EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Port of London Authority proposes to deepen the Princes Channel, the southern approach to the Port of London, to remove the navigational risk associated with the existing situation. Estimates of likely increases in ship numbers have indicated that the development of the Princes Channel should be complete by the end of 2006.

The dredge will produce up to 2.5Mm^3 of predominantly fine sands. The PLA is committed to finding beneficial use for as much of the material as possible, and indeed, has successfully found a use for dredged material generated during an earlier dredge. However, the PLA recognises the practical difficulties associated with aligning the timescales of major projects and, should beneficial use not be available, it is proposed to recycle the sand within the sedimentary system. A sand placement site has been identified in the North Edinburgh Channel, in consultation with the local fishing industry.

An environmental characterisation exercise has been undertaken and is discussed in this report. A range of surveys have been undertaken to define the baseline environment including biological, sediment quality, current speeds, bathymetry and archaeological surveys. The North Edinburgh Channel is characterised by a dynamic mobile sandy environment and the channel is migrating eastwards. The biological communities are, therefore, representative of an unstable environment and the Channel does not provide specific spawning or nursery habitat for fish, other than as part of the wider Thames Estuary. There are no conservation sites within 15km of the Channel although feeding grounds for birds are widely distributed across Estuary.

The placement of sand in the North Edinburgh channel is considered to mimic the natural dynamic processes and the environment is, therefore, adapted to this regime. The environmental assessment does not predict any effects over those already occurring naturally.