



Round Hill Creek

Channel Access Improvement

Improving marine vessel accessibility through the Round Hill Creek mouth will lead to increased tourism and commercial opportunities within the Seventeen Seventy and Agnes Water communities. The current access limitations are also a substantial safety risk for these communities in times of natural disaster and evacuation as well as for general marine rescue operations.

Gladstone Regional Council seeks funding and project delivery of the Round Hill Creek sand dredging works as outlined within the Round Hill Creek Channel Options January 2019 report by BMT WBM Pty Ltd.

Why is it important

Over the last 20 years there has been a natural designated channel to allow vessels to navigate Round Hill Creek at most tide conditions. More recently, this channel has gradually shallowed, due to sand shifting and natural coastal processes which has caused problems at low tides for all vessels.

This has raised a number of concerns including:

SOS **Safety:** Limited ability for Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) to respond to emergency situations during low tide.

Warning **Safety:** Risks for recreational vessels at low tides attempting to enter or exit Round Hill Creek.

\$ **Economic:** Limitations for commercial vessels entering or exiting Round Hill Creek. This has contributed to a lack of operator diversity and therefore tourism numbers visiting the area and the reef.

The current accessibility of the creek has had major implications on response times of the Round Hill VMR.

Based on the 2019 VMR data, there are on average 1633 people 'on the water' a month. This translates to approximately 54 people in the region a day.

The limitation on the access of, particularly larger commercial vessels, has also restricted the economic growth of the tourist industry within these communities. There is the potential for several larger tourist vessels to access Seventeen Seventy with indications that 35M luxury high speed catamaran's and similar would access the creek, if able. These vessels have capacity of up to 220 persons, indicating a significant tourism boost to the area and region as a whole.

Councils Visitor Economy Strategy 2025 lists access to the reef from Seventeen Seventy as a key constraint given the tidal issues of the creek mouth. The Strategy indicates the current \$315m annual value of tourism in the region could grow up to \$348m over the next 5 years, should this current constraint be addressed.



What would success look like?

The Round Hill Creek channel is successfully dredged and maintained with the least possible environmental impacts. The Seventeen Seventy and Agnes Water communities and businesses are able to realise the increased economic benefits of the improved access, with increased tourism and visitor numbers. Local fishermen and recreational users of the creek are able to safely and efficiently access a range of locations using the creek mouth. The VMR are able to respond to all marine emergencies, regardless of the tides.

What community support does it have?

A community survey was undertaken in September 2019 to engage the broader community and open the opportunity to provide feedback on the impacts of the current state of the creek.

The participants covered a wide demographic of the Agnes Water and Seventeen Seventy region including recreational users, commercial businesses, community groups and service providers.

Of those surveyed, **70%** replied that they have been **negatively impacted** by the sand accumulation and restrictive nature of the shallowness of the creek entrance. Commercial businesses have listed impacts ranging from needing to reduce staff and dramatic decline in accommodation and tourism bookings, to loss of income due to tidal depth.

Over **40%** of total respondents have **personally experienced safety concerns** whilst entering and exiting the creek. The vast majority of these incidents were the result of hitting hidden sandbars and dangerous wave action due to the shallows within the creek mouth.

Several commercial operators have indicated that the major restriction to increasing and diversifying their operations is the safety and access risks associated with the shallowing of the Round Hill Creek access. **Should this be resolved, access to the Seventeen Seventy region to tourist operators by sea would become increasingly economically viable.**

What is preventing the issue from being resolved?

The Round Hill Creek Channel Options January 2019 report by BMT WBM Pty Ltd has been prepared and adopted by Gladstone Regional Council in February 2019. This report considered the potential options to increase all tidal access into and out of the Creek. This report concluded that major structural works to provide a permanent channel deepening solution are not considered viable due to substantial costs, inherent risks and significant negotiations that would be required to obtain approval.

Soft options such as dredging a channel would provide the desired navigable access for comparably less investment and is currently the preferred option to resolve the shallowing of the channel. Dredging will be subject to technical considerations and environmental approvals to investigate the alignment options. Estimated costs are \$1.5million for initial capital works.

At this point in time, Council considers that the largest constraint to the resolution of these issues is the cost associated with the approvals and physical completion of the dredging works. The ongoing maintenance costs are also out of reach of the local community if the access is to be retained long term, at approximately \$500,000 per annum.

