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MEDIA RELEASE

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Geelong dive operators denied compensation

The Port of Melbourne Corporation refuses to compensate Geelong's diving operators for loss of business due to Bay dredging and is telling those affected that they should use the legal system, says David Koch, Member for Western Victoria, speaking in Parliament last week.

"Although acknowledging dive operators will experience revenue losses of over \$4 million while Port Philip Bay is being dredged, the Port of Melbourne Corporation is not prepared to discuss issues affecting the diving industry or consider options for protecting the industry.

"Dive operators in Geelong are telling me that underwater visibility off Queenscliff has reduced from an average 20 metres before dredging commenced to as little as three metres during ebb tides.

"The grey murky water caused by the silt plume is not just contained to the Bay but extends some eight kilometres beyond the Heads reducing visibility for recreational divers and dive fishermen who are now confined to areas away from the Heads.

"Diving operators rely on clear water to attract tourists and scuba divers who want to explore the remarkable diversity and abundance of marine flora and fauna in the Bay.

"Since dredging commenced, the lack of visibility has reduced the number of people who can dive together from about ten to five due to safety concerns of not being able to see the bottom of the Bay and the higher risk for inexperienced divers becoming disorientated in the murky water.

"The ripple down affect for Geelong is that diving businesses are already seeing a fall in business of up to 60 per cent and with an expected two years of significant turbidity forecast as a result of dredging, the impact of diminished returns has the potential to send these businesses to the wall.

"Despite a Government that gives lip service to social justice, Member for Bellarine, Lisa Neville, who is a cabinet member in the State Parliament, has not spoken up for local diving businesses, nor has the member for South Barwon, Michael Crutchfield, given them any support.

"Last week the Upper House passed the Port Services Amendment Bill that seeks the Port of Melbourne Corporation to undertake immediate public disclosure of environmental monitoring of the channel deepening project through changes which will reassure bayside communities that if dredging doesn't comply with the Environmental Management Plan, it can be ceased until rectified.

"This is not about whether dredging should take place, but about delivering a greater level of transparency of environmental undertakings and while I believe there will not be any intentional destruction of the bay, enforcing regular and timely public disclosure of environmental monitoring will see a greater level of probity.

"The coalition is very supportive of deepening the bay to allow fully loaded container ships to come and go from Melbourne and we see these amendments as vitally important for keeping the community informed, especially those whose livelihoods are affected during dredging.

"The Brumby Government must make sure diving operators are compensated for loss of business while dredging is underway, as their association does not have the financial capacity to take on the legal might of the Port of Melbourne Corporation," said David Koch.

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