No harm to surf breaks: experts

By Rebecca Fox on Tue, 7 May 2013

Continuing to dump dredged spoil from Otago Harbour's shipping channel at existing sites will not negatively affect the protected nationally significant surfing breaks at Aramoana and Whareakeake, Port Otago specialists say.

An Otago Regional Council hearing of Port Otago's application for a three-year renewal of its consent to dispose of 450,000cu m of spoil per year from maintenance and incremental capital dredging of the harbour to sites at Heyward Point, Aramoana Spit and Shelly Beach is being heard by an independent panel in Dunedin this week.

The consent was opposed by five out of eight submissions, mostly from people wanting to protect the nationally significant surf breaks near the dump sites.

Counsel Len Andersen, for Port Otago, said a short-term application had been applied for so the company could find the best long-term
solution for the disposal of spoil. A longer-term consent would then be applied for.

For the renewal, Port Otago had agreed to change the ratios of deposits at two sites so no more than 350,000cu m was dumped at Heyward Point, up from the present 200,000cu m, and up to 50,000cu m would be discharged at Aramoana spit. Fifty thousand cubic metres would also be deposited at Shelly Beach.

Port general manager infrastructure Lincoln Coe said a range of consultant groups would be set up as part of the company's New Generation project after channel-deepening consents were granted late last year. Until the capital dredging began, it proposed continuing with its existing working party but would add a surfing representative, he said.

Coastal specialist Dr Martin Single said there was no evidence of any adverse effects from the disposal of dredged sediment at the Shelly, Aramoana and Heyward Point beach sites. Surveys of the beaches showed they were healthy, he said.

Dr Single considered that there were beneficial effects to Shelly and Aramoana Beaches because the dredged sediment provided extra sand and reduced erosion of the dunes.

Dredge spoil placement appeared to be lessening the erosion by supplying sediment to the general area next to the Heyward disposal site, he said.

The proposed conditions provided ongoing assessment of effects and provided for adaptive management.

Benthic (sea floor) ecologist Dr Brian Paavo said, from the research he had been involved in, he considered the continued disposal of dredging material, of the quantity and quality so far, was not expected to have "onerous deleterious ecological effects" on the sea floor environment for the short duration of the consent.

Physical oceanographer Dr Peter McComb said a detailed analysis of the surfing wave dynamics had been undertaken.

The presence of the offshore bar and dredged channel was the main feature creating the unique surf conditions at Aramoana. The spit "mound" had a secondary, modifying effect.

The proposed deposit at Shelly Beach was not expected to produce outcomes different from those in the past 10 years, he said.
Depositing similar amounts at the spit ground was not expected to result in long-term effects on the sedimentary environment of Aramoana Beach.

"This region has the capacity to absorb this volume and cumulative negative impacts over the long term are not anticipated."

Some short-term effects on the surfing wave climate were expected but would not be dissimilar to the effects experienced in the past 10 years as both surf breaks had been influenced by port activities for many years, he said.

The Heyward Point deposits had the potential to alter the "wave-focusing effect" within the dominant swell corridor to the Whareakeake surf break.

Judicious placement of spoil on the deeper parts of the ground could be used to minimise effects, he said.

Planner Mary O'Gallahan said the proposed monitoring work was expected to result in a better understanding of the relationship between disposal and "surfability" and help develop a management plan which minimised any long-term negative effects on the surf breaks.

The conditions of the consent provided appropriate safeguards in the event the effects on surf quality were to change in the future, she said.

"A sustainable approach needs to take into account the economic benefits of the proposal as well as the potential effects on surf quality."

The hearing continues today.

**Day 1**

**Where:** Southern Cross, Dunedin.

**Application:** Three-year renewal of consent to dispose of dredged spoil at three sites.

**Independent hearing panel:** John Lumsden (chairman), Mike Johnston, Martin Ward.

**Evidence:** Port Otago, counsel Len Andersen, general manager
infrastructure Lincoln Coe, coastal geographer Dr Martin Single, marine benthic ecologist Dr Brian Paavo, physical oceanographer Peter McComb and planner Mary O’Callahan.

Surfers concerned for breaks

Two of New Zealand's best surfing breaks could be put in jeopardy if Port Otago is allowed to go ahead with plans to dump increased amounts of spoil from Otago Harbour, the Surfbreak Protection Society says.

The comments were made at an Otago Regional Council hearing of Port Otago's application for a three-year renewal of its consent to dispose of 450,000cu m of spoil a year from maintenance and incremental capital dredging of the harbour to sites at Heyward Point, Aramoana Spit and Shelly Beach, which is being heard by an independent panel in Dunedin this week.

Specialists from Port Otago said on Monday dumping up to 350,000cu m at Heyward Point and 50,000cu m at Aramoana would not negatively affect the surfing breaks at Aramoana and Whareakeake.

Surfbreak Protection Society (SPS) vice-president David Sorck disagreed, saying yesterday the port had "produced no evidence that the proposed activities will not adversely affect the surf breaks".

