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# **STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKS COMMITTEE**

Mr JJ McDonald MP—Chair  
Ms JM Bush MP  
Mr TA James MP  
Miss AS Doolan MP  
Mr SR King MP  
Mr BJ Mellish MP  
Ms SL Bolton MP

**Staff present:**

Ms S Galbraith—Committee Secretary  
Ms R Duncan—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE SUNSHINE COAST WATERWAYS AUTHORITY BILL**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Wednesday, 1 April 2026**

**Caloundra**

## WEDNESDAY, 1 APRIL 2026

### **The committee met at 9.32 am.**

**CHAIR:** I declare open this public hearing for the inquiry into the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026. I am Jim McDonald, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. With me here today are: Ms Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper and deputy chair; Mr Terry James, the member for Mulgrave; Mr Shane King, the member for Kurwongbah; and Mr Bart Mellish, the member for Aspley. Miss Ariana Doolan, the member for Pumicestone, is substituting for Mr David Kempton, the member for Cook. I also welcome the member for Noosa, Sandy Bolton, who will be joining us shortly and has been granted leave to participate in the proceedings today.

The purpose of today's hearing is to assist the committee with its examination of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded by parliamentary reporters. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

Today we will be hearing from invited witnesses. We also have some time at the end of today's proceedings for anyone who has registered with the committee secretariat to share their views with the committee. Speaking opportunities are limited in that session, so we ask that each participant keep their contributions to around three minutes. We will give some further instructions at that time. I now welcome representatives from the City of Moreton Bay, Noosa Shire Council and Sunshine Coast Council.

**ASTON, Mr Christopher, Executive General Manager, City Futures, City of Moreton Bay**

**JAMIESON, Ms Hayley, Manager, Property, Noosa Shire Council**

**MOORE, Dr David, Manager, Environment and Sustainability Policy, Sunshine Coast Council**

**RAWLINGS, Ms Kim, Director, Environment and Strategy, Noosa Shire Council**

**WILKIE, Mr Frank, Mayor, Noosa Shire Council**

**Mr Wilkie:** Noosa council supports the state objectives of improving coordination and long-term planning across Sunshine Coast waterways. We agree that better coordination, if well designed, can deliver real benefits; however, council does not support the bill in its current form. Our concerns are about governance design rather than policy intent. We are asking for amendments that strengthen the bill, not weaken it.

We see partnerships as the key to attaining the best outcomes for this deeply loved waterway that courses through the heart of our community. Accordingly, Noosa council seeks: a partnership approach involving representation of the three local governments on the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority board; tighter wording to ensure Noosa's highly valued everglades and constrained shallow river and lake system are protected by law, not just assurances; and greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of agencies and genuine consultation with communities and councils regarding the waterways, strategies and major infrastructure projects.

The Noosa, Sunshine Coast and City of Moreton councils are already part of the Resilient Rivers South East Queensland program, a partnership between the South-East Queensland Council of Mayors, the Queensland government, Australian government, water utilities, key regional catchment organisations and the community, to ensure coordinated river catchment management

and healthy and resilient rivers. This partnership-based planning recognises that local governments are responsible for managing land uses across the thousands of square kilometres that make up the catchments directly feeding into South-East Queensland waterways like the Noosa River. Land-based choices regarding erosion, stormwater and sediment control plus riparian and intertidal development are integral to the health of our waterways. It is impossible to ensure healthy rivers without regard at every level of decision-making to the role local governments play on behalf of their communities in managing the use of adjacent land.

By way of practical example, council manages extensive foreshore land and public spaces along the Noosa River, including areas such as Noosaville foreshore and Gympie Terrace. Decisions about marine infrastructure, navigation or dredging in these locations have direct land-based impacts on parks, traffic, public amenity and community safety which are currently managed through council endorsed plans and engagement.

The bill establishes a new authority with broad powers over strategy, infrastructure, navigation and sediment management whilst stating that local government responsibilities are not displaced. In its current draft this creates uncertainty and overlapping mandates without clear hierarchy or dispute resolution mechanisms when priorities differ. Council is also concerned that Noosa council and the Kabi Kabi traditional owners were not consulted during the development of the bill prior to its introduction. Accordingly, this is why our submission seeks: representation of three local governments on the SCWA board; guarantees of genuine consultation with each community and councils regarding the waterways strategies and any mayor infrastructure projects; endorsement of SCWA strategies by local governments; assurances that Noosa's distinct environmental and waterways values, community expectations and statutory land use frameworks are appropriately recognised in the establishment and ongoing operation of the authority; and greater clarity in the bill regarding governance roles, responsibilities and tenure in decision-making.

In conclusion, today we are seeking your support for amendments that strengthen the bill, not weaken it. With these changes we believe the authority could complement local stewardship rather than risk duplication or conflict. Council looks forward to assisting the committee and welcomes your questions.

**Dr Moore:** Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. I am speaking in my capacity as council's manager of environment and sustainability policy based on council's adopted policies and waterway management activities.

The Sunshine Coast's natural assets, including our waterways, their intrinsic values and the extensive ecosystem services they provide are fundamental to the lifestyle that attracts people to live, work and play within our region. Our community has a very strong connection to our natural environment and waterways. Council's environment and livability strategy sets long-term strategic directions for a healthy environment and a livable Sunshine Coast and includes our commitment to maintaining healthy waterways, wetlands and coastal areas that can be enjoyed sustainably. To achieve this we work alongside traditional owners, community organisations, industry and government partners in delivering a range of catchment and coastal management activities. Our balanced approach in environmental, social and economic values was recognised internationally in 2022 when the Sunshine Coast local government area was designated a UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Turning to our submission, council supports the intent of the bill to strengthen coordination and the sustainable management of our waterways. We have suggested three areas for further refinement. First, the bill could be strengthened by ensuring the health of natural habitats, particularly that subtidal and intertidal areas are protected and enhanced. A more explicit, nature-positive approach would reflect the Sunshine Coast community's high expectations for environmental stewardship and enhance the resilience of our regional fisheries and tourism values.

Secondly, the bill could more clearly demonstrate how local planning and participation will be integrated into the authority's governance and operations. This may include: local representation on the board; clearer requirements for public consultation and understanding what that looks like; and alignment with endorsed local government plans and strategies—for example, our Healthy Coast Management Plan, Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy and Coastal Health Report. This has already been developed and shows that our coastline and estuaries are in good to excellent ecological condition and highly valued by the community.

Thirdly, to ensure the authority complements rather than duplicates existing work we suggest clarifying the scope of its waterway management responsibilities, including spatial extent and a commitment to integrate with established programs such as Catchment Action Planning and the resilient rivers program.

In conclusion, the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority has the potential to be an important new voice and partner in the shared responsibility we all have for the sustainable management of our highly valued Sunshine Coast waterways. We look forward to being involved throughout the authority's establishment and subsequent implementation.

**Mr Aston:** I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee this morning for this inquiry into the bill. I appear here this morning on behalf of council officers to outline their key interests in areas of the bill.

To start with some context, the City of Moreton Bay has a population in excess of half a million people. We expect it to grow from a population of approximately 800,000 people in the next 25 years to over a million people within 35 years. As we plan to accommodate this growth, one of our key policies is to limit our urban footprint to 25 per cent of our urban area, or to 'go green as we grow' in terms of our policy. The City of Moreton Bay is home to a beautiful coastline and hinterland areas, and providing ongoing opportunities for our community and those from around South-East Queensland to explore and enjoy these is a key part of our future.

This brings me to the bill. The objective of improved coordination in the long-term strategic management of our waterways is supported. The establishment of a dedicated waterways authority undoubtedly has the potential to provide clear and strategic direction and greater focus on waterways management across the region. However, aspects of the bill and the authority's proposed functions raise questions to ensure it is in fact a coordinating and enabling body, not a body that introduces additional complexity.

I will outline four key interests in the bill: firstly, implications in relation to urban stormwater requirements. I mentioned earlier the growth pressures facing our region. The bill also identifies that it will not impact local government functions under the Planning Act. However, under the remit of waterways management there is an increased risk of receiving stormwater sediment which will create a risk to councils—or developers—needing to retrofit and upgrade stormwater systems which would see increased costs and potentially cost shifting to local governments.

The second is growth areas, land use planning and infrastructure. As I flagged earlier, the authority may affect development yield, flood assumptions and infrastructure capacity in some large growth areas of South-East Queensland such as Waraba, North Harbour, Elimbah SEQ Development Area, Morayfield and the like. Our city's growth is also reliant on significant water treatment plants and outfalls. While these are not owned or managed by council, any impacts on those would significantly impact their operations and our growth. Council undertakes established dredging programs at Bribie Gardens, Pacific Harbour and Newport for our residents, and we feel that the existing dredging approvals, funding and operations need to be recognised and supported, not duplicated by the authority. Any proposed changes should involve early consultation and some agreed transition arrangements.

Finally, the fourth area is around governance and board representation. I note that the proposed seven-member board is skills based but does not have any local government representation, despite operating across multiple local government areas. We consider this to be a key governance risk because consultation alone is insufficient where council assets, infrastructure and growth are potentially impacted. This could be addressed by either formal local government representation or a designated board position with senior local government experience. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear this morning. I welcome any questions or points of clarification from the committee.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all for representing each of your council areas. We will go to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Ms BUSH:** Thank you for your recommendation. You are certainly giving us a lot to think about this morning and a lot to talk about. I will start with Frank. Part of your response this morning was talking about consultation. The Department of Transport and Main Roads have conceded that they did not undertake community consultation, and the consultation with Noosa council appears to be quite limited as well. I am keen for you to outline the risks associated with that and also with not engaging comprehensively with the Kabi Kabi people. Why do you think that partnership model is so important as a response?

**Mr Wilkie:** The partnership model is important because of the enormous amount of ratepayer and taxpayer money that has gone into planning documents and community consultation to inform our town plans, our Noosa River foreshore masterplan and the resilient rivers catchment action plans that are currently underway. Local governments, as you know, have a responsibility to manage land uses on the thousands of kilometres of land immediately adjoining the waterways that make up the

catchments. That is why we feel they need to be consulted in the formulation of the 10-year waterways strategies and also prior to any major decisions on major infrastructure that may be planned for the relevant local government areas.

**Ms BUSH:** It sounds like what is consistent is, beyond consultation, locking in some kind of shared partnership—an ongoing formal role and voice.

**Mr Wilkie:** Yes. We feel partnerships are the best way to ensure good outcomes in terms of resilient healthy waterways.

**Ms BUSH:** There is a lot of nodding behind you.

**Mr Wilkie:** The Crisafulli government was elected on a platform of working in partnership with local governments, and we respect that.

**CHAIR:** A true partnership with local government: I think they were the words.

**Mr Wilkie:** That would be magnificent.

**CHAIR:** For those who do not know, I spent 16 years in local government and that is how I know Frank, and resilient rivers is very dear to my heart, too. Talking about local government, I will go to the member for Mulgrave, a former mayor of Cairns.

**Mr JAMES:** Thank you. I had 22 years in local government so I understand where you come from. Mayor Wilkie, the principal objective of the bill is to establish the statutory body—that is basically where we are at the moment—and call it the SCWA. Once it is set up, the strategic planning and the consultation occurs, so that should cover most of the issues that you raised. Do you want to comment on that?

**Mr Wilkie:** If I can also echo the comments of my colleagues at the table here this morning: as long as the consultation is genuine and early. Also, may I suggest that, when the strategies come to being formulated, they require the endorsement of the local governments, not just consultation with them.

**Mr JAMES:** I am pretty sure that is the aim of the bill once it is set up.

**Mr KING:** Forgive my naivety: I understand that all three councils own a part of Unitywater or manage Unitywater; I am not sure of the relationship there. With this body coming on board—and, once again, forgive my naivety—will that affect the relationship or control with Unitywater, because that is pretty important to the way the waterways are managed? Would you care to comment on that?

**Mr Wilkie:** I am unaware of that but I will defer to one of our staff members.

**Mr KING:** That is why I said to forgive my naivety. It is relevant in my mind but it may not be.

**Mr Wilkie:** These are very good questions that we have as well with the bill. We are seeking further clarity on issues such as that.

**Ms Rawlings:** I think the issue is that we have a lot of questions that require clarification. Unitywater, like local governments, have a lot of assets in the catchments, and where the new authority might stop and start is a little unclear. From that perspective, there are probably some grey areas still for Unitywater in that space in terms of assets.

**Mr KING:** Maybe we need to talk to them as part of this. Do the other councillors have a comment?

**Mr Aston:** My comment is in relation to the Unitywater infrastructure that our growth areas rely on in terms of those ocean outfalls and water treatment facilities. I think Unitywater's involvement or consultation would be really important, because if those sediment loads and requirements do change as a result of any authority decisions that would impact in terms of the design and water treatment quality requirements that those facilities deliver.

**CHAIR:** Unitywater would have its own standards that it would have to meet with DETSI and what have you, so that would not change by this.

**Ms Rawlings:** Yes.

**Mr KING:** That was the crux of my question, I guess, Chair: Unitywater has rules and a working relationship with the councils at the moment. Could this body potentially take power away from council or give extra power to council? I do not know. I was just wondering how that would work.

**Ms Rawlings:** Great question.

**Dr Moore:** I mentioned that shared responsibility. If you look right across the Sunshine Coast waterways, there are many different stakeholders that have a role to play in the sustainable management of them—Unitywater and the new entity of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority—so it is understanding roles, functions and how we all work together to make sure the Sunshine Coast waterways are here in another 10, 20, 30, 40 years.

**Mr KING:** Just for clarity, the reason for that question was that these three councils have a shared interest in Unitywater and that is so no-one has more power than the other.

**CHAIR:** I was around when Urban Utilities and the different water and sewerage providers were set up.

**Mr Wilkie:** If I can clarify for the member: Noosa council is a minority shareholder in that and it is size based and the size of—

**Mr KING:** I understand. I deal with Moreton Bay council in my area, and it is always that Unitywater is shared ownership. I understand the balances between the three councils; hence my question when Mr Aston raised the sewerage and the outfalls. It piqued my interest.

**CHAIR:** And stormwater as well.

**Miss DOOLAN:** My question is to the mayor. Do you believe this bill will positively impact or complement council's current responsibilities in terms of managing our waterways?

**Mr Wilkie:** That is our hope, but I think we need more guarantees that it will. We contend that that can be achieved by having local government representation on the board and councillor endorsement of the long-term strategies and if the waterways authority does not take a one-size-fits-all approach to managing the waterways because they are all so fundamentally different.

