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Next Generation Project Passes First Milestone

Port Otago Limited's Next Generation project has passed its first milestone with the completion and public release of preliminary reports into the possible effects of the project on the physical coastal environment and its ecology. The project, launched in August 2007, is to explore the issues and options associated with handling visits by the next generation of bigger ships to Port Chalmers.

The purposes of the two studies just completed were to identify the level of existing knowledge on the physical and ecological environment of Otago Harbour and its environs, and to identify areas requiring further investigation to enable a full assessment of the project's likely environmental effects. The reports were completed in December and were circulated to members of the Project Consultative Group¹ working alongside Port Otago on identifying and mitigating possible environmental effects of the project.

At this stage, the reports indicate that there are no significant environmental issues for Next Generation but they do identify that further investigation and analysis is necessary to fully understand the issues and effects of the project prior to Port Otago preparing a consent application.

An initial assessment of ecological effects by Dr Mark James of NIWA, supported by Mr Rick Boyd (fisheries consultant) and Dr Keith Probert (University of Otago), suggests that it will be important to understand how any sediment plume behaves and how the harbour ecology responds. The report identifies future modelling work required, including wider analysis of seabed habitat surveys inside and outside the harbour, and extending studies on birds, mammals and fisheries in the context of the project and its effects.

The second report, completed by Dr Martin Single, (Shore Processes & Management Ltd and University of Canterbury) provides an overview of the physical science aspects of the project. The report considers effects from vessel surge or wake, coastal erosion and management, and sediment transport. It recommends further analysis of dredge material and seabed materials at any disposal sites, and further modelling of waves and currents to assess the effects of a deeper channel and bigger ships.

The two reports are available to the public via the Port Otago website, or by calling Emma Morey at Port Otago (4727890).

For further information please contact:

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¹ Port Otago Limited has coordinated the establishment of a Project Consultative Group of community representatives that will work with the Port throughout the investigation phase of this project. The PCG is actively involved in developing the shape of the project, including the identification of key issues and how they can best be addressed. The PCG is independently chaired by Stephen Higgs and currently has a membership in excess of 30 people. The input of the PCG will give invaluable guidance to Port Otago and ensure transparency around the investigation phase of the project.