

Sugarcane Bioenergy Inquiry 2025

Submission No:	29
Submitted by:	Whitsunday Regional Council
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	



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27 October 2025

Mr Stephen Bennett MP
Chair, Primary Industries and Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Mr Bennett,

Inquiry into Sugarcane Bioenergy Opportunities in Queensland

On behalf of Whitsunday Regional Council, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Primary Industries and Resources Committee's inquiry into sugarcane bioenergy and the broader role of biomass in Queensland's fuel production going forward. The Whitsunday Region, with our historic strengths in sugar production and horticulture, is well-qualified to contribute to this inquiry. At the outset, we welcome the State's enthusiasm to pursue the development of a biofuels industry, whether that be through this inquiry or through funding programs such as the Sovereign Industry Development Fund (SIDF).

By way of background for the Committee, the Whitsunday Region is Queensland's fastest-growing regional local government area. Our local economy is diverse and underpins this strong population growth, with industries such as agriculture, tourism, and resources setting us up for future success. Bowen and the surrounding districts represent one of the most productive horticultural hubs in Australia, supplying around 40% of the nation's winter vegetables. Challenges for the local agricultural and horticultural sector include surplus produce and biomass waste to the tune of approximately 170,000 tonnes per annum. Turning this material into energy and biofuels is both a sustainability imperative and an economic opportunity.

Unlocking Regional Bioenergy Potential

Council, in collaboration with industry and research partners, is actively supporting initiatives that advance regional bioenergy opportunities. Proposed bioenergy projects aim to convert agricultural and organic waste into renewable gas, electricity and bio-fertilisers, reducing carbon emissions while providing growers and producers with new revenue streams and access to low-cost sustainable inputs. Such developments contribute to circular economy outcomes, reducing waste and enhancing environmental performance across the region.

Catalytic Infrastructure for Bio-Industry

Council is investigating the underlying infrastructure required to support the development of a viable regional bio-industry. This includes identifying and planning enabling works such as utility extensions, transport links and industrial services that would provide the foundation for bioenergy and bio-manufacturing investment. By advancing strategic infrastructure planning, Council aims to create the conditions necessary for industry growth, private investment and long-term regional diversification.

Alignment with Broader Regional Principles

In addition to local priorities, Council also supports the general principles outlined in the submission from the Greater Whitsunday Alliance (GW3) to this inquiry. In particular, we endorse the emphasis on:

- the role and benefits of sugar cogeneration in Queensland's electricity mix,

- the need to address market and regulatory barriers to biofuels investment from the private sector,
- opportunities to align biofuel production with national security and defence needs,
- the importance of consistent policy and funding mechanisms to de-risk investment,
- and the central role of research, innovation, and skills development in underpinning a world-leading bioenergy industry.

Government Support Across All Stages

It is also vital that government policy and funding programs provide support at every stage of project development. Early-phase activities, such as feasibility studies, technical investigations, and environmental assessments which were funded under the former Queensland Bioenergy Fund, are essential to derisk larger investments. Without this support, many viable opportunities in regions like the Whitsundays, and elsewhere in Queensland, cannot progress from concept to construction.

Council's Position

Council strongly supports the establishment of a sugarcane-based biofuels industry in Queensland and advocates for policy settings that:

- De-risk private sector investment in anaerobic digestion and cogeneration projects.
- Recognise the importance of enabling infrastructure in regional locations like Bowen–Merinda–Abbot Point.
- Provide targeted support across the full development pipeline, from feasibility studies to operational projects.
- Integrate bioenergy development into Queensland's Energy Roadmap and Primary Industries Prosper 2050 Strategy.
- Promote collaborative R&D with industry to maximise the productivity and sustainability of cane and horticultural feedstocks.

The Whitsundays can be a leader in a future Queensland biofuels industry, having abundant biomass, committed growers, and shovel-ready infrastructure proposals. Council, alongside local proponents, are enthusiastic to partner with Government to deliver nationally significant outcomes in energy security, emissions reduction, and regional economic development.

I commend the Parliament and the Committee on undertaking this important inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Ry Collins
Mayor | Whitsunday Regional Council