**Mr MELLISH:** My question is for each of you but, Mayor, you are probably able to speak a bit more frankly. In terms of the lack of local government representation on the proposed body, plenty of boards are being set up with a dedicated role for different people outlined in the legislation. Would you see that as a rotating role, perhaps an LGAQ representative, or for the councils to sort it out between themselves or multiple members? What would the best model be that you would be pushing for? I agree that local government should be represented on it so I am just trying to work out the best way.

**Mr Wilkie:** We are contending that it be one representative from each local government area.

**Mr MELLISH:** Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay might not be able to speak too freely on it, but would it be along those same lines?

**Dr Moore:** It is just ensuring there is that local government representation. The bill mentions the engagement with local governments, consultation and also the formation of committees. The Sunshine Coast waterways is a large area. There are many different types of waterways and there are many different types of communities that come together, so there is a lot of different local knowledge and history that can be shared to inform how these waterways can be managed sustainably. How we do that needs to be determined.

**Mr Aston:** I would echo that. There are two parts. One of them, as I outlined, is local government board representation or experience. The second part, to take on Dr Moore's point, is the consultation to get the experience from the relevant areas into that decision. For me it requires a two-part answer.

**CHAIR:** I have a question and I am happy for you all to answer it. My question is with regard to the biosphere that was established recently and the issues that you raised, Mayor Frank, about the wetlands particularly and what have you. How do those issues intersect with your current arrangements with resilient rivers and how do you see that fitting with this organisation?

**Mr Wilkie:** The biosphere status really has no regulatory impact. My understanding is the biosphere status was awarded because the local government areas already engage in practices that make it worthy of recognition; they are very sound, responsible environmental practices. We certainly would not want the activities of the waterways authority to in any way jeopardise that status through irresponsible practices. I am not saying that is anyone's intention, but we would hope that would not be an unintended consequence.

**Dr Moore:** As Mayor Wilkie said, the biosphere is not a statutory protection but it does recognise our collective commitment to a sustainable future on the Sunshine Coast. It is about valuing our waterways and how we all work together to ensure they are managed sustainably. It is ensuring that the decisions that are made ensure the protection and enhancement of these assets into the future.

**CHAIR:** Chris, do you have anything to add?

**Mr Aston:** No.

**CHAIR:** That is certainly the key function of what the waterways authority is intended to do.

**Ms BUSH:** My question is to any of the three councils. I think the bill is silent on the identification of a clear conflict resolution process between the authorities and even between the authorities and community. I am interested in your views on that and whether you anticipate that being an issue. Would you prefer to see a clearer conflict resolution process prescribed in the bill or through regulation?

**Mr Aston:** For me, it turns to the point that was made before. The bill really just sets up a head of power for the authority to exist. If there are statutory functions given to it, then absolutely there should be a conflict resolution process established in the bill. If it is more of a coordination, governance and a vibe type document that they deliver, it is probably not so necessary.

**Ms BUSH:** Frank, I see you nodding.

**Mr Wilkie:** We believe there does need to be, because there is such a heavy intersection of roles and responsibilities when this comes to fruition. If it can be done up-front—who does what, when and where—that would help a great deal. There will be times when the authority and the local governments are going to be in conflict over areas of responsibility, so it would be wise.

**Dr Moore:** I would agree with that. Understanding the role and function of the waterways authority, the decisions that are being made and how that impacts on existing activities is a really critical step that needs to be taken.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Can you speak to any challenges you have faced in the past in terms of managing the waterways because there is not one statutory body?

**Mr Wilkie:** Yes. For many years, the Noosa council was seeking to get action on anchoring, mooring liveaboards and abandoned vessels on the Noosa River. It convened a working group that involved multiple agencies, and the Noosa River plan was born out of that over 20 years ago with the principal aim of managing on-water activities. In recent times, a stakeholder advisory group—which was convened by the Noosa council and involved multiple stakeholders—working with Maritime Safety Queensland came up with an action list. MSQ, to their credit, and the state government, to their credit, have properly resourced MSQ to start tackling those on-water issues, which is wonderful news, but it took the best part of a quarter of a century to get that action. The answer to your question is yes.

**CHAIR:** Did you have anything to add, Dr David or Christopher?

**Dr Moore:** There are many different aspects to managing waterways, and I know the waterways authority is looking at activities like dredging, navigational markers, access infrastructure et cetera. We need to be looking at all of the stakeholders and all of the different roles that they are playing to understand where they all fit to deliver the outcome that we are all after.

**Mr Aston:** It is a very complicated legislative space. To be frank, a lot of time is wasted when people are trying to work out who has responsibility for what parts—it could be a recreational fisher, someone trying to undertake tourism or a business. If there is an opportunity through this process not only as part of the bill but also more broadly across the legislative statute to provide clarity around that, that would be welcomed by all parties. Great question.

**CHAIR:** It is a great question. The briefing from Transport and Main Roads recently was interesting. They talked about simple things like what is in the water and what is on the water and there being different delineations. Are there any other questions?

**Mr MELLISH:** Thank you for your comments earlier, Mayor and council representatives, about the role of local governments on adjacent land, repairing vegetation and things like that. For transport infrastructure, how would you see this authority conflicting with or complementing council's role? An example would be the Bribie Island bridge. If ever there is funding for that project, how would you see council's role in the approval of such a project in your local area?

**Mr Wilkie:** Major infrastructure could have impacts on parking, traffic and residential amenities. They are all areas that come under council's purview. Would you like to add to that?

**Ms Rawlings:** I think the process is unclear about the intersection of those approvals. Councils have their planning framework in place. We know that there are consequential amendments intended for the Planning Act, but we are unclear as to what they look like—where council's remit starts and stops with potential major new land-based infrastructure servicing the waterways.

**Dr Moore:** One comment I would like to make is in terms of the role and function of, say, dredging for navigation. Council plays a critical role in responding to coastal hazards, sand renourishment et cetera. How is that going to work in terms of availability of sand, sources of sand et cetera for that long-term outcome? There are definitely opportunities there to integrate to deliver the more efficient outcomes.

**Mr Aston:** I certainly hope—taking the latter point of that question—that funding is available for that Bribie Island bridge in the City of Moreton Bay. To echo the points made by the Noosa Council before, the Coastal Protection and Management Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Planning Act and the EPBC make up a complicated legislative statute, as I mentioned before. There is the opportunity to provide clarity around that through this process. If that does not happen, my concern is that there would be a risk of additional duplication and questioning as a result of what the authority may or may not do.

**Mr Wilkie:** If I could add to that, Chair, when anything happens in the local community, the local government is the first place the residents go to to demand answers and action. The more that local governments can be involved in the decision-making the better prepared they can be in helping whatever is planned come to fruition in a responsible way.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all for your advice this morning. The establishment of the waterways authority was a pre-election commitment by the government, so we are delivering on that. The policy objectives of the bill note that the management of the waterways has been piecemeal, and this is in direct response to that. I know you have addressed concerns to us about that and want to make sure you have local government representatives from the three councils involved. Is there anything else you want to say in the last few minutes about what you would like to see included to make sure the piecemeal approach does not continue?

**Mr Wilkie:** I can only reiterate what was said before: locking in representation, genuine and early consultation on the waterways strategy and perhaps even an endorsement of the strategies by the local governments. Anything else?

**Ms Rawlings:** There is a great opportunity here for coordination and better management. One of the fundamental concerns is the remit of the authority and where we start and stop. Currently, as it reads, the remit falls short in terms of environmental and ecological safeguards for all of the local government areas and the unique nature of each of the catchments and river systems. It is somewhat silent on that. A fundamental concern is what it could do and the opportunity it could bring without having some of those safeguards embedded either in the bill or in the mandated scope of how the waterways management strategy will come about. I know that is still to come, but maybe some safeguards early on in the piece would be useful.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Kim. Dr David or Christopher?

**Mr Aston:** I would only add that fish do not stop swimming at local government boundaries and sand does not stop moving at local government boundaries. I make that point because, while we all have our legislative areas to look after, it is really important to have a regional view, and I think this bill provides that opportunity. At the same time, to reinforce the points that I made, it is a balance between supporting growth and allowing people to enjoy our waterways as well. A lot of people get more experience by being able to enjoy our waterways. How do we ensure that balance without overcomplicating what is already a complicated legislative framework? We want to reinforce the requests to be part of the consultation, be part of accompanying regulations and also be part of the waterways management strategy.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all for appearing today. You have not taken any questions on notice, so you do not have any homework. Enjoy the rest of the week before Easter. I wish you all of the very best for Easter. Thank you, again, for appearing before the committee today and for the information that you have provided.

**BOND, Mr Norman, Chairperson, Kabi Kabi Peoples Aboriginal Corporation**

**MARKEY, Ms Susan, Chief Executive Officer, Kabi Kabi Peoples Aboriginal Corporation**

**CHAIR:** Good morning, and welcome to the committee. Would you like to make an opening statement before the committee asks questions of you?

**Mr Bond:** It is my responsibility to remind us that it is respectful for us to acknowledge that we are on Kabi Kabi country. The land and waters here today in Caloundra mean so much to me and my people, so we take the opportunities that are presented to us to make sure that we are doing the best that we can to make sure that what we have today is there in the future for others.

In our submission, there were four points that we focused on: representation, sustainability, endorsement protocols and coordination. It is important for everyone to understand what things like endorsement protocols mean. For traditional owners, we always have to engage and share with our rights holders, our members, what is happening on their country. Kabi Kabi country is highly developed, and it is happening rapidly. For me, I have to share with all of the members—most of whom do not even live on country, cannot even afford to live on country—how it can be done in an appropriate way where we are informed and where we can share our knowledge about country.

We have so much to offer, but our lived experience with government is that we do not get a chance to share it in an appropriate way. Having a seat at the table is important for us to get it right for all and to not feel like we have been left out. We went through the native title process for a reason—to have our rights recognised. Now we have statutory rights. We should do better to make sure we are included, all of us. That is what I hope the bill can address because it is silent on that.

Kabi Kabi traditional knowledge of waterways health is profound, and it is still available today. Water is our lifeblood, and it is yours too. The bill, our state and the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority will be strengthened by a clean legislative commitment to publish sustainable benchmarks evidencing the health of our waterways with the availability of traditional ecological knowledge. We can only benefit from it being in the bill.

Like I said, the bill is silent on the coordination of existing efforts to manage, develop, protect and restore the waterways. We need to be included. The health of our waterways requires considerable coordinated and collective efforts and a commitment to work together, mandated or not. The interface between the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority and Kabi Kabi could be built on a framework of cultural recognition, environmental management and legislative obligation. That is important to us.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Bond. Did you have anything you wanted to add, Susan?

**Ms Markey:** No.

**CHAIR:** We will go to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Ms BUSH:** Thanks, Norman and Susan for coming in. The member for Noosa will actually ask the first question.

**Ms BOLTON:** Good morning to you both, and thank you for having me here. Are there any tangible projects or benefits that Kabi Kabi believe will eventuate from the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority that currently are not being addressed by either local governments or MSQ in relation to the river systems?

**Ms Markey:** Yes. We are looking for Kabi Kabi, as rights holders of the waterways, to be involved specifically in decision-making about the waterways. That would be one tangible outcome that we are looking for. Another tangible outcome would be that the waterways authority bill would be focused on sustainability. We are looking for a commitment to set benchmarks of that sustainability and publish the health of our waterways against that benchmark as a sign of the authority's success.

**Ms BOLTON:** Why has that not been possible under the current arrangements?

**Ms Markey:** I think the role of history has something to do with that. I think Kabi Kabi have achieved its status as rights holders as opposed to being stakeholders and residents or former residents, so that change only took place in June 2024. I do not think anybody can point anybody's finger at anybody else. It just is. That is the date. This bill has come into play after our status has changed to be rights holders rather than stakeholders. I think this is the first opportunity we have had to engage rights holders in decision-making about water.

**CHAIR:** You understand that the bill that has been put before the committee actually outlines a number of requirements of skills. It says stakeholders and not rights holders, because it obviously changed. This was a commitment by the government to make sure that a piecemeal approach for the waterways is picked up. That is why we are having this consultation process. As I asked the former local government, is there anything else apart from representation on the board that you would like to see us take forward from today?

**Ms Markey:** Yes. We support the perspective of the local government and point out that this is a crowded legislative space. From the way the bill has been written, it is not clear that by establishing an authority the space will become less crowded or less complex. We are very much looking forward to and support more coordination, not less. We understand that the authority has the responsibility for putting together a 10-year strategy. It is very clear there is more complexity, not less. We are very concerned about that. We would support the voices of the local governments that there is a need for more cooperation, not less. It is not clear how the authority will deliver streamlined decision-making, particularly about sustainability of the environment.

We understand that the carriage of the authority would be with TMR, the Department of Transport and Main Roads. The Department of Transport and Main Roads has not traditionally been responsible for environmental outcomes. We are quite concerned about that. As a statutory authority, environmental outcomes is not built into TMR. We are quite concerned about that. We are also concerned that TMR has not had the responsibility of coordinating efficiently with multiple overlaying stakeholders around the environment.

**CHAIR:** When you mentioned more complexity and not less, what were you thinking about?

**Ms Markey:** It is clear that putting an authority on top of an existing overlaying group of councils and not legislated stakeholder groups is not streamlining complexity. It is not clear how that would work.

**CHAIR:** The intention is to provide that coordination.

**Ms Markey:** I understand the intention. I cannot see any clarity about how it would be achieved. I think the road to hell is paved with—

**CHAIR:** With regard to your comments about the Department of Transport and Main Roads, they have overseen Maritime Safety Queensland for a long time so it is not that there is a separate entity. Maritime Safety Queensland is the head body which has very strong environmental outcomes.

**Ms Markey:** Yes, I agree with you—thank you for making that point—but in fact Maritime Safety Queensland and TMR are not responsible for environmental health or reparation. That is the point. Providing environmental sustainability to TMR and Maritime Safety is a concern.

**CHAIR:** Certainly it is intended that the board has a number of different skills. It has a very strong focus with regard to the environment and protecting the health of the waterways. That is the point of it all.

**Ms BUSH:** Norman, you mentioned the endorsement protocol. I was curious about that. Can you tell me a bit more about that? Do you have a model in mind? I am keen to hear you expand on that a little bit more if you can.

**Mr Bond:** Just engaging with our people is quite time consuming. We are not funded to do that work as it is. Only when projects come up do we have an opportunity to get that information, because the information that we are talking about is cultural heritage, a lot of it, and it is held by different sections of our community. How do we make sure we are informed or those who have the authority are being informed rightly?

**Ms BUSH:** Just so I can get this clear, essentially like a gateway that has to be run through before decisions can be progressed?

**Mr Bond:** With most projects there are a lot of time constraints, and just not having the time to extract information from the relevant areas is quite problematic. How do we do that in a way that enables development or the necessary things that need to happen in a reasonable time?