The council had a legal obligation under the Resource Management Act and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) to protect surf breaks of national significance, Mr Sorck said.

The surf breaks at Aramoana and Whareakeake - which were among 17 surf breaks of "national significance" included in the NZCPS - brought both national and international tourists to Dunedin, he said.

Before any consent was granted, a three-year "baseline study" was needed so any potential adverse effects from the dumping could be monitored. During those three years, no dumping should be carried
If the council approved the dumping plan as it stood now, it would be breaking New Zealand law, he said.

This was because the NZCPS stated that a "precautionary approach" must be taken if the effects on the coast line were "uncertain, unknown, or little understood, but potentially significantly adverse".

Monitoring after the event - as proposed by Port Otago - did not qualify as a "precautionary approach", he said.

The monitoring the port had proposed also would not adequately show whether there had been any adverse effects on the quality of the surf breaks.

Mr Sorck's submission was backed up by eCoast Ltd director Dr Jose Carlos Borrero, who presented evidence on behalf of eCoast Ltd managing director Dr Shaw Mead, who could not attend the meeting.

A statement by Dr Mead, read out by Dr Borrero, said he was concerned about Port Otago's proposal.

"I am a firm proponent of sustainable development and reiterate from my initial opinion that there is no doubt that maintenance and expansion of the port's operations are very important to the city of Dunedin. However, this should not come at the expense of nationally significant surfing breaks," Dr Mead said.

Without a baseline study, it would not be possible to judge the effects of dumping, he said.

Dumping the maximum 50,000cu m at Aramoana and 350,000cu m at Heyward Point would represent two-fold and seven-fold increases respectively, over the average amount being dumped at the sites and the port had failed to adequately look into the possible effects.

Anecdotal evidence from surfers and a surfing wave dynamic report suggested the effects had the "potential to be negative".

Earlier in the day, local surfer Nicola Reeves, who is involved with the Big Rock Boardriders and South Coast Boardriders and is the South Island representative of the Surfbreak Protection Society, said local surfers had noticed that dumping had already had a negative effect on wave quality at Aramoana.

A bridge of sand had formed between the mound of material dumped by the port and the shore, she said.
South Coast Boardriders member Roderick Rust, who has been surfing in the Dunedin area since 1972, said local surfers were "very afraid" over the possible effects of the dumping.

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**No dumping risks port's operations**

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By Vaughan Elder on Thu, 9 May 2013
News: Dunedin

Surfers at Aramoana. Photo by Nic Reeves.
A proposal to halt the dumping of spoil from Otago Harbour off-shore from two of New Zealand's best surf beaches is not practical and would place Port Otago's dredging operation at risk.

The comments were made by Port Otago counsel Len Andersen on the final day of an Otago Regional Council hearing of the port's application for a three-year renewal of its consent to dispose of 450,000cu m of spoil a year from maintenance and incremental capital dredging of the harbour to sites at Heyward Point, Aramoana Spit and Shelly Beach.

They came after the Surfbreak Protection Society on Tuesday called for dumping at Heyward Point and Aramoana Spit to be stopped for three years while a baseline study on surf quality and the effects of dumping was carried out at Aramoana and Whareakeake - which were included among 17 surf breaks of "national significance".
Mr Andersen said the society's call for dumping to be stopped while a study was carried out would put the port's entire dredging operation at risk, as there were "no alternative [dumping] sites". "Port Otago needs to be able to dispose of the maintenance dredging spoil in order to maintain the [harbour] channel," he said. Stopping dumping also posed a potential risk as it was possible dumping at the present levels contributed to the high quality of waves at the two sites. "It is a blunt instrument to say stop [dumping], because that in itself is altering [the status quo]," he said.

Port Otago's application was already a "precautionary approach", because the consent was only for three years, during which the effects of the dumping would be constantly monitored, allowing for an "informed decision" when the dumping came up for consent again.

Mr Anderson said Port Otago accepted criticism from surfing advocates - including the Surfbreak Protection Society and local surfers Roderick Rust and Nicola Reeves - that it could have communicated better during the pre-hearing phase, and in particular when it came to having experts from both sides discussing the issues. "It should have been handled better," he said.

Independent hearing panel chairman John Lumsden earlier said one of the significant issues that had come up from the hearing was whether Heyward Point could "handle" the significant increase in dumping proposed in the application.

Mr Andersen said in reply there were periods in the past when more had been dumped at the site, which gave some reassurance the increase would not have a negative effect.

Otago Regional Council principal resource officer Peter Christophers earlier defended his recommendation to approve the dumping, saying the conditions attached represented a "precautionary approach". "I stand by my report that consent be granted with conditions," Mr Christophers said.

However, based on the submissions, he recommended a few changes to conditions, including having at least one member of the South Coast Boardriders on the working party, which would meet at least every six months and monitor the effects of dumping. He also recommended the amount of each type of spoil at each site be monitored.

A decision will be made in due course.