

Background

Providing safe and unimpeded access to terminals for vessels is the cornerstone of a port's mandate. Without safe access, marine gateways become obsolete. Ensuring appropriate water depth is a primary component to this safe access and often requires dredging. However, like every other aspect of port operations, dredging must be sustainable economically, environmentally and socially.

Economic sustainability

Dredging requirements differ by location. For example, capital dredging in Burrard inlet is often relatively expensive as it may require removal of rock or hard pan, however it is required fairly infrequently. In contrast, capital dredging in the Fraser River is usually a relatively easy operation, consisting of picking up sand, however it requires constant maintenance, which is a significant and varying operating expense from year to year.

Environmental sustainability

As more is understood about the impacts of marine operations such as dredging on the marine eco system, regulations designed to protect the environment have become progressively more stringent. Port Metro Vancouver strives to minimize environmental impact in all of our operations, and must consider ways to mitigate any impacts from dredging.

Social sustainability

As a member of the lower mainland community we share our port waters with a variety of users, some engaged in commercial use and others in recreational use. Although we may not have a legislative or contractual commitment to support navigational or other access for many of these users, as neighbours we must consider their needs and assist where possible or appropriate. In order to balance our economic, social and environmental responsibilities with respect to dredging, Port Metro Vancouver has developed a dredging philosophy to guide dredging activities now and in the future.

1. Port Metro Vancouver shall undertake a planned and strategic dredging program **for navigational purposes only**.
2. As dredging is generally for the common good of the marine community, both **capital and maintenance dredging costs** shall be recovered across as broad a range of stakeholders as possible.

3. In the case where dredging benefits a very small user group, such as a single terminal or a specialized shipping sector, the cost of dredging shall be borne by the specific beneficiaries.
4. As dredging has a potential impact on the **environment**, it must be kept to the minimum amount required to ensure safe access for navigation. The use of other options such as technology, which will provide a similar level of safe access, shall always be considered first and based on commercial viability.
5. All channel dredging, whether capital or maintenance, shall only be carried out if considered **commercially viable**. The only exception shall be in the case of secondary channel dredging where it is considered that financial support is a corporate social responsibility.
6. Port Metro Vancouver shall **develop partnerships** with other stakeholders to ensure the financial burden of maintenance dredging is shared among the broadest group of beneficiaries.
7. To provide stakeholders with a **level of certainty** so they may make strategic decisions about their businesses or endeavors, Port Metro Vancouver shall develop a strategy for dredging that takes into account the next 10 to 15 years.
8. Port Metro Vancouver shall consider providing some financial support for **secondary dredging** to communities that develop and implement a long-term plan to address their dredging needs, and where that plan provides a sustainable long-term solution.