**Ms BUSH:** I think timing is critical, yes.

**Mr Bond:** But the recognition of some of our dilemma needs to be known.

**CHAIR:** It is very clear in your submission, thank you.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Thank you for your time today. I do note that the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority will be required to consult with our native title holders, which is good to see. What has been your role in the last 10 years in terms of working with council and other entities to manage our waterways?

**Mr Bond:** We have had members work with local government on things like coastal adaptation strategies and these things and other projects. I am sure there are others, but I just cannot answer it right now. Blue Heart, Sunshine Coast Council. I am sure I can answer the question in written form.

**CHAIR:** Do you want to take that on notice, Norman?

**Mr Bond:** Yes. Sure, we can do that.

**Ms BOLTON:** You mentioned sustainability quite often. Concerns have been raised to our office that an authority could see a number of things emanate in our rivers in the lead-up to the 2032 Olympic Games, including extra moorings for vessels over 50 metres and super-yacht marinas. There have been a number of examples. Have you been aware or been in discussion about any of these that have been popping up?

**Mr Bond:** No, I cannot recall. With regard to sustainability, our concern is the definition of success. How do we know? It is unclear. We need clarity on how you measure success with regard to sustainability.

**Ms Markey:** I can add to that. The key focus of Kabi Kabi and our rights are the health of our environment. We definitely have multiple partnerships with multiple organisations, including resilient rivers and the councils themselves and Blue Heart, for example, and we have been working with the team on the Pumicestone Passage et cetera. Our focus is on sustainability. Further, we also have lived knowledge of the health of our river systems and our waterways prior to development which can be very helpful as we measure things like freshwater mussels in our fresh waterways as a sign of their health, for example. The history of Kabi Kabi gives up some environmental science that can benchmark what health actually looks like.

Having said that, we work quite closely with the games organisations as they are developing, and we have a very pragmatic partnership about how can we welcome the maximum number of people to Kabi Kabi country to understand the value of high environmental health. That is a partnership that we offer to all levels of government and are very busy delivering. We are very hopeful that our partnership with the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority would be a benchmark of what waterways health can be and that we would be so successful that we would publish against that benchmark. That is our submission.

**CHAIR:** I note the Kabi Kabi estate stretches from Pine Rivers all the way up to Hervey Bay, so thank you for your stewardship. Unfortunately, the time allocated for this session has expired. There is one question taken on notice. Can you have a response back to us by Friday, 10 April? Thank you.

**COURT, Mr Peter, Master Mariner, Court Marine**

**McCARTHY, Mr Andrew, Secretary, Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance**

**McGOVERN, Mr Craig, Owner/Director, Pelican Boat Hire and Noosa River Slipway**

**PATCHETT, Mr Neil, General Manager, Government and Public Relations, Boating Industry Association**

**STIELOW, Mr David, Managing Director, Noosa Ferry & Cruise Co**

**CHAIR:** If you wish, each of you may make a short opening statement before the committee has questions for you.

**Mr Patchett:** I would like to acknowledge the Kabi Kabi people. I am here today representing the Boating Industry Association, the peak industry body in Australia representing light, commercial and recreational boating. Last year the industry turnover was more than \$10 billion with around 35,000 people employed across more than 2,000 businesses. Most of those, 75 per cent or more, are family. Queensland has about \$4.2 billion in turnover and more than 14,000 jobs. Most of that is concentrated in South-East Queensland.

Boating is an activity that delivers more than just craft floating around out there. It delivers genuine physical and mental health benefits. On a boat feel-good hormones go up and stress goes down. We call that the blue mind effect. I can tell you way more about that some other time. Forty-nine per cent of people who go boating do so to go fishing. That means catching food to put on the dinner table at home. Little wonder almost one in five households has a boat or some form of watercraft in this state, which means you have millions of people—it is estimated about two million in Queensland—who get out there every year.

For me, just so you have context—I am happy to answer questions—I have more than 50 years experience in recreational boating across paddle, power and sail. My first boating experience in the Sunshine Coast was sailing on Lake Cootharaba in 1968. I am a member and volunteer at the Lake Cootharaba Sailing Club which just recently had its 80th anniversary. I have 25 years of senior level experience in government with maritime regulators spanning policy, strategy, legislation, advocacy, standards, safety, events—including Olympics—and maritime disaster response. The promotion of safe and responsible boating underpins everything I do. I have worked with the World Health Organisation to address preventable drownings across the equatorial zone and am currently vice chair of the International Council of Marine Industries Associations' Sustainability Committee. My interest in the bill is to raise awareness of the need to minimise duplication, confusion and unnecessary costs in the management of the waterways. The aim should be to support safe, responsible and enjoyable boating that is consistent with longstanding international, national and state maritime conventions and requirements whilst being responsive to local needs, which include waterway access in infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Thanks very much, Neil. Andrew, do you have a submission or some supplementary information?

**Mr McCarthy:** Yes, I have given that to Rhyll just now. I thank the committee for allowing us the opportunity to give feedback to the inquiry. Thanks to Neil for his opening statement. As a boater and fisher, I appreciate that. I have actually sailed against you at a regatta at Cootharaba back in the seventies.

I am Andrew McCarthy from the Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance. We represent 3,000 members. We formed in 2022 to provide a voice to Noosa's boaters and fishers and to balance local discussions immediately surrounding uses or change of uses proposed for the Noosa River. Until that point the local narrative was dominated by small but influential environmental groups. These changes included wholesale speed reductions and a proposed conservation park both of which had progressed without balanced community consultation. Gladly, after some strong community support, we reached a great compromise with MSQ about speed reductions and rejection of the conservation park.

Regarding the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority, the Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance wholeheartedly supports a well-funded Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority with an independent board representing all key waterway user groups and that proactively consults with the community.

There are some threats that we see. We do not support influential environmental groups' calls for catchment-specific subcommittees or reference groups. We see this as an extra layer of bureaucracy which risks the independence and effectiveness of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority.

We do not support much of the Noosa council's submission either to the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill. We read that its primary goal is to gain control through a guaranteed board seat and veto powers over planning. This would cripple the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority with another layer of bureaucracy and competing priorities from three separate LGAs before it begins. Locally, the Noosa council is requesting membership to the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority despite having no experience, expertise or resources to deal with waterways management. Something that is a common refrain for our membership is that most of the Noosa council executive team do not even hold a boat licence, which many would think is a prerequisite to be appointed to the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority.

Noosa council has also adopted a planning scheme which precludes the establishment of any new boat ramps in the Noosa shire, despite Noosa recording the highest boat ramp demand shortfall in the state in the last demand study done by MSQ and TMR. That probably explains why we have had no new increase in boat ramp lanes for 30 years.

Two issues of concern to the Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance are: firstly, Noosa council's continued restriction on land use which is detrimental to recreational and commercial boating and inhibits equity of access to the Noosa River; and, secondly, boat ramps create floodwater and erosion resilience, which are important factors to manage important impacts for future climate change.

**CHAIR:** Andrew, I might just pull you up there because we have a panel of five here, but we will come back to your important points which might be picked up by others in their address. Craig, over to you.

**Mr McGovern:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favour of the proposed authority. I have boated, swum, kayaked and lived beside the Noosa River for 25 years, and over the last decade I have built Pelican Boat Hire, a business that has operated continuously since 1957, into our river's largest marine business. I have won two Queensland tourism awards for doing something pretty simple: I help people enjoy the Noosa River. I believe people want to keep enjoying this river, so I would like to make three points in favour of the waterways authority.

Firstly, the Noosa River is not in crisis but a healthy functioning system that people love, care for and expect to enjoy for generations to come. The Healthy Land and Water Report Card has confirmed year after year that the Noosa catchment remains in very good condition. We already have fish habitats, riparian zone regulations, strict development controls and complex marine regulations. We do not need more rules; we need an integrated management plan that gets implemented by objective professionals.

Secondly, I ask the committee to look beyond the self-serving statements made by some stakeholders and ask you to commit the authority's strategic planning process to ensuring this river can keep being used safely and responsibly, not viewed from behind a barrier, as some would argue. Our community has already suffered enough through decades of bad river planning processes, environmental problems being ignored, safety issues growing and not being solved, and infrastructure planning being thwarted, and Noosa's small town parochialism has always overwhelmed a rational discussion about this waterway. I welcome the government's election commitment to bring professional and objective leadership to this waterway because people want to continue to enjoy the river safely and responsibly.

My final point is to speak in favour of keeping the authority independent from councils and individual stakeholders. For too long the Noosa River has been controlled by a few loud voices instead of good policy. We are told that they, and only they, can protect us, and I believe they have failed. In a former life I was a CEO of a different statutory authority of the Queensland government and I know too well the risks of parochial appointments. This authority needs a skills-based board with members selected on expertise, not postcode, if it is to avoid the local conflicts of interest that others have spoken about. I am confident the bill's mechanisms for consultation and committees can provide the representation that is required. I look forward to an independent and objective authority delivering an integrated river plan for a cleaner, safer and healthier waterway.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Craig. We will go to David now.

**Mr Stielow:** My name is David Stielow. I own the Noosa Ferry, which is an interesting business. We a tourism-based business that provides some sort of transport product in the Noosa River. The business has been going for 30 years. I am probably new in the town because I have only been there

for seven or eight. I think you have to get to a decade before you are called a local. I did spend 25 years in the Whitsundays and had a marine business and worked very closely with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, a legislative body that governed the management of the Great Barrier Reef.

The business itself, as I mentioned, is tourism focused but we do do transport in some way. The river is a multi-use narrow channelled river, as everyone knows. We are part of a complex transport solution. We are not the solution but we are part of the solution. We flex in our times and we do more runs. We are catering for tourists primarily, but we have local programs as well. We try to blend transport and tourism on the Noosa River.

The main point I wanted to highlight besides giving perspective is that we have no leases with council on any public jetty infrastructure in the Noosa River and every jetty that we access is a privately owned jetty. We have commercial arrangements like with Craig and O Boats to access their jetty in a normal commercial environment. Is it broken? Absolutely not. In fact, it works really well until Craig gets a bit cranky—but, no, it does work well.

One thing I have noticed in my seven years—and it goes back to the 30 years the business has been running—is that there has not been one single change to the jetty infrastructure on the Noosa River in 30 years besides private enterprise like Pelican and O Boats. To put this in perspective, can things be improved? Probably, because in 30 years what premium tourism destination in the state has not changed public infrastructure on the waterways?

I would love to be part of the process. What we do is unique. We have just spent over a million dollars building a new boat that is accessible and environmental, solar powered and hybrid. However, we have nowhere to go because no jetty is accessible for chairs besides the Noosa Marina, which is our home base, and I had to build a ramp to do that. There are a lot of things that could be done better. As I said, is it broken? No. Can we improve? Hopefully this authority will help that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, David. We will go to Peter.

**Mr Court:** Peter Court is my name. I am a Master Mariner. I am out of the commercial maritime sector in Australia large and small. I have worked in a variety of areas in that sector. I have spent a lot of time in oil and gas. I have been the manager of marine operations for major oil organisations and the custodian of their oil spill response, which comes with a large focus on the environmental side of things. It is not only about how you maintain the commercial interests that actually need a waterway but also about the community and society and environmental aspects.

I have always found it interesting that—and I will talk of Noosa but it turns out that it might be a bit more widespread—something like the Noosa River did not have a voice. I grew up in Western Australia. In the 1980s I think it was I witnessed the emergence of the Swan River Trust, which is a trust that was set up to establish a voice for the Swan and Canning rivers. At the time, the river was not in great health. That has been a significant success and it has been a success for a variety of reasons. It gave an independent voice to that river system to be able to speak—as in totally independent. What was concerning it? What was a better outcome for it? How did it impact the people and the users of the river? By its nature it resulted in being heavily environmental in its focus, but there are other examples such as the Gold Coast Waterways Authority, which we can look at, which obviously takes care of a variety of things from dredging to capital works and maintenance.

That is one of my questions: where do we see this sitting? Is it somewhere between the middle of those two? Do we have clarity about what success looks like? That is obviously how the success of establishing such a regime will work. Will it be independent? Will it look at the river systems of the Sunshine Coast as a whole and individually where required? Will it have the right expertise in its executive management and also, of course, governance? I have had various chair positions over the last few years. I am currently chair of the Port of Townsville and I am on the board of a charity. Like a lot of people in this room, I have seen governance that has been done well and governance that has been done badly. I think that is where it all sits at the core of it. Get that right and I think it can be the voice that is required from an environmental perspective, from a commercial perspective and from a society perspective.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Peter. That was very good. I will go to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Ms BUSH:** I am going to go to the member for Aspley for the first question.

**Mr MELLISH:** My question is to Mr Patchett from the Boating Industry Association. It is good to see you again. Your submission talks about the terminology of 'one-stop shop' when it comes to the setting up of the authority and the potential risks around that terminology going forward. Are you able

to go into some of the important roles that Maritime Safety Queensland plays in navigation and safe navigation? Your submission talks about ensuring that role remains with Maritime Safety Queensland and that the roles are clearly defined.

**Mr Patchett:** Absolutely. There is a concern around duplication. Obviously I mentioned that. In Queensland, Maritime Safety Queensland holds the state's navigation safety. That is their delegated responsibility for the state. That is one area of confusion. Boating is not just something that happens locally; boating moves along the entire east coast. There could be a flood north or a flood south. It is seasonal. There is also visitation from overseas. You have this situation where, in our view, longstanding maritime conventions around safe navigation should be applied consistently across the state. MSQ has that responsibility, and we can see no reason why this new authority cannot work hand in hand with the state's safe navigation authority so that there is clarity of purpose and intent. Ultimately, that is about lives as well.

As I mentioned, I have been involved with maritime regulators at the pointy contact of trauma and major incidents. Clarity of purpose when it hits the fan is phenomenally critical. There can be no confusion. I think it is not an impossibility to separate safe navigation within the bill with maybe a little bit of finessing.

To pick up the commercial vessel area, we talked about that in our submission. The role of administering and managing commercial vessels in this country went to AMSA in about 2011 or 2012 with a national law for domestic and commercial vessels. The idea that there can be a one-stop shop on the Sunshine Coast for all things floating—and my interest is in all things floating and infrastructure at the foreshore. Commercial vessel safety, integrity and a whole range of issues around that sit clearly with AMSA, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority. Some of the states perform some functions under delegation, but it is very controlled by the national body. The idea that the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority could be the one-stop shop for commercial vessels—I cannot see that happening. It needs to be tidied up. Safe navigation is supercritical. There are people's lives at risk. It is the same story with a commercial vessel when it comes to safety—lives at risk. It is about the protection of public safety. Those things should be separated and can be separated, in our view.

