



**Southern Downs**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

15 September 2017

Committee Secretary  
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE Q 4000

[ipnrc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:ipnrc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Please address all  
communications to:

The Chief Executive Officer

Southern Downs

Regional Council

PO Box 26

Warwick Qld 4370

[mail@sdrc.qld.gov.au](mailto:mail@sdrc.qld.gov.au)

[www.sdrc.qld.gov.au](http://www.sdrc.qld.gov.au)

abn 59 786 792 651

**Warwick Office**

64 Fitzroy Street

Warwick Qld 4370

**Stanthorpe Office**

61 Marsh Street

Stanthorpe Qld 4380

t **1300 MY SDRC**

(1300 697 372)

f **07 4661 0333**

Dear Chair Pearce

Southern Downs Regional Council wishes to provide a submission to the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry into the Mineral, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017.

The Southern Downs Regional Council notes that the Bill proposes to:

- give effect to the Queensland Government's response to four recommendations of the Independent Review of the Gasfields Commission Queensland and associated matters
- remove the automatic referral of compensation matters to the Land Court of Queensland under the *Mineral Resources Act 1989*
- ensure the consideration of the water-related effects of climate change on water resources is explicit in the water planning framework
- provide for the inclusion of cultural outcomes in water plans to support the protection of the cultural values of water resources for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders
- provide for the mechanism to allow for temporary access to unallocated water held in strategic water infrastructure reserves, and
- establish new powers for dealing with urgent water quality issues.

Southern Downs Regional Council wishes only to provide a submission that covers the following:

- ensure the consideration of the water-related effects of climate change on water resources is explicit in the water planning framework
- provide for the inclusion of cultural outcomes in water plans to support the protection of the cultural values of water resources for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders
- provide for the mechanism to allow for temporary access to unallocated water held in strategic water infrastructure reserves, and
- establish new powers for dealing with urgent water quality issues.

With regard to the first item of the terms of reference, Southern Downs Regional Council believes that it is imperative that the State Government lead the discussion around water conservation and effective water management. The potential implications of climate change mean that it is becoming essential that communities and the private sector treat water more as a valued commodity.

Additionally, Council believes that more defined directions need to be determined and implemented that recognize water resource planning especially in relation to population growth and industry demands. Forward thinking long term plans need to be formulated

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that will match strategic water reserves with the aspirations and expectations of different communities and the business sector.

Southern Downs Regional Council believes it appropriate for example that Planning Schemes in the future take into account the impact of proposed land uses in relation to the water required to undertake specific activities.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to the development of network trunk infrastructure that can service existing populations but have capacity to meet the needs of future communities and business opportunities. This level and detail of information needs to be spatially presented and potentially reside or be included within the State Infrastructure Plan.

In regard to the second item within the terms of reference, namely that there should be the inclusion of cultural outcomes in water plans to support the protection of the cultural values of water resources for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, Council supports the identification of allocations that maintain these important assets through adequate and appropriate environmental flows. Council believes that these flows are important to maintain the environment that surrounds cultural assets and places that are sustained and managed by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.

The third item under the terms of reference relates directly to the need to provide for a mechanism to allow for temporary access to unallocated water held in strategic water infrastructure reserves. Southern Downs Regional Council contends that all strategic water reserves that can be utilized should be used to support regional development where ever possible.

Council recognizes that there are a number of reviews underway at present that are seeking to convert licenses to volumetric allocations that are transferable, but this process has proven to be challenging and at times problematic. Council supports the development of a temporary mechanism that will allow access to strategic water reserves on the condition that there is an appropriate pricing mechanism implemented and consistency in the charging that does not provide an advantage to one group over another.

Formal guidance and further flexibility of how strategic reserves can be better utilized would be welcomed by Council.

Finally, in relation to the final item of the terms of reference, namely the establishment of new powers for dealing with urgent water quality issues, Council supports the existing Drinking Water Quality Management Plan, but recognizes that "not one size fits all."

Council notes that the expectations of the auditors and in some circumstances the Department of Energy and Water Supply, is that the capacity of a rural or regional local government authority is similar to that of a large local government authority or public authority. Council believes that there is perhaps more scope for consideration to be given to a more achievable benchmark for smaller local government authorities. As part of this submission Council would like to highlight the good work that has been undertaken by the Department of Energy and Water Supply in relation to the Stanthorpe Water Security Supply Assessment Study and the Warwick Water Security Supply Assessment Study, however it is noted that there perhaps needs to be more of a "joined up" State Government Agency approach that involves the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Each of these Departments has a role to play in the management of important water and wastewater infrastructure and product. At times, it is observed, the Departments are not always focused on common objectives.

Additionally, Southern Downs Regional Council is keen to understand the future aspirations of SunWater. As SunWater seeks to become financially sustainable, the imperative directed to Council to either use more or less water needs to be clear. It is noted at present there are no incentives, financial or otherwise, for local governments that use less water or communities that become more "water wise." Reduced water usage should be viewed as a laudable objective, as it is the premise being put forward by the Department of Energy and Water Supply through the recent studies. Council would be keen to understand the imprimatur from the whole of government in relation to water conservation and education.

As the Committee would be aware, each year motions are put to the Local Government Association of Queensland conference. Southern Downs Regional Council has submitted two motions that are relevant to the terms of reference of the Committee.

The first motion is as follows:

***That the State Government considers a formalization of local government's involvement in catchment planning in relation to surface and underground water management.***

*Local governments have, in the past, been engaged in a haphazard manner by the State government in relation to all aspects of water planning and catchment management. Most recently, Southern Downs Regional Council has had to advocate to become involved in the consultation process for the Regional Operational Plans for the Border Rivers Catchment and the Moonee Catchment. Given the important role local government plays in relation to the supply of domestic water outside of the Unity Water System and the role local government has in the management of bulk water resources such as dams and off-stream storages, it is submitted that local government representatives should have a higher degree of formalized input into this level of planning. This would include advice on the implementation or removal of moratoriums for overflow water as well as formalized input into the conversion of licences into volumetric allocations as well as better management of localized catchments. The desired outcome is a higher level of involvement from local government in the allocation of water resources across their districts, increased responsibility in relation to matching future strategic community plans to allow the optimal utilization or conservation of water resources. The impacts are likely to be positive in that there will be higher water strategic planning and a better use of resources which is consistent with the state government's Bulk Water Statement that was released earlier this year.*

The second motion is as follows:

***That the State Government considers either the abandonment of River Trusts or the reallocation of the resources currently committed to River Trusts being transferred to local government authorities.***

*Southern Downs Regional Council finds it difficult to forecast the level of resources required by the two River Trusts that operate within its municipal area. It is noted that each of the River Trusts are required under legislation to prepare strategic plans, however many of the River Trusts across the State have not undertaken a revision of their plans for over a decade. It is Council's*

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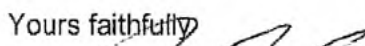
*assertion that either the River Trusts should be fully supported by the State government and compelled to undertake strategic plans that have the capacity to be resourced by local governments in a manner that is consistent with long term financial planning, or their functions and responsibilities should be reassigned to local government or an appropriate State Government Department or agency. Southern Downs Regional Council is seeking the effective use of funds and resources to support the different waterways within the Southern Downs and across the State. As indicated above, it is about a coordination of resources and strategic planning to deliver benefits to the broader community.*

The above motions can be considered relevant to the terms of reference that have been addressed previously.

Southern Downs Regional Council believes that there is significant opportunity for reform in water catchment planning and the management of this important resource to support the community and business.

Southern Downs Regional Council thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours faithfully

  
~~David Keenan~~  
Chief Executive Officer