

Weedy Seadragon future looks bright at Flinders Pier

16 September 2021:

Newly released findings from an independent scientific study have revealed that the potential impacts to the local Weedy Seadragon population from the proposed Flinders Pier works would be localised and temporary.

The report, prepared by environmental marine biology consultants CEE Pty Ltd, examined the marine ecosystem at the pier, mapping habitat and marine life, and identifying potential impacts from removing the unsafe 180-metre section of timber pier.

In a key finding, the report identifies removal of the inshore timber piles and deck is unlikely to impact the population of Weedy Seadragons (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) at a state, regional or local level and that any minor, temporary disturbances can be managed.

The report has found the outer section of pier – which will remain in place - provides the most valuable marine habitat for seadragons, including extensive beds of Sea Nymph seagrass (*Amphibolis antarctica*). This habitat is widespread along the coast between Flinders and Balnarring but also occurs alongside the pier, and to a much lesser extent due to shading, under the pier from the middle to outer sections.

Seagrass is highly suitable habitat for seadragons, providing shelter from turbulence and predators and containing high numbers of the small crustaceans they eat. However, with work planned for the inner section of the pier away from the main Weedy Seadragon habitat, the effect on the abundance, behaviour and movement of this species is expected to be negligible.

The report explains how the characteristics of the marine ecosystem differ between the inshore and deeper waters due to Western Port's dynamic tidal environment.

The inshore flat sandy seabed and piles provide a habitat for resilient and common marine life. Therefore, any impacts to the seabed found alongside the middle section of the pier due to nearby works are expected to be minor, and the biota will recolonise over time.

Funding to remove a dangerous 180-metre inner timber section of Flinders Pier comes from the Victorian Government's \$24 million Piers and Jetties economic stimulus package.

The ecological assessment will be considered alongside a heritage impact assessment commissioned by Parks Victoria and a third-party Victorian Heritage Register nomination underway through Heritage Victoria before any decision on the pier's future is made.

The Flinders Pier Marine Ecology and Pier Removal Impact Assessment Report can be viewed at www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects.

Quotes attributable to Parks Victoria Regional Director Marine and Maritime, Jo Richards

“We are focused on protecting the sensitive marine values of Western Port and the report confirms this can be achieved while also ensuring visitor safety. It is just one of many steps we are taking in our project planning and will be considered carefully along with the heritage assessments that are still underway.”

“We are reassured by the report findings that with careful management, scheduling of works and the development of a Construction Environmental Management Plan, the proposed works can go ahead without any significant impact to the marine ecosystem and the local Weedy Seadragon population.”

“Flinders Pier is an important snorkelling and diving destination, and it will continue to be a great location for seeing the iconic Weedy Seadragons up close.”

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Supporting images and footage

Watch the video: Flinders Pier – an underwater discovery - <https://youtu.be/bqhWUqeSTA8>

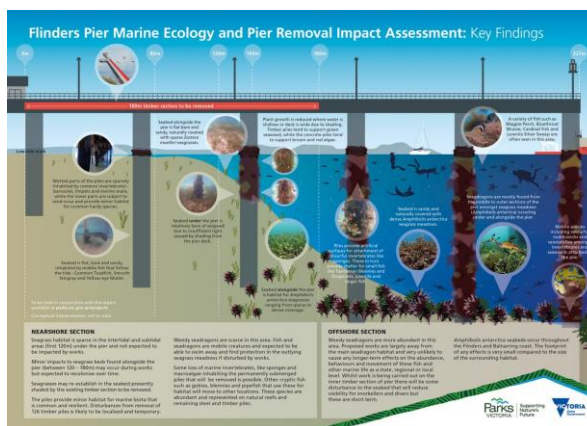
Hi resolution images available to download here: <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects/flinders-jetty---timber-inner-section-removal>



Weedy Seadragon amongst seagrass (*Amphibolis antarctica*) at Flinders Pier. Credit: Parks Victoria



Juvenile Magpie Morwong and Bluetthroat Wrasse at Flinders Pier. Credit: CEE Pty Ltd



Infographic - conceptual interpretation of key findings. Credit: Parks Victoria



Smooth Stingray and Silver Trevally swimming under Flinders Pier. Credit: CEE Pty Ltd

About Parks Victoria

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These places are home to more than 4,300 native plants and around 1,000 native animal species. It is a privilege to conserve Victoria's natural environment for current and future generations. Parks Victoria works in partnership with Traditional Owners and is committed to [Managing Country Together](https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/managing-country-together).