**CHAIR:** Did anybody else want to add to that?

**Mr Court:** I would like to say there is a certain degree of greyness around getting AMSA involved in anything that comes into a river system. It is quite correct that they did come in as a body regarding certain elements of small craft. I was a marine pilot in Melbourne and there was zero chance of getting AMSA interested in what was happening on Port Phillip Bay, whether it was a ship or anything else.

**Mr JAMES:** From what I can see, the bill aims to achieve everything that you have outlined. Is there anything you can see or perceive in terms of unintended consequences that you can think of?

**Mr Patchett:** The minister described the functions broadly in his statement. One element to us, the boating industry, is not clear and that is around navigation. The bill uses terms around managing navigation access. When I think 'navigation', I think about safe navigation. That goes back to my comment earlier. It is fundamental. We need clarity around who runs it. When something happens, you need to know who to go to. That picks up the issue about navigation aids. Navigation aids are embedded in international conventions which are adopted in Australia. Typically, in federated arrangements every state maritime regulator looks after the buoyage system for that waterway, which is effectively the traffic signage of the waters. Once again, it is critical. They are not just pretty signs sitting out there; they literally help people remain safe. We made that point in our submission too—to be clearer around that.

I think the authority at the moment has the role to manage navigation. We see a subtle change which is deliver navigation, but under the guidance and templates of MSQ who are the state's navigation authority. There should not be any ambiguity around that, particularly when you have an authority with investigative powers and compliance powers around safe navigation. I know there is some confusion on the Gold Coast around those matters where primarily Maritime Safety Queensland delivers all the on-water compliance and education. It needs to be quite clear for everyone's benefit, including the boating public.

**CHAIR:** Did you have something to add, Craig?

**Mr McGovern:** I think there is a risk or an unintended consequence, if you water down its authority, that it will become a lame duck. That is, if I am making my comments today, what we have suffered for too long. We need an authority that has strength and objectivity and focus and deadlines and a process to resolve and reconcile all these different views and actually get some things done.

**Mr Court:** I would mirror that, and I did in my submission. I gave my submission very late so I did a lot of googling or Chat GPTing. I knew that I wanted to look at the Swan River and the Gold Coast. It is about making sure we have the clarity of purpose; otherwise, we get stuck in between and cannot deliver anything. There is obviously a variety of ways that can be achieved. There are all sorts of things regarding deliverables: what does success look like? Are there get-out-of-jail-free twilight clauses where if it is not a success it can be completely revisited—looking at what has worked and looking at what has not worked. For example, one of the things I asked is: is the primary problem the authority is intending to solve navigation, environmental protection, user conflict or economic development? Is it clearly understood what takes priority and how we actually resolve conflicts as they inevitably arise? That is the reason we are here: to talk about the establishment of a body to give these river systems a voice. We obviously go into it knowing there are going to be these conflicts.

**CHAIR:** And deliver that coordination.

**Mr Stielow:** Let's make sure the 10-year strategy does not become 20.

**Mr McCarthy:** The big risk comes down to making sure we do not have a problem with priorities. There are three LGAs involved. Each of the LGAs gets a board seat. They have separate priorities. We risk paralysis and loss of productivity. We think that is probably the biggest challenge we have.

**Ms BOLTON:** It is so good to see a huge Noosa contingency here. I am going to ask the same questions I asked of Kabi. Andrew, you identified Chaplin Park as a tangible project that you would like to be delivered through Sunshine Coast waterways, or have I misinterpreted that?

**Mr McCarthy:** You have misinterpreted that. Our members would love to see Chaplin Park as a new boating facility. As we mentioned, we have had no increase in boat ramps in 30 years in Noosa. We now have over 5,000 registered boats. We understand there is a lot of contention around the use of Chaplin Park, whether it be native title and other things. Currently, we are trying to work with council to improve an existing boat ramp. Down the track we would like to keep it open, but at the moment it is not a major priority.

**Ms BOLTON:** For everyone else, is there a particular project? I am asking this in relation to the benefits to Noosa. From my understanding of how this authority would work, most things ultimately still will have to go through the same processes we have now, through MSQ or Noosa council, or fighting in the budget for the funds and resources needed. I have read in previous submissions, whether it was the Destination Management Plan or others, things like dredging, flood mitigation, not specific to this inquiry. Is there one thing that each of you see could be delivered by the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority that does not have to go through the same processes we have to go through now?

**Mr McCarthy:** For us it is very simple. We are boaters and fishers. We would like to see that our infrastructure keeps pace with the requirements of the people. There is no point having beautiful waterways if people cannot actually enjoy it. As Neil said, it creates a lot of ongoing joy and health for people. The biggest thing for us is that the authority can make sure the infrastructure keeps pace with the needs of the community.

**Mr Patchett:** One thing I would say, and not being specific, unfortunately, and I believe it is sadly lacking, is a proper marine infrastructure strategy put together with key stakeholders to look at the opportunities for improvements around storage, access and infrastructure. There are many opportunities, and I will give you one example—and I have to give credit to Maritime Safety Queensland. The current boating management plan in whatever form or phase is a good thing and we support it, but what is lacking is a review of, when I say access and storage, the mooring and anchorage scenario. There is room for conversation around how that could be improved to allow local people to own a vessel and have it on the waterway, if it is a certain size, but in the right location. At the moment we are lacking a strategic approach to that issue around storage. I would say the strategic document after a review around the access, infrastructure and storage issue.

**Ms BOLTON:** That should have been added to the demand study that was done in 2024?

**Mr Patchett:** Yes, but I had issues with that as well. Holistically, that is a job that needs to be done.

**Mr McGovern:** The river floods regularly. I would rather there was not raw sewage flowing into the river when it floods. In relation to infrastructure, the public jetties and the public facilities for recreational boaters and commercial boaters are 30 years old. It needs to be updated. A simple one from my perspective: I am looking to spend about \$1 million to renovate an antiquated slipway and Noosa council's feedback at a prelodgement meeting was more worried about me increasing the

operational intensity rather than me improving the environmental controls and the safety for workers and operators in that facility. I just think the priorities are skewed for whatever the loudest voice wants to focus on on that day.

**Mr Stielow:** Our hope is that this body will actually make it easier to get stuff done. You are saying it has to go through all the same regulatory processes. If that is the case then maybe it will slow things up, but hopefully it will not.

**Mr Court:** I come back to the river systems as a whole, not just the Noosa River, having this parent and advocate and being able to actually coordinate this. The example I would go to as a user of the Noosa River is the scenario where there were a lot of houseboats building up on the river and there was very little control. Through contacts at MSQ, speaking to them, it became quite apparent—I am talking around 2021—that nobody seemed to have the direct authority to actually do anything, or at least that is what was claimed. That is not unusual around the country. I am not about stumping for a particular piece of infrastructure or how that might be streamlined for any of the rivers.

I step back a bit. I have used many of the rivers in this country commercially and recreationally, and I can say from experience that when bodies like this are done right they assist in exactly what you were saying—some sort of coordination in actually moving things forward and when somebody comes forward and says, ‘Who is responsible for that?’ they say, ‘Okay, that is the trust’s responsibility.’ That is the question I asked: is it going to be an advisory body as such or is it actually going to be responsible for capital works and decisions like that or is it simply going to be a system that operates up and down the whole Sunshine Coast? Let us look at it holistically: what do we need to do, how do we prioritise things, how do we get things done, how do we not have a—I forget how long it was—two-, three-year argument about whether or not people can park their houseboat on any of the river systems and not have registration and payment and clarity around what is happening with their sewage and that sort of thing for the benefit of the commercial users, the environment and the whole of the community?

**Ms BOLTON:** Are any of you aware—I asked this of Kabi Kabi, because it has been raised to my office—that an authority, if it has an overriding power in any way, could see things like increased moorings for vessels 50 metres and over or marinas built for superyachts in the lead-up to the 2032 games? Does anyone have any knowledge of this at all?

**Mr McGovern:** I would say it is not feasible for the Noosa River to have any of that because it is too shallow. I would have thought that is all of the rivers within this authority.

**Mr Patchett:** I would echo that.

**Ms BOLTON:** That is where I think the question of the dredging comes around.

**Mr McGovern:** Even with dredging—they are sand-based rivers—it would be unsustainable.

**Ms BOLTON:** Basically no-one is aware and it is not going to happen?

**Mr Patchett:** It is not practical.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Thank you for your time today and for your fulsome submissions. I wrote some questions down but you have answered all of them. Going back to what David said about this making his business easier to operate, what practical changes do you believe this authority will make to you running your business from a day-to-day perspective?

**Mr Stielow:** None. I do not think this will help me in the day-to-day running of the business. As Andrew was saying, infrastructure has not changed in 30 years along the river. My hope is that this body will have a strategy for 10 years that will be acted on, whether that is one jetty or three jetties. What we have now is not broken, but it could be better because the volume of people sometimes cannot be managed with the current infrastructure. Everyone does doom and gloom about traffic, but it is 10 or 15 days a year. I think it is more just strategise the plan for a decade and actually do something about it.

**CHAIR:** When you say ‘traffic’, is that vehicle traffic or boat traffic?

**Mr Stielow:** Correct, primarily vehicle—it is busy here but the waterways are unique. Most go slow; that is the key. Speed is the problem. It is traffic on the land and we are part of the solution to move people, basically.

**Mr Court:** I would echo that. One of the lenses we have to look at this through is the projected growth on the Sunshine Coast as a whole in terms of population. There is a reason so many people want to live here and it is obviously going to keep going that way. What has existed to date has worked, but you do have to start to question whether or not that will work in the longer term as there are ongoing population pressures and demands on the river systems.

**Mr Stielow:** Did I answer your question? I know I said none, but—

**Miss DOOLAN:** It will give you that strategic plan for the future.

**Mr Stielow:** It is more about strategy and actually acting.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Having a vision for the future?

**Mr Stielow:** Yes, correct. There are many, but in 20 years nothing seems to have been acted upon. There is always conversation.

**CHAIR:** In terms of that user experience that you mentioned—the question was about day-to-day experience, business operations—once you get out onto the water, if the land-based things have been fixed there will be improvements through that?

**Mr Stielow:** I think so. I am probably looking at it through a tourism lens, but also there are many users on the river that have nowhere to go to drop off from a public boat facility as well. It is not just for them; it is that combination of public and tourism.

**CHAIR:** Does anybody else want to say anything?

**Mr Patchett:** I reiterate that to the BIA, the Boating Industry Association, perhaps the greatest value of the new authority is a concentrated focus on these waterways around the infrastructure solutions at the land-water infrastructure: boat ramps, jetties, pontoons—whatever it happens to be—and that includes dredging. It is something that is clearly lacking and has been for too long. That is where the real horsepower of this particular authority is. In the same voice, when I articulate that, as long as the outcome does not create confusion around the management of vessels that float and those safe navigation issues, I think that is where the potential trip-up is. In terms of infrastructure, 100 per cent that is where the solution is.

**Ms BOLTON:** There have been various comments made regarding the situation that the Noosa River got into, which was a lack of resources over many years. We are now talking about an authority. So far we do not have any understanding of the resourcing or the funds that are going to be committed to ensure we have gone through the process on the Noosa River—the river advisory committee, the outcomes from there and a number of stages that have delivered a lot of the outcomes that have been sought. If we do not have those resources we will end up in the same boat again, but also regarding infrastructure—

**CHAIR:** No pun intended?

**Ms BOLTON:** No pun intended! Regarding needed infrastructure, it is a budgetary requirement. Ultimately, who is going to pay for it, because it is not just the Noosa River; across Queensland the demands are very high. Ultimately, we are looking at a body. In terms of budget, are they going to be allocated an amount to say, 'Right, we can go and do all this infrastructure because the demand study said what they felt was needed for the rivers'? Again, it is battling within budgets. I am just trying to understand that.

**Mr McCarthy:** The government has the boating infrastructure fund and it has been around for a long time. If we look at the Noosa River, for example, there has been no increase in boat-launching facilities for 30 years. The money has been there; it has been budgeted. What has not been there is the will and the focus to deliver it. We believe that a Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority concentrating on delivering infrastructure for the waterways will deliver that focus. In that case a recreational budget does exist. Fair enough it needs to be topped up, but it has always been there. In our case it has never been used.

**Ms BOLTON:** Is it an MSQ budget?

**Mr McCarthy:** Yes, I believe so.

**Mr McGovern:** At the moment we do not have an integrated strategy for any member of parliament or anybody to pursue or request funds for that region. If we can get a plan, then it can be built into the budget processes for whatever the works are, whether it is infrastructure, environmental initiatives or stopping sewage flowing into the river. At the moment we do not have a plan; we do not have a champion for the waterways and for the whole region. You have to go to all these different places. If there is an opportunity it is about integration and having a champion that actually understands the entire waterway from infrastructure through to environment and safety that you can advocate to and seek funding. At the moment, no-one is our champion.

**Mr KING:** I would like to add to that. This is what I was going to ask. There is the question of the actual funding if it were a body like that, but you also have the councils there—and that has been my experience in the past. They are the delivery agent, so the coordination is the problem you highlight.

**Mr McGovern:** Yes.

**Mr KING:** I just wanted to make sure that was the problem you were highlighting—the delivery agent.

**Mr McGovern:** It is all about priorities. The Noosa council has had a budget allocation for looking into a new public jetty in The Woods area. That sat on the books for years. Then they did a very narrow consultation process for what they recommend. It may sit on the books for another five to 10 years; it may never happen.

**Mr Patchett:** It is currently unfunded.

**Mr McGovern:** Yes. At the moment we need a strategy and some champions that can look at the whole picture.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your appearance before the committee today. There were no questions taken on notice. My community is a farming community and I want to draw the analogy between the farmers in my community being great stewards for our community with the land that they use because they want it to be there for generations to come. I get a sense that it is the same for you, being involved in waterways. We will take a quick break.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.06 am to 11.21 am.**

**CAMPBELL, Mrs Jill, President, Noosa Integrated Catchment Association**

**CRIGHTON, Ms Jude, Secretary, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland—  
Sunshine Coast & Hinterland**

**McCARTHY, Ms Narelle, Advocacy and Engagement Manager, Sunshine Coast  
Environment Council**

**CHAIR:** Welcome, ladies. Would you like to make some short opening comments, after which the committee will have questions for you.

**Ms McCarthy:** I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the country we are meeting on today, the Kabi Kabi people. I think we heard about their very strong connection to country and the importance of integrating and being informed by their traditional knowledge as we go forward in this process.

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council can see that there is potential opportunity with coordination and collaboration through the establishment of an authority. However, there are also inherent risks. This is a significant and very substantive piece of legislation encompassing very diverse and unique catchments and waterways of the greater Sunshine Coast region. There is very little to demonstrate that the ecological integrity and the environmental health of our waterways is going to be central to the purpose of this bill and, therefore, the act that will follow.

