation to conducting the dive:-

- Observe the general guidelines for diving during the CDP (*see previous page*).

In relation to transiting the Entrance,

- Advise the Point Lonsdale Signal Station of intention to transit only if conditions and the position of the dredging vessel prevent safe entry or exit of the Heads without breaching the 200m RAA.



Port of Melbourne Corporation links

Channel Project Daily Activities update:

http://www.channelproject.com/schedulelocation/daily_activities_update.asp

Channel Project Access Restrictions:

http://www.channelproject.com/schedulelocation/access_restrictions.asp