Northern Gold Coast Beach Protection Strategy: Recreational benefits

As a premier tourist destination and host of several international events, the Gold Coast’s 52 kilometres of Pacific Ocean frontage (including South Stradbroke Island) features some of the most popular beaches in Australia. Many different types of activities are undertaken on these beaches. To protect and enhance recreational amenity, the city of the Gold Coast has a long history of active coastal management, including engineered coastal control structures to stabilise beach width.

Increasing beach width

Narrawneck is a narrow stretch of coastline between Main Beach and Surfers Paradise that is bordered by the ocean to the east and the Nerang River to the west. Strong wave action during storms can cause sand to move from the visible portion of a beach to the submerged nearshore region. Here, it will stay until calmer conditions facilitate a migration back up the beach. Increasing the beach width and protecting it with a submerged artificial reef as part of the Northern Gold Coast Beach Protection Strategy has enhanced beach amenity. It has also secured a lot of public open space for recreational use.

Recreation at Narrawneck

There are many types of surf craft utilising Narrawneck reef across varying conditions. Since the Reef’s construction, use of Narrawneck for all types of surfing has increased. Overall, monitoring indicates that the reef provides suitable conditions for a wide range of activities:
- Beach walking
- Surf carnivals
- Body surfing
- Surf skis, surf kayaks and paddleboards
- Fishing
- Scuba diving
- Body boarding
- Long boards
- Short boards
- Sail boards and kite boards

A range of surf craft at Narrawneck (Source: GCCM)

Flags set up directly inshore of Narrawneck Beach (Source: GCCM)
Monitoring by the Griffith Centre for Coastal Management in collaboration with other coastal monitoring systems (e.g. Coastal Coms) has confirmed that the Narrowneck reef has positively contributed to surf quality along the coastline immediately adjacent to the reef.\(^1\), \(^2\), \(^3\) Average conditions and a high-tide usually bring 'spilling' waves. Larger swells and offshore wind conditions result in more hollow, plunging breakers. The reef has resulted in longer rides extending closer to the beach, featuring faster and slower sections.

In such close proximity to world-renowned breaks—such as Burleigh Heads, Snapper Rocks and South Stradbroke—Narrowneck is not generally the Gold Coast's most popular surfing beach. Although the primary purpose of the reef was to improve beach stability, the reef has also assisted to increase surf quality in this area. Some regular events that have been held at Narrowneck since the Reef was constructed include the Clean Water Teams Challenge, and one-off events like the National Wave-jumping Titles, Queensland State Bodyboard Championships and the National Kiteboard Championships.

References
\(^1\) Strauss, D. K. Splinter, M. Elliott-Smith, C. Lane, R. Tomlinson 2010, 'Coastal Imaging—Palm Beach and Northern Beaches, Gold Coast May 2010 to October 2010' gccc.coastalcoms.com/reports/6-monthly-combined-reports/december-2010/view (Last accessed 4 May 2011)