Concerns were raised around not having that embedded within the bill and explicitly articulated as being important in the decision-making process and primarily focussing on delivery of infrastructure and use of dredging of sand and sediment. There is very little in the way of environmental considerations. That has been described by the Department of Transport and Main Roads in their response to the submissions where there was significant and very consistent and concerted sentiment around the lack of ecological assessments and certainly the risks associated with cumulative impacts. In their response, DTMR said that would be covered by the sustainable use, essentially implying that this is inherently covered by sustainable use.

I will point out something which has not been demonstrated, which we did bring up in our submission. There is no definition of 'sustainable use'. That is carried through from the Gold Coast Waterways Authority Act and we see this now in the bill for the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority. Without having a clear definition of what 'sustainable use' is, there is little confidence regarding ecological risk assessment and the cumulative impacts that need to be looked at in the very beginning of any consideration of works. When we talk about waterways management, it does bring in the need to protect and enhance our waterways as well. It is not just about managing them in a linear or a narrow way. It is actually holistic and the environmental sustainability is built into that decision-making process.

I remind you as well that we are really fortunate to have our contiguous biospheres. We are a biosphere corridor—the Great Sandy, Noosa and the Sunshine Coast. Whilst these are not statutory, it is a very clear obligation and values-based position to be recognised as having the biospheres right here within the region. We have an obligation, we have an opportunity to live sustainably and to look after our waterways in a way that actually upholds the aims and objectives of those biospheres.

We do see there are some key recommendations, that is that there is a strengthening of the ecological risk management and cumulative impact assessments; that is actually built in. It is not satisfactory that that would be considered at the time of waterways management plan preparation; that is too far down the process. In terms of embedding robust monitoring evaluation reporting frameworks, again, we heard from the Kabi Kabi representatives about that ecological and sustainability benchmarking. How do we know if this is working? There has been some fantastic work that has been going on across the region within our catchments. We have the Resilient Rivers preparing the catchment action plans now. That is a collaborative process bringing in expertise, local knowledge, research, science and decision-makers so we can have a clear understanding of what is needed for our waterways and what pressures they are under and how we can start to avoid an increase in those pressures.

Ensuring genuine local and First Nations input into the management planning—that has to be first and foremost. In terms of clarifying jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities, there is very little confidence because of the vagaries within the bill around those jurisdictional responsibilities and also the concern around things such as the tidal works program, which would be in secondary regulation. That is not satisfactory; that should be in the primary legislation. Tidal works is significant. It has inherent risks and needs to be properly approached. In terms of improving governance through

strengthened representative board composition, that includes the local councils and we have outlined proposed representatives on that board. This would be in addition to having catchment advisory bodies. Because we have such diverse catchments, we need to be collaborative and we need to have all of those voices.

**Mrs Campbell:** I will read a little bit from our submission. NICA was established in 1996. Telstra was sold and the funds were used to set up catchment groups which were to coordinate and align natural resource management. NICA actually established the first Noosa plan. Of all the catchment groups, only Mary River catchment and Noosa catchment are still going. We have been going for 30 years. It is a volunteer participation led group and is very active. We do twice monthly river clean-ups, we do water testing monthly and we have volunteers doing weed removal and rehabilitation. It is a very active group. I listened to some of the boating people who appeared earlier who were saying, 'Yes, the river is in good order. I could not understand that.' It is because a lot of environmental groups have had input to keep it that way and I think that is really important.

In terms of my initial concern when I heard about the waterways authority establishment late on a Friday afternoon—normally if someone was doing that in a company you would think, 'What is the problem here?' The fact there are environmental groups up and down the coast screaming should be a red flag. There was not enough written into it. We are all saying the same thing. The alarm bells should be going off. That is how loud it is. We really do need to have benchmarks and safeguards written into the authorities act. I think without that it is irresponsible. Noosa River is unique in Queensland in that it goes from freshwater to hypersaline in the shallow lakes, so we have a great variety of different marine critters and vegetation that need to be protected.

The concern we have is that in the act there needs to be a clear demarcation between the high and low waterlines, because the authority as it is proposed is going to have control from the high waterline. All of the country is low-lying, so the high waterline is way in. The way it stands, this authority could have overarching authority. They could actually say, 'We're going to take all those wetlands, fill them in and build multi high-rise' or 'We're going to put in a marina'—'We're going to do something.'

All the saltmarsh areas and the mangrove areas, which are part of what makes this whole area special, really need to be protected. The only way I can see to do that is that the councils maintain authority from the low waterline up and then if the new authority wanted to build extra jetties and things, that could be done provided it was based within environmental best interests. The Noosa River, where the boating is, is a short area and it is congested now. It is in pretty good order. I can understand people wanting extra jetties and good jetties. I can understand that, provided we do not interfere with the intertidal zones. We agree with Noosa council when they say the authority has a place, but these safeguards need to be embedded in it.

**Ms Crighton:** I have stepped in at the last moment as our president, who prepared our submission, is unable to attend. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland—the clue is in the name—was established in 1962 by Kathleen McArthur, the poet Judith Wright, David Fleay, whose name will be known to many, and the publisher Brian Clouston. It is one of Australia's longest running environmental organisations. As this point I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners, the Kabi Kabi people, because it is their knowledge that underlies all of the environmental knowledge. I referenced the age of our organisation because I think it is very important to take account of historical knowledge going back to the times of the traditional owners and also there is a lot of historical knowledge about the development of the Sunshine Coast that our organisation has been commenting on for all of that time.

I am holding up a book called *The Little Fishes of Pumicestone Passage*, written, illustrated and designed by Kathleen McArthur, who was our founder. She also became a wildflower artist because she loved the wildflowers so much and that took her back to understanding the environment in which the wildflowers grow. Some words from our submission—

Sunshine Coast Waterways are important ecological areas known for their diverse marine life, including dugongs, turtles and dolphins, as well as abundant birdlife and fish. There are rich ecosystems of mangroves, seagrass beds—

very important—

and saltmarshes and the waterways are a refuge—

and resting place—

for migratory shorebirds. Effective governance and protection of these waterways are essential for the continued health and resilience of these habitats.

Healthy habitats for wildlife are also healthy habitats for human life. So many people live on the Sunshine Coast and also in the hinterland because they appreciate both the benefits of being near the sea and the waterways and also the green spaces that protect those.

While improved coordination and strategic planning for and facilitating the sustainable use, management and development of the Sunshine Coast waterways is a worthwhile objective, we recommend amendments and additions to strengthen the bill. First, we recommend that the bill explicitly references the Water Act 2000 and the Vegetation Management Act 1999 to ensure legislative alignment. Additionally, it should be noted that any strategy, program or decision should be assessed against and meet obligations under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, the EPBC Act 1999, and also relevant international agreements with Japan, Korea, China, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. A lot of these relate to the protection of migratory shorebird habitat because the Sunshine Coast waterways are so important on that international level.

Our submission covers a number of recommendations to strengthen the act, but we recommend the bill require binding environmental outcomes, including no net loss of key habitats, water quality standards and ecological condition indicators. Strategies should incorporate climate change and coastal hazard resilience, taking into account predicted sea-level rise with measurable actions, timeframes, monitoring, public recording and independent review.

**CHAIR:** Jude, Jill and Narelle, thank you very much for your representation of your communities and sector. Jude, you have represented the group very articulately.

**Ms BUSH:** With the chair's indulgence, I thank the three of you for the work you do. We would all have Bushcare or Watercare groups in our communities. You do such a fabulous job and a lot of heavy lifting. We do appreciate that. You have highlighted some opportunities in the legislation and also highlighted and shown us a couple of flaws in relation to sustainability which could have been resolved perhaps with more consultation. Narelle, if I did not mishear, I heard you mention that you would like to see council or local government having a role in the board and the authority. Did I hear that correctly?

**Ms McCarthy:** Yes.

**Ms BUSH:** Is that part of your recommendation, to make sure there is a local voice advocating about local issues?

**Ms McCarthy:** Yes, that is correct, because of the lack of consultation. This is a very substantive piece of legislation that will have far-reaching impacts and certainly opportunities if things are done right. Obviously, we are all one region and it is all interconnected. However, the catchments and the river systems are all unique. They have their own inherent values and also have been identified, obviously, for community and different uses as well but primarily for their ecological health. The local councils, the groups and people who live and work within these areas do have that knowledge so it is vital that that representation is established through the board. As for not being consulted, we see that has not happened to date, so that would still be an ongoing role, of course. However, having that board position will give better assurance that that local knowledge and that representation, as the body closest to the community within our regions, is actually represented.

**Miss DOOLAN:** I echo Jonty's words, and thank you so much for your time today and for the work that you do to protect our environment. Do you believe environmental outcomes are currently being achieved by the council under the current programs that they run?

**Mrs Campbell:** With the available funding, I think they do a good job. Environmental works are expensive. As well as being a member of NICA, I have been coordinating Noosa Bush Beach and Creek Care for 22 years. We do rehabilitation, sometimes along creeks and things but mainly on the land. Our group alone does about 3,000 hours a year. If council had to pay contractors for that, they could not do it. Council do a good job with the funds that they have. Noosa council, particularly, sometimes gets it wrong but their intent is always good. I think that a council representative on the waterways authority will have the voice of all the local people and local knowledge. There is so much knowledge, actually, that is not even recorded now digitally. It was done 30 years ago and perhaps that needs to be collated and the authority uses that as well as a reference. Don't reinvent the wheel. There are lots of other things that have been done.

**Ms McCarthy:** There has been extensive consultation across the region with communities on a range of documents and policies by the local governments and that is the culmination of certain strategies and policies that are then rolled up into some statutory documents as well. There is the Environment and Liveability Strategy for the Sunshine Coast Council. Noosa has a similar one, as

does Moreton. We have our healthy coasts and shoreline erosion management plans. We have the coastal hazard adaptation strategies. The Sunshine Coast and Noosa councils have been leaders in Australia on coastal hazard risk assessments and climate risk assessments. That has also involved an incredible amount of consultation and technical input. Those environmental outcomes have been identified through that consultation and the establishment of policies, and then having implementation plans. Obviously, then the resourcing and the funding is always critical to ensure those outcomes are delivered. I did reference the Resilient Rivers program and the catchment action plans that are happening now so that again there is another opportunity.

Yes, the environmental outcomes are tangible and have been delivered. If there is more resourcing and more collaboration and coordination then we could probably achieve more because we know that these waterways and the ecological systems are under pressure. We are at thresholds where we do need to have that support and investment to ensure that they are actually able to have climate resilience and also continue to be enjoyed.

**CHAIR:** Did you have something to add, Jude?

**Ms Crighton:** A lot of the rehabilitation work has come through scientific understanding over the last decades of damage that has been done since European occupation of these lands, obviously. It is very important to keep updating that scientific information.

**Ms BOLTON:** Thank you for the work that you do, especially with very limited resources. It is a constant battle. In the previous session I was trying to understand what the benefit would be of an authority. One part that came out was about the value of an integrated plan that takes into account infrastructure. You have mentioned a number of strategies and what everyone is doing. Do you believe that is lacking an integrated plan? If it is lacking, would one for each waterway address concerns around benchmarks and safeguards?

**Mrs Campbell:** I do not actually think it is lacking. I do not think that is an area that is currently lacking. I think the different groups are doing effective jobs. I think locally they can pull more people in as well. If you have an overarching authority then it is very hard to pull in volunteers or other opinions effectively. No, I do not really think so. I may be out of step there.

**Ms McCarthy:** The partnerships, the coming together and the collation of the extensive knowledge across the region through the local governments and organisations are really important. There has certainly been much more collaboration happening in recent times over various strategies and policies as well as understanding the responsibilities we have across the region and the pressures from population growth and elsewhere. The opportunity would be that that could be elevated. It does not necessarily need to be parallel to an authority. The authority should be informed by those collaborative partnerships across the region. It is almost like the authority takes that information and has the opportunity to be informed and consider the information and the work that has already gone on to get that coordinated outcome, which of course then comes to the management strategies. As we understand the way the bill is written it would be a 10-year strategy, with a review every three years, for the whole of the Sunshine Coast waterways. Collating that information and having that baseline is really important going forward.

**Ms BOLTON:** Is an authority the only way to do that?

**Ms McCarthy:** No, not necessarily. There is already collaboration with councils and various working groups, for example, so that could actually be enhanced. I do not think that the authority should be a substitute for the work and collaboration across the region that is already underway. It should be something that supports that. It is not clear how the structure of the authority is actually going to benefit the work that is already going on.

**Mrs Campbell:** It is important that the authority does not just become an authority but has the ability to action things. There are lots of reports, but unless those recommendations are actually actioned, or the funds are there to action them, they fall a bit flat. That is a critical thing.

**Ms BOLTON:** Is that actioning done over the top of local governments and MSQ?

**Mrs Campbell:** If this is going to be from the low waterline across and they believe there should be more infrastructure, the funding should be there for it.

**CHAIR:** The first issue that the Department of Transport and Main Roads responded to in terms of the themes raised in submissions was the environmental protection and ecological integrity of the waterways. We took the initiative to distribute that to all of the submitters. Did you receive that response to the submission?

**Ms McCarthy:** Yes.

**Mrs Campbell:** Yes, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Clause 12 is about managing the waterways, clause 4 refers to the bill's relationship with other acts and clause 14 is about the necessity for an ecological risk assessment. TMR, therefore, believe that they do not need to legislate it because all of those things that they are required to attend to—

**Ms BUSH:** Point of order, Chair: we are normally policed on long preambles, so I would like to draw your attention to that. Is there a question?

**CHAIR:** There is a question, Deputy Chair, and I cannot recall ever pulling anybody up on that. I am just reading a summary for the audience here and for those who have not received it. With regard to that response, Narelle, Jill and Jude, do you have any comments further to that?

**Ms McCarthy:** Yes, Chair. 'Sustainable use' has not been defined. That is probably the first part of that response. It also suggests the impacts on the local community and the local environment, but, again, 'local environment' and the components of the local environment have not been defined. Coupled with no definition of 'sustainable use' or 'local environment' and what that extends to, are we talking about riparian areas? As Jill has described, there are estuarine and freshwater systems. We have reefs off the Sunshine Coast as well.

There is too much ambiguity and lack of clarification about what those terms mean. Not having those terms defined will mean that the consideration of 'ecological integrity', 'ecological risk assessments' and 'cumulative impacts' will not be clearly articulated and defined. Also, we are doing that work before the management strategies are done. We need to have those benchmarks. I can see that you—

**CHAIR:** It is the chicken and the egg, I think.

**Ms McCarthy:** We cannot leave it too late, Chair. I am saying it has to be clearly defined at the beginning.

**CHAIR:** This is the establishment of it to allow all of those things to happen. Jill, did you have anything to add?

**Mrs Campbell:** The sustainability is so loose, really. It is subjective and objective. There are things that really need tightening up, and we hope they will be. Environmentally, we have become cynics. That is why we are trying to clarify things. It would have been better if this was done ahead of time. I do not think there would have been issues, but you never know.

