

Penguin parade at risk

Title

Australia's famous penguin parades on Philip and French Islands - which are nationally significant shorebird feeding and roosting sites - face the growing risk of a devastating oil spill, if Victoria's controversial Western Port development is approved, new research shows. "Oil and birds don't mix," said BirdLife Australia's Shorebirds Program Manager Dr Golo Maurer. "Oil sticks to birds' feathers. If they aren't poisoned by cleaning themselves, they suffer a slow death through hypothermia, drowning or impaired movement." BirdLife Australia believes the Federal Government should step-in and independently assess the environmental impact of massive expansion plans for the Port of Hastings, including the increased risk of oil spills from ship traffic. "Western Port Bay is listed as an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar convention and is protected by Federal environmental laws," Dr Maurer, said. "The Victorian Government is committed to pushing ahead, regardless of the impacts, which is why the next Federal Government should retain its approval powers. As the local MP, and potentially the next Federal Environment Minister, Greg Hunt cannot turn a blind eye to poor process and bad planning." Thousands of migratory shorebirds, including the tiny Red-necked Stints and the internationally red listed Eastern Curlew migrate to Western Port each year. The Bar-tailed Godwit travels 10,000 kilometres to feed in fertile Western Port mudflats. The migratory birds are also joined by thousands of Black Swans, ducks, herons, ibis and egrets. The Council of Australian Governments' (CoAG 2012) own National Ports Strategy commits all governments to environmental outcomes by applying leading practices, including "the need for major new developments to have a social licence to operate."