**Ms Crighton:** I have just one point: I recommend the bill explicitly define the upstream boundary of the waterways authority's jurisdiction. The Brisbane River management authority specifies it extends up to the tidal limit or to a well-known landmark. It needs those definitions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Jude, Jill and Narelle. The time for this session has now finished. You do not have any homework either. Thank you for appearing before the committee today and the evidence you have provided.

**COURTNEY, Mr Dom, Executive Officer, Outdoors Queensland**

**WELLINGTON, Mr Tony, President, Noosa Parks Association**

**CHAIR:** Welcome, and thank you very much for being here today. It is good to be in your company again, Dom. Dom and I were on the South East Queensland Catchments Members Association and the Healthy Land & Water board for many years. I put that on the record for today. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before the committee asks questions of you?

**Mr Wellington:** Thank you very much for this opportunity. I do not envy your task today, having to sit through so many presentations. I am going to give you a reprieve. We are going to go on a boat ride. We are going to start in a small creek right up near the road that goes to Rainbow Beach. For 80 kilometres we are going to travel down the Noosa River, one of the most unique river systems on the planet. As we head south, the creek turns into the Noosa River and for the bulk of our journey we will be travelling through the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park. I am not sure if you are aware, but this is one of the great geological marvels on the planet.

With K'gari, Cooloola represents the largest vegetated dune system anywhere on planet Earth. The high dunes were created during the Pleistocene and the newer dunes in the Holocene, and the whole area supports more than half the perched lakes anywhere on the planet. Literally, there is no other landscape like it. Indigenous presence in this landscape dates back 65,000 years.

After many hours of boating, we enter what is known as the Noosa Everglades, a delta of inlets and dense growth. It is a tourism drawcard. To our right is Lake Como, the first of five lakes that are attached to the lower reaches. Then we enter Lake Cootharaba, which is the largest lake, and for the first time in this long day's journey we see human settlement at Elanda Point and then Boreen Point. We travel on to Lake Cooroibah, down to Tewanin and Lake Doonella.

All is not well with the river and lakes we have been passing through. We know that they are slowly silting up. Historical analysis of fish and oyster harvesting reveals how the river was once far more plentiful and biodiverse than it is today. Studies of the sediment, or benthic layer, reveal an incredible ongoing loss of biodiversity in the river.

When our craft enters the section of river below Tewanin, if we are travelling particularly at peak holiday period we will be struck by the number of watercraft. This congestion increases as we approach the river mouth. Welcome to one of the most congested waterways in Queensland.

I do not know if you are aware, but Noosa is long overdue for a direct hit from a cyclone. Between the 1940s and 1976 there were multiple cyclones that hit Noosa and we have not had one since 1976. We have no idea how the low-lying properties—thousands of them—let alone our canal estates will fare when the next cyclone hits. If you have a look at council's mapping of the impacts of the rising sea level, it is quite mind-boggling.

We took this boat trip from the Noosa River headquarters to the mouth so that you could see for yourselves the massive changes that occur along the trajectory of the river. The pressures on the river are multifarious and the matters that will need to be resolved in coming years are multidimensional. The four biggest challenges are: one, making the flood-prone river system safer for riverside communities, and we at NPA struggle to see how the SCWA is going to help in terms of future flood mitigation; two, improving biodiversity in the river and where it flows into Laguna Bay; three, increasing fishing sustainability, which is of course part of that biodiversity; and, four, managing tourist and resident impacts, particularly regarding waterway congestion.

NPA is deeply concerned that in its currently proposed form the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority will be unable to successfully tackle the interconnection of these key issues or even some of them in isolation. In fact, the Gold Coast Waterways Authority already struggles with multi-agency matters, as noted in Gecko's submission. It is critical that actions taken in other systems are not transplanted to the Noosa catchment on the assumption that the outcomes will be the same. You have already heard many people refer to the Noosa system as being extremely shallow. We have all sorts of problems with acid sulfate soil et cetera.

Further, Noosa Parks Association urges the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority to establish a wideranging Noosa reference group that can be called on for advice. We are not going to dictate who should be on the panel, but, plainly, if Noosa council is not represented its ex-officio board members have to be consulted. Environmental, residential, business, tourism and Indigenous stakeholders should also be in the mix. Our greatest fear is that actions taken on the Noosa River will be carried out without reference to the wide range of organisations which have many decades of investment in the river. Thanks very much for your time.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Tony. Over to you, Dom.

**Mr Courtney:** Thanks, Chair. It is appropriate you hand over to me after we have just been on a boat ride. Outdoors Queensland is marking 30 years as the peak body for outdoor activities across the state. When we talk about outdoor activities, we are talking about outdoor recreation, outdoor and environmental education, nature- and adventure-based tourism and outdoor health—doing activities for health purposes.

We put in a submission because these waterways are significant. Our submission was not particularly detailed and certainly was not as detailed as some of the ones other organisations put in. We put it in because we just want to be part of the process. Having sat here this morning and listened to the discussions, I think a lot of this is actually about stewardship. We believe that when people have access to outdoor spaces and have positive experiences in nature—sometimes the experiences are not so positive—it builds a sense of stewardship. It builds connections to these places. It connects you to the tens of thousands of years of the Kabi Kabi people's stewardship of these places and to the stewardship that has been shown by the local governments, who have been here today. There are also the environmental operators and organisations that do so much work and the boating industry people, who spoke just before about their stewardship of these places.

A key part of the concern for what the proposed authority could do is where will its level of stewardship come in amongst the various layers that already exist in this process? We were involved with the Gold Coast Waterways Authority's Our Waterways Future process, which last year carried out some community consultation in relation to the recreation there. That was done for the first time 13 years after they were formed. I know there is a requirement for a 10-year plan in the bill. I just hope it does not take 13 years to develop a 10-year plan because we want to be involved. We want to have that stewardship for these waterways that are so important to the communities right across this region.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Dom. That is a great point you have made. We will go to the deputy chair.

**Ms BUSH:** We will go to the member for Aspley, actually.

**Mr MELLISH:** Thank you for your submissions and for appearing. You both mentioned the need for a strategy or a program or a plan from the get-go for the proposed authority. Are you able to go into a bit of detail about what you want strategy plan or program to entail? What are the must-haves in your view?

**Mr Courtney:** The key thing for us is that it involves all of the stakeholders who are involved in this process. A lot of the time we become an afterthought in some of these processes. We are talking about community access to these waterways. It is actually about the quality of life for these places. The waterways from Noosa right down to Pumicestone are amazing assets. They are not just there for commercial exploitation; they are there for the community. They are part of the reason people choose to live, work and play in these places. The waterways are a drawcard. It is important that they are central to the thinking—that in making the various decisions they actually consider all of those different stakeholders and the rights holders, as we mentioned earlier.

**Mr Wellington:** It is about having some formal process for consultation. I will give you an example. I recently sat through the deliberations of the Resilient Rivers process. They managed to collate 270 documents relating to the Noosa River—many of those documents being scientific documents of some substantial import. Therefore, the great concern, as I said in my presentation, for Noosa Parks Association is that the expertise will be overlooked. There are people with great expertise in terms of the impacts on the river. What we do know is that if you do one thing in the river somewhere it has an impact somewhere else on the river. If you dredge the river mouth, it is going to have impacts further upstream. If you put in hard walling, it is going to have impacts elsewhere. If you upset the acid sulfate soil, it is going to have significant environmental impacts. What we are talking about is making sure it is not just the local knowledge but also the scientific expertise that is formally transmitted to the SCWA before it makes decisions.

**Mr MELLISH:** Mr Wellington, you mentioned the very significant ecological areas upstream. Is it a concern to you that the department said in their response to what stakeholders have said that they do not intend to put lines on a map to outline what is and is not affected? Is it a concern that we do not really know what the upper boundaries of this authority will be?

**Mr Wellington:** Absolutely, because we know that the number of tour boats going up through the Noosa Everglades to Harrys Hut are creating erosion, for example. It goes to the bigger issue that even councils are unclear about where the authority lies—if there is a dispute, for example, between Caloundra

the SCWA and one of the councils who is the head of authority and how that dispute is resolved. Yes, I am concerned about a lack of clarity throughout. As you point out, a lack of clarity with regard to what areas the SCWA will have authority over is crucial.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Tony, do you believe a Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority is needed and why?

**Mr Wellington:** I am sorry to say that I do not think it is needed but I understand that there is a political imperative. I understand that it was an election commitment and thus it is going to be. Noosa Parks Association plans to work with the authority for the betterment of the Noosa River system. To be honest, when I was on council and I was the mayor of Noosa we struggled with the many different state government departments that we had to deal with on the river. At the time I presented all sorts of opportunities to clarify that and to make it easier. Many of those opportunities were to transfer some controls to the local government—for example, to transfer moorings and living-on-board issues to the local government which is on the ground, in the place and aware of the problems. There are other ways to go about this. I accept the fact that we are going to have a Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority, and I look forward to working with it.

**Ms BOLTON:** I am going to ask the same question. However, it is around the benefit. I have asked it previously and I have only been able to come down to the need for an integrated plan that incorporates infrastructure, environment et cetera. In terms of coordination, is that severely lacking at the moment? I have asked the question before because I am trying to understand what everyone believes is going to occur with an authority that ultimately still will need to reach down through local government and MSQ. I am just not getting it yet.

**Mr Wellington:** It is because we are dealing with a case of the unknown, and you have made that clear in your public statements about this process. There is a distinct lack of clarity in the legislation regarding who has the head of authority and what the primary purpose of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority is. We were told it was to clean up a mess created by a previous government but that mess has always been in existence. It was not necessarily created by the previous government. The mess can be resolved by intergovernmental decision-making between local government and the state government without imposing a new level of bureaucracy, but that is what we are going to get. If the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority—as I say, we do not know what it is going to do yet—can in fact channel all the competing interests—and, as you know, Sandy, there are many in Noosa—and synthesise that into some serious decision-making that benefits everyone, well and good, but it is a case of wait and see.

**Mr Courtney:** I think there are potentially some benefits, but I certainly acknowledge the unknowns in it. In a previous career I was recreation coordinator at Seqwater when that was formed, so I moved into Seqwater, another government authority that was formed. It took a while to see the benefits, I think you could say. One of those benefits was a consistent application of the strategies and policies, particularly for the recreation at all of the various 25 or 26 different lakes across South-East Queensland. One of the parts of that was even just having a consistent water quality testing regime that Seqwater brought in and refined over time in relation to dealing with closures of the lakes for recreation for water quality issues.

The Australian recreational water quality guidelines have recently been released. They are quite complicated. It could be a benefit. If you have an overarching authority that is responsible for it across all of these waterways, it might actually take some heat away from the councils having to do that water quality testing. It is a small one, thinking about what the potential benefits are. It is just that scale, I suppose.

**Ms BOLTON:** My follow-on to Tony, just quickly—

**CHAIR:** We are out of time. What is your question?

**Ms BOLTON:** How would you see this mitigating against floods? You have mentioned it.

**Mr Wellington:** Yes. I am struggling to see, without serious involvement of the local government, how the 10-year plan can actually anticipate flooding, let alone the fact that there is no mention of climate change and sea-level rise in the legislation.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today. We are out of time. There are no questions taken on notice, so you have no homework. I hope you enjoy the balance of your day. All the best for Easter.

**CURRY, Ms Jennifer, Joint Secretary, Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents**

**DWYER, Ms Naomi, Executive Member, Caloundra Residents Association**

**WEISER, Ms Elisa, President, Caloundra Residents Association**

**WHITE, Mr Aaron, Vice-President, Noosa Shire Residents and Ratepayers Association**

**CHAIR:** I now welcome representatives from the Noosa Shire Residents and Ratepayers Association, the Caloundra Residents Association and the Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents. I will hand over to you to make a short opening statement before the committee has some questions for you.

**Mr White:** I am representing the Noosa Shire Residents and Ratepayers Association. I would like to thank the parliamentary committee for the opportunity to present our views on this important issue. The first thing I would like to say in support of our submission is that we do not necessarily oppose a regional waterways authority; however, we do have concerns that it will not have fair or adequate Noosa representation. I am sure the committee has heard similar views from several speakers today. I will give you a view as to why this is important to the volunteers who have spent years filling in the gaps of looking after the Noosa River, while successive councils and state governments played jurisdictional ping-pong on issues like the hulks on the river which it took decades to have removed.

The crux of the issue, which I am sure has already been voiced here today, is whether Noosa should be treated differently just because we think we are 'special'. As a hillbilly from Kin Kin, I may not be an expert on all aspects of river management but, as someone who on behalf of several organisations has spent over 20 years writing submissions to George Street on a range of issues, I can certainly provide some insight into why Noosa is the undisputed NIMBY capital of Queensland. It is not the number of Tesla drivers or the white-shoe brigade or Hastings Street or the endless stream of Victorian tourists who never seem to leave that makes Noosa special; it is the actual place.

The Noosa region is special because of something called the Macleay-McPherson overlap. This is a geographical term that refers to the region being the overlap of the northern range of hundreds of species of flora and fauna and the southern range of many others. In layman's terms, it is a biodiversity crossover. The relationship of this to what we are discussing today is how the river system lies at the heart of this, particularly for the numerous species of threatened migratory birds who visit every year.

The Noosa River system is unique in that it has a series of semi-tidal lakes which are fed by one of only two everglades systems in the world—the other being in Florida. The everglades are largely responsible for the Noosa River having the least polluted water of any river in South-East Queensland. My point here is that Noosa's environment and incredible biodiversity is what makes it special, and the people who campaign for more national parks, less population, more local government autonomy and less high-rise recognise this.

I am a case in point. I did not move to Noosa 27 years ago to be a campaigner, but once you get the magic of the place you seem to get dragged into the fight to protect it. Therefore, when the community hears a waterways authority is being established that will not necessarily have fair representation from Noosa on it, we are deeply concerned. If an external authority oversees dividing up funding between the Maroochy and Noosa River catchments, there is a real risk Noosa will be short-changed. Regardless of how important our river is to biodiversity, recreation and our reputation as a world-class ecotourism destination, the cold, hard political reality is that there are far fewer voters to upset in the Noosa's catchment than there are in the Maroochy catchment.

Another important reason for the waterways authority to have the trust of the Noosa community goes back to our armies of volunteers. Currently, volunteers engage in a range of activities on the river, from water testing to silt-reducing revegetation projects, rubbish clean-ups, re-establishment of oyster reefs and many more. I would argue that it will not encourage volunteers to fill in the gaps if they a semi-autonomous state controlled body giving Noosa a raw deal.

In closing, should the state government proceed with establishing a Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority—and it is questionable whether it is necessary or not—the Noosa Shire Residents and Ratepayers Association request a fair representation of Noosa representatives on its board.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Aaron. We will go to Elisa and Naomi.

**Ms Dwyer:** Thank you for the opportunity for the Caloundra Residents Association to present today. We support the establishment of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority to enhance the governance and management of our region's precious waterways, including Ramsar listed wetlands and sensitive marine habitats. We want to focus today on four areas of the bill that we believe require change.

Firstly, we recommend that environmental protection is prescribed as a statutory function of the authority and, further, that the accountability should be explicitly translated into its 10-year strategy with public reporting on key ecological outcomes. We note the DTMR document, which you mentioned being released yesterday, which asserts that it is unnecessary for the bill to confer an environmental function on the authority—this being implied through the requirement to address sustainable use of waterways in its strategy. Respectfully, we do not agree. The bill does not define 'sustainable use', leaving it open to interpretation. The fact that environmental protection does not make it as a core legislative consideration of the authority is deeply concerning and markedly out of step with community values.

The ecological sustainability of our waterways is critical and the authority should be clear that it is a statutory obligation when making decisions about the planning, use and management. We advocate that it receives no less consideration than navigation and infrastructure, which are prescribed functions and would presumably become redundant without viable healthy waterways.

Secondly, the inquiry process has demonstrated that significant community concern and passion for our waterways exists. Community confidence is fostered by engagement, genuine consultation and transparency. Therefore, we recommend that the bill includes clear expectations for engagement, emphasising that community consultation is a board level KPI. Embedding a statutory requirement for the authority's community engagement strategy would, in fact, exemplify government's genuine commitment to make it happen.

Getting the right leadership for the authority will set it up for success. The reverse is true. Considering the complexity of the waterways and the authority's multi-council scope, we believe that additional governance provisions are necessary to promote effective coordination and alignment. Specifically, the board should include ex-officio representation from each of our three councils. Moreover, one board position should be reserved for a member with scientific expertise, with the full board benefiting from evidence-based advice provided by a statutorily convened scientific subcommittee. We advocate that a board appointment is reserved for the traditional owners of the land, our Kabi Kabi people.

Finally, if the authority is to be the antidote for the historical pain of fragmented governance, it should be expected to lead the development of structural solutions to address this, including an accountability framework, collaboration protocols and issue resolution processes. Again, this is so important. It should not be relegated to subordinate legislation or policy but embedded as a requirement in the act. Thank you for hearing our views and those of the many clearly very aligned community organisations here today who are optimistic that the committee will do the right thing and amend the bill to secure the long-term sustainability and ecological health of our waterways.

**Ms Curry:** Thanks you for the opportunity to speak further to our submission. I represent OSCAR. OSCAR is a not-for-profit umbrella group for community and resident groups across the Sunshine Coast and Noosa and it represents several thousand people—there are many of those groups in the room today—and it has the same geographic coverage as the proposed bill.

While supporting the concept of a water authority for the Sunshine Coast waterways and notwithstanding the response from TMR yesterday, OSCAR wants the bill to ensure there is outstandingly good governance, genuine community and expert engagement across a range of disciplines, with it all being undertaken within the context of sustainability. This has been raised by many of the submitters today. In fact, most of the points in our submission have been echoed through other submissions and through people speaking today.

Further, we want to emphasise the importance of the independence of the board and the need for the range of expertise. That has come up again and again this morning. This expertise, for example, can be provided through board members but also through the subcommittee model, thus adding weight and credibility to the board, leading to the best outcomes for all our waterways.

With multiple local government and state agencies involved—and we have all heard the challenges that has presented for all of us across the years—potentially the greatest challenges facing a single waterways authority is how to coordinate through those agencies and deplete the

impact of silos which can naturally occur within those agencies. The subcommittee model is an opportunity to work through those silos mitigating any depletion of the activities of those silos. It can support the board to strengthen the capacity for real coordination across those many authorities involved in the waterways.

Suggestions are that a number of government agencies and tertiary institutions—for example, the DPI, NRM and DETSI, who have recognised expert scientists in these fields—are associated with the waterways authority. Similarly, the Sunshine Coast University and the CSIRO have expertise in these fields and could be associated with the authority.

Creating a statutory science and technology subcommittee—name yet to be defined—would go some way to forging coordination and partnerships. As the representative of CRA has said, we build trust when we see coordination and being listened to, from expertise not just in the science community but also in the volunteer community. I am always astounded by the expertise that sits within our community, built up over many years of professional and lived experience. That goes some way to getting a really great outcome from such an authority. We note that it is easy to mandate coordination; it is not so easy to activate such coordination. Working across agencies requires specific planning and skill in its own right.

We echo the fact that ‘sustainable use’ is not defined. We support the focus on sustainability and the creation of measures of what successful sustainability looks like for both the commercial and environmental areas to achieve the balance needed so that we recognise the sometimes competing requirements of commercial and environmental areas. This would assist in allaying concerns that have been brought up again today about the lack of balance between those interests.

We also would like to emphasise that the ‘reasonable’ steps to engage with community may not actually translate into true engagement with community. We have seen that lack of community engagement highlighted today about the lack of definition and clarity in the bill as proposed. I would like to emphasise that that is changed in the bill. We continue to highlight the benefits from including local knowledge and expertise from the Kabi Kabi people and also from our lived experience, as demonstrated from today’s participants. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Jennifer, Naomi and Aaron. I take it, Elisa, you are not going to add anything at the moment?

**Ms Weiser:** I am happy to receive questions. We are here jointly.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I just wanted to clarify that. We will go to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Ms BUSH:** A couple of you have made recommendations around board appointments. Some people might argue that it might become cumbersome. Can you speak to how including representatives from councils, the Kabi Kabi people as well as someone with a scientific background might actually increase efficient decision-making and not tie it down in red tape?

**Ms Dwyer:** I think good governance starts with having a skills-based board and a board whose composition is also holding the required expertise to deliver on the strategy that the legislation has vested it with. The recommendations that we make in terms of board composition—and, again, they are not recommendations that would blow the board size to being something that is unmanageable—include the three councils and I think it has been raised very effectively today by other speakers about the importance of having those perspectives that have a lot of historical knowledge and a lot of expertise present on the board. Obviously, every board member has fiduciary responsibility to look across the waterways, not just their own patch, and that is taken as read. We think it would build a greater depth of expertise, community confidence, as Jennifer said, by having those perspectives present on the board. The preservation of a role for the traditional owners of the land we think also signposts to the community the criticality of all of that historical knowledge and the ecological health and safety and that being the priority of our local people.

In terms of scientific expertise, again, you have heard today about all the nuances and unique aspects of our multiplicity of waterways. We think the board will require access to wideranging evidence-based expertise in terms of some of the challenging decisions that will come to bear. Having the confidence in a scientifically relevant, independently comprised subcommittee we think would go a long way to ameliorate some of the tensions about wise, evidence-based, independent decisions that balance the interests of all of the stakeholders.

**Ms BUSH:** I do not want to lead you, and the chair will stop me if I do, but do you think there is an argument there that trust and robust decision-making then decreases the likelihood of future appeals and court action in decision-making?

**Ms Dwyer:** Absolutely. I think the composition of the board, which is going to be one of the first decisions for the authority, signals to the community the level of confidence that it can have in the leadership of that authority. Getting the composition right is critical. Being respected and understood to having the requisite skills-based knowledge and independence to lead the authority I think will go a long way to shoring up community confidence.

**Ms Curry:** Would you mind if I just add a point to that?

**CHAIR:** Is it a different point or is it the same?

**Ms Curry:** I would just say that, with the bill being based on the Gold Coast Waterways Authority and only having one council involved, it could be assumed that having the three councils would blow out and make the board inefficient. However, those councils have raised so many issues about jurisdiction and where that jurisdiction sits that having the three councils involved would mean, as you say, there is less opportunity for conflict to arise because they are involved in those decisions in the first place.

**Mr JAMES:** Naomi, once established, the Waterways Management Program provides that the SCWA must develop a program before the start of each financial year and that the program must include: details of projects and activities to implement the strategy; details of steps undertaken to consult; policies and financial measures for implementing the strategy; performance targets et cetera. Do you think this clause will cover the concerns expressed in your opening statement?

**Ms Dwyer:** No. I do not think they will. The concerns in our opening statement were in relation to enshrining environmental protection as a required function of the authority. I think what you have just read out in terms of what the strategy is to cover is insufficient in terms of giving the board the clarity that it must address environmental considerations and the strategies to deliver on those and the ecological milestones and indicators that will be used to determine what does success look like. I think there are multiple elements of the strategy that need to be successful. In terms of our opening comment about environmental protection, I do not think it does adequately. I think the point has previously been made about taking 'reasonable' steps for consultation. What does that mean? Clearly, reasonable consultation has a significant continuum of what people would regard as best practice. I will not labour the point about genuine consultation, but we think there need to be some explicit requirements that exemplify the gold standard for genuine community consultation.

**Mr KING:** I am feeling a bit left out. My colleague and I from Moreton Bay are hearing a lot about Noosa. It is beautiful. I looked up Harrys Hut to make sure it is still there. You reminded me of having been through the everglades when I was younger. I want to have a long preamble, Chair. My question is along the lines of the member for Cooper's question about all of these bodies. We have Maritime Safety Queensland and the councils, and I do agree that you need the three councils because of the diversity of the areas. We are talking about Cootharaba and Pumicestone Passage, so they are different. We have the traditional owners, environmental groups, which are very important, Unitywater and people with a scientific background who will make up this board. That is huge. I asked this question earlier. In your ideal world, where do you see authority levels? Council is usually the delivery agent, but then you have Maritime Safety Queensland and all these different bodies funding and delivering. If you have a utopia, what would that be? I know it is a big question. Answer in any way you want. We talked about jetties and things like that and extra ports, but who has the final say to actually deliver—

**Ms Dwyer:** I think you are making the point that we tried to make.

**Mr KING:** I think I am.

**Ms Dwyer:** I think we are in violent agreement, which is that there are so many interconnected entities involved that if we are to have an authority—and that is a given—we see it as taking a leadership role in bringing that clarification as to what is council's role vis-a-vis some of the others so there is a clearly defined accountability matrix so we are no worse off with more of this: 'It's them'; 'No, it's them.' So we have the community and agencies themselves having a transparent understanding of what they are accountable for delivering but also where they are responsible for collaborating and setting the standard from the outset in a messy landscape. The expectation in this new world is around collaboration and coordination under the auspices, if you like, of this coherency-bringing authority.

**Mr KING:** Yes, I do agree we are on the same page. This bill sets up a head of authority, but the consultation going on from there between all these groups is vital and has to be sorted out before anything is done. If two groups are pulling from different ends of the rope, some of them will have to

make a decision and some of them will miss out, whereas at the moment things seem to be working. It has raised a lot more questions in my mind this morning. I do appreciate everyone coming in because we have a lot to think about, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Which are the key functions of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority as outlined. Aaron or Jennifer, do you have anything else to add?

**Mr White:** It is very clear, particularly from Noosa's perspective, that we have the expertise and experience within our community to fill out our own body. There is no doubt we could find First Nations, boaters and fishers, environmental groups—quality representatives—not necessarily from residents and ratepayers. There are quite a few volunteers involved in these activities in our group, but I do not see residents and ratepayers being a lead agency in these things. I think the problem for this overarching body is that it is over such a wide geographical area with separated waterways which have different challenges and different assets and different threats, and to try and pull together a seven-member board that is going to be able to cover all of that off and consult with all of these communities on all of the different layers of bureaucracy and all of these issues is a major challenge. Good luck.

**Mr KING:** Thank you, Aaron, for articulating that better than I did. That is exactly what I wanted to say.

**Ms Curry:** They echo all of the questions we have in our minds because they raise the importance of how the decision is going to be made and the quality of those decisions. One of the potential subcommittees is that not only do you have expertise but, for example, the mayor can then convene their own engagement through the community. An example was raised yesterday for the Sunshine Coast like the biosphere, where representatives of different organisations, commercial and community, are there to provide input into how the biosphere is managed. That takes some of the pressure off the board itself running all of the community engagements, but you have those layers that come through and feed up. What is important in that is transparency and the feedback from decisions about how that community and commercial input has been fed into the decision.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all for appearing before the committee today. The time allocated for this session has expired. Thank you for all of the volunteering and citizen science you have delivered for our community.

**KETTLETON-BUTLER, Ms Jen, Spokesperson, Pumicestone Passage Catchment Management Body**

**MEWBURN, Mr Ken, President, Take Action for Pumicestone Passage**

**CHAIR:** I invite you both to make an opening statement. Then we will have some questions for you.

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** Thank you so much for the privilege of addressing this committee. From a personal perspective, it is wonderful to see our democracy in action and the scrutiny and the seriousness with which you are taking this issue. Welcome to beautiful Caloundra too, by the way. We are a volunteer Caloundra organisation focused on restoring our barrier island and actively looking after our waterway, the Pumicestone Passage. We were, incidentally, the leading community organisation that advocated for urgent action on the erosion and breakthrough of Bribie Island. That is a huge issue that has been threatening Caloundra.

Here is some very brief context about me. I am fourth generation to Caloundra. I am a member of a four-generation commercial fishing family that has lived and worked on the Pumicestone Passage since 1922. My grandfather has been responsible for over 50 rescues on the Caloundra Bar. I also own a local medical practice, so I am a business owner and I am an experienced recreational boat skipper. I regularly fish. I traverse the Caloundra Bar. I ply the waters of our beautiful passage regularly, so I know it quite well. Our bar does have safety issues that have plagued it ever since my family has lived here. I have many interests in this particular issue. I primarily just want to ensure that our future generations continue to enjoy the wonderful amenity and opportunities that this waterway, which is the heart of our town, have provided for past generations. That is why I volunteer so much of my time on this cause.

To be very clear, the PPCMB strongly supports proactive waterways management, as we here in Caloundra have had firsthand experience of the consequences of a lack of management with the erosion and breakthrough of our barrier island which could have been prevented with timely, commonsense active waterways management. The erosion and breakthrough issue has caused untenable risks and impacts to our community, our economy and also our environmentally significant Pumicestone Passage, not to mention the ever-spiralling cost to address it, which is far, far more than the cost had the issue been actively managed decades ago when it was raised by the community and scientists alike.

Let me be clear: that is not the previous government; that is previous governments and policymakers. Since the 1960s our community has been raising these issues. We have heard the science. Unfortunately, we missed out. The recent emergency work to stabilise the situation and the long-term solutions being worked on as we speak by the Office of the Coordinator-General are vital—absolutely vital—to secure the future of Caloundra, which was built under the assumption of the ongoing protection provided by our barrier island and the location of our coastal bar being at Bulcock Beach. We note, and are extremely grateful, that the long-term solution from the independent review to this significant erosion issue affecting Caloundra is being carried forward by the Office of the Coordinator-General and not the proposed Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority. We fully support this decision. This addresses one of the significant concerns we put forward in our submission from the PPCMB because we were fearful that the gains of the emergency works would be lost in amongst the standing up of a new fledgling authority. We note that the SCWA will take responsibility for the ongoing monitoring and maintenance of the long-term solution following delivery by the Office of the Coordinator-General, which is currently in early detailed feasibility planning studies. We applaud this commonsense decision and thank the government for its proactive and pragmatic leadership on this issue.

Our waterway and our island are a rare double-ended estuary of incalculable ecological significance. We want to keep it that way. At the same time, our island and our waterway are at the heart and soul of our community, our economy and our cultural heritage. We do not want to lose any of that. We value safe access to the open ocean. A stabilised, safer bar is something our community has needed for decades. Our community loves playing at its shoreline, plying its waterways in our recreational craft, swimming safely, wetting a fishing line, having a coffee at a cafe overlooking water—the list goes on. We need this waterway to be well looked after, which is why we urge this committee to adopt some of the other recommendations in our submission.

We really need the governance structure of this waterways authority to be best practice and beyond the political so that it can enjoy the trust of our community. After all, that is what it is here to serve. The appointment of the board, we believe, should include ex officio representation, including,

at the very least, the mayor of the Sunshine Coast. The SCWA board needs to be above political agendas to serve for the long-term good, and that is what I believe this process is about achieving. I thank you for your absolute consideration of these vital aspects to the governance. I am echoing what other groups have said here, but there must be authentic mechanisms to hear the community voice and there must be mechanisms and KPIs for the board to reach out and show that it is implementing the voice of the community. I believe that we are clever enough people to do that and work it out together.

We believe the board needs to have coastal, engineering and marine science expertise embedded, either in membership or a subcommittee. We believe that the board, to be effective, needs to be responsible for appointing its own CEO—with approval from the minister, of course—if it is to function successfully and independently. Finally, we urge this committee to enshrine in the legislation that simple developmental indicators, KPIs, are adopted as co-equal measures of success in all of the strategies and operations of the SCWA.

Our waterways are important for boats and navigation but they are also important for so much more, not least of which is the need for clean, safe, ecologically sound environments that we can preserve and pass on to our future generations. These are the foundations of long-term, successful and—the key word here—balanced planning. We have to get the balance right on all of these things for our community, both economically, environmentally and socially. Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here and speak on behalf of the PPCMB.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Jen. Over to you, Ken.

**Mr Mewburn:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the committee. Unlike Jen, I cannot claim generations of experience with the Sunshine Coast. I tried to retire here 26 years ago and to date I have not had much success in that. However, having become involved with groups like Take Action for Pumicestone Passage—I was a foundation member of that—on their behalf I have managed to be involved in the community advisory group on the coastal hazard adaptation strategy and the biosphere application. I have been on the Resilient Rivers workshops. We were signatories for the formation of the Pumicestone Catchment Network. As a result, we are well aware of the fact that there is more than just Pumicestone Passage in this waterways area. We have always believed that we needed a better management system for Pumicestone Passage. Going back to the Bribie Island issue, we know the Bribie Island spit has been there for over 3,000 years. In the last 70 or so it has decided to make some dramatic changes. We did not respond to that. When you think about it, John Bingle sailed up the passage in 1822 and discovered the bar where it was; he realised it was a passage. In 1842 they created the first map of the area. The Bribie Island spit was still there and a lot of what has happened since has been the result of anthropogenic actions.

With the management body, when it was designated as the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority we thought that went far outside of what we had originally thought of. I was rather intrigued to see in there the requirement to create an integrated management strategy. There was a very extensive one of those written by the government in 1993 and it did not go anywhere. There was also one written by the Pumicestone Region Catchment Coordination Association in 1999. That, likewise, probably resides in somebody's wastepaper basket. They detailed a lot of what would have been an ideal base for an actual master plan. That is one of the things that I think has been lacking in this area for so long.

You cannot manage something if you do not know what you are managing. You could not build a house if you did not have a plan, irrespective of how many materials you had. We have not looked at the residual consequences of issues here without taking into account what is going to happen in other areas. The consequences of the Bribie Island breakthrough are not just the fact that people were going to get their feet wet or houses were going to get damaged; we have lost cultural heritage sites which can never be replaced. We have lost national park and habitat on the island. It will not come back for a century or more. Nobody in this room is ever going to see it recover. We have currently undiagnosed problems further down the passage because of salinity increases because of the dynamic changes after the breakthrough. That has been basically ignored as a potential consequence and nobody has bothered to look into it. We just wait and see how long it takes before the terrestrial vegetation dies out and how long it takes to come back. We have lost mangroves in the passage itself opposite the breakthrough area, along the Costigan boardwalk and the area next to the powerboat club, and that is due to increase in salinity. It is an environmental problem that we pretended was not going to happen.

It was claimed that there would be no change to water quality the north end of the passage. TAPP have been doing some water quality monitoring. We spent a lot of our own money with the university to have some microbiological testing done and, trust me, there is a difference. You cannot Caloundra

have a pond without a flowthrough without having a problem. Ever since the old bar closed off it fills like a bathtub. It actually fills on the outgoing tide and then it slowly empties. All of our stormwater drains run into the passage. There are about 14 drains that run into the north end of the passage. E. Coli levels in the water near Bulcock Beach, where we get 100,000 visitors a year, at one stage were so high that the university just said the water was so filthy you would not do anything in there. When we talked to the council and the government about that they just said everything is okay. The problem we have with regard to those sorts of qualities is actually getting somebody that believes us.

With consideration of a waterways authority, community consultation is going to be absolutely critical. I am a little concerned about the make-up of the board without having positive community representation such as our council people on it. After all, it covers three council areas. As we have said before, it is not just one council like the Gold Coast Waterways Authority. I believe that there is benefit in having council people and the Indigenous people, the Kabi Kabi people, represented on that board. We also need to have good community consultation. Somebody mentioned subcommittees. Maybe you do need them as such, where you have a community group in each of the areas of the waterways authority that can be consulted with by the board for representation of that area.

The environment has come up in all submissions and been talked about a lot today. Every area has its own environmental issues and its own environmental categories and characters. We are lucky enough in Pumicestone Passage to have a Ramsar rating as part of the Moreton Bay Marine Park. As such, a lot of us included in our submissions that we thought perhaps the EPBC Act should have been included in there. Noticing the response to submissions—I think it was reasonably well explained why it was not—it is still going to apply.

The environment is always going to be a major concern for people. We are going to have to do some things sometimes that are paramount. It is chopping our leg off to cure gangrene to fix some of the issues in the passage and in the waterways. All of these groups, the Resilient Rivers group, the biosphere benefits, should all actually overlap with this if they work together.

Another thing that I would like to make a comment on is that I have only recently managed to grab the responses to the submissions. On behalf of TAPP I would like to say that we, as a committee, would like to consider the response we had and get approval to make comment about that, if that is possible.

**CHAIR:** You are entitled to do that. I will go to the member for Aspley for the first question.

**Mr MELLISH:** I had a different question lined up, but in response to what you have just raised with us, Ken, there would be hundreds of families swimming at Bulcock Beach every day. Is it your view that government should be doing more to investigate the safety of that? Are you talking about E. Coli levels? Is enough being done at the moment for it to be a safe swimming location?

**Mr Mewburn:** There is a pretty standard rule that you do not go swimming in those areas during rain or after heavy rain or three days after rain in something like an estuary. Do not swim near stormwater drains. There is no signage. We have a lot of visitors who come to this area who would not know that. When you have a pond around, people want to swim in it, fish in it or boat in it. If you are on holidays in an area, you are not going to worry about a little drop of rain; you are going to jump in the water anyway.

There is a stormwater drain that runs out onto Bulcock Beach which at one stage was very heavily infested with naegleria fowleri, which is very bad for children. It comes into a pond. That is a super suction point for children who get in and play. We asked the council to put a sign up or fence it or something like that. They did not do that. It is bad for tourism. It is bad for your health as well. I do not know what the ultimate answer is. I have seen signs put up in Western Australia that warn about water quality—a sign that simply says what is there in the council documents, for God's sake. Do not swim in the water if it looks dirty. Look what happened to a few people in New South Wales recently when they went swimming in murky water and got nabbed by a shark. We have sharks in the Bulcock Beach area and in around Pumicestone Passage too.

**Mr KING:** I remember as a kid the diving boards at Bulcock Beach. You would dive off but not go out too far or the current will sweep you out. The risks have changed over the years.

**Mr Mewburn:** They have.

**Miss DOOLAN:** Thank you for your time and for the work that you do to protect the Pumicestone Passage and your advocacy with fixing our Bribie Island breakthrough. In your experience, with the delay of that progress, because for years you have been screaming out, do you believe that was a lack of coordination which could have been fixed with something like a Sunshine Coast waterways authority or was there something else at play?

**Mr Mewburn:** The passage actually is covered by 14 different groups of government or NGOs. Coordinating all of that—if you actually write down the overlap of responsibility, it is a wonder that we ever get anything done. It really is. An overarching body—somebody that takes overall control and does not delete the responsibilities of these other people but takes a management control, and you can actually get things done a lot quicker—I think is a benefit.

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** In a word, yes—absolutely. If we get this Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority right, which is what this whole process is about, yes, I believe it would.

**Mr MELLISH:** Thank you again for your submissions and for appearing. You mentioned in your opening statement that you are pleased that the Coordinator-General is doing the dredging work and not the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority. In the public briefing last week we heard that that will transition to the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority in terms of maintenance dredging. Are you concerned that that is being transferred and not remaining with the Coordinator-General?

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** No, I think that is the absolute appropriate thing to do. The long-term remediation works are a very large, complex, expensive project. We have to get it right. I think that needs and deserves its own standalone focus—absolutely. If we get it right and we do all of that work correctly then, absolutely, there is going to be ongoing maintenance required. That is a given. I think that can very successfully be transitioned to the waterways authority and it should be.

**Mr MELLISH:** Do you have an idea of what the estimated cost of that ongoing maintenance will be?

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** I really could not say, but there is opportunity—and I have seen it in the government's response to the review—to leverage the Port of Brisbane Channel Enhancement Project to hopefully get support from the Port of Brisbane, financially and with sand, to offset some of that cost, which I think is, frankly, only fair.

**Mr MELLISH:** The Port of Brisbane pays for it; is that what you are advocating?

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** Ken, you might be able to expand on this a little bit more, but my understanding is that the Port of Brisbane is responsible for the dredging and maintenance of the shipping channel, which is a vital link. In recent times we have not seen more reason for the vitality of shipping links to get products into and out of our society. The shipping channel is vital; it is important. It is about to be expanded. It also has impacts on surrounding communities, and I believe that is a part of what has happened with the erosion and breakthrough at Bribie Island. The Port of Brisbane is its own entity with budgets and remit to maintain and dredge that channel. The opportunity is there to leverage the sand that is being dredged out of that channel and to put it back onto the island as a regular maintenance operation.

**CHAIR:** Did you have something to add to that, Ken?

**Mr Mewburn:** No, I pretty much agree with that. The shipping channel is a separate entity. It is in an area isolated from the marine part and the Ramsar zone out there. They are in the act of doubling the width of it and increasing the depth of it. Hopefully, over the next number of years there will be an ongoing supply of sand to continue to repair the eastern side of Bribie Island. Sadly, due to the shipping channel the eastern side of Bribie Island will always erode. We know roughly how many cubic metres of sand a year disappears from it. That has been measured; it is understood. It is just that we never did anything about it.

**Miss DOOLAN:** We know that the committee process is essential to make sure people's voices are heard and legislation can be stronger. Do you feel that the PPCMB is being actively listened to by the government? Are there any circumstances when you felt in the past you were not listened to?

**Ms Kettleton-Butler:** Absolutely. I would have to say you have to give kudos to the current government for acting so fast on this issue. This is not an issue that was of its making, but it was certainly an issue it had to deal with and deal with promptly—pretty much the moment it got into office. Kudos and credit has to go to the current government. I am very grateful as a representative of the Caloundra voice for the prompt action the government has taken.

I do not want to get political. For the last 80 years governments of all colours and all persuasions and councils and policymakers have been warned and have considered options. They were discounted for a variety of reasons: one, cost; two, disagreement about what we should do, which is a big one. There is a whole lot of tug and pull about that. It is a very thorny little issue there.

I do know that in the year 2000 a paper was presented to Passcon. It was authored by a gentleman called Lester et al. In it he very clearly posited some reasons for the erosion of the northern tip of Bribie Island and he very clearly predicted the breakthrough and the consequences of what

would happen. You would have to say that 20 years ago the science warned us and the community has constantly called it out. I think the lack of investment in Caloundra and our coastal management processes are a function of us being a very rapidly growing community without commensurate investment from the government in the infrastructure needed to support that community.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your time before the committee today. The time for this session has now expired. There is no homework for you, either. Happy Easter to you both. I hope you can enjoy some time with family. Thank you for appearing before the committee and for the evidence you have provided today. We will now go to the open session. I will go through a little bit more detail in a moment. There is only one registered person. Is there anybody else who has not registered who would like to register?

**PRICE, Mr Lyndsay, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** The microphone is all yours if you would like to make a brief opening statement. The committee will then have questions for you.

**Mr Price:** Thank you for welcoming me and thank you for giving me this opportunity. I have a question for you. I was a member of Brisbane Marine Pilots for 27 years. I have been involved with commercial vessels since the 1970s. I now own a 16.6-metre sailing yacht and I work from the Mooloolah River. In all the time that I have been involved coming in and out of the Mooloolah River there have been problems with the bar at the entrance. Every now and then you will have a closure and there is an emergency reaction of dredging, there are funds allocated, there is research and more talking and nothing happens. This has gone on since 1968. We have had fatalities there. We have had very expensive vessels damaged on many occasions. When I was with Brisbane Marine Pilots I assisted with the removal of a couple of vessels there. When is this going to be sorted? It is a simple question.

**CHAIR:** Thanks. We will be asking the questions today. If you have some statements or evidence you would like to provide the committee, we will be very happy to listen. If you read the functions of the Sunshine Coast waterways authority, there is your answer.

**Mr Price:** Thank you very much. I am glad I at least brought some notice to it. I wish you every success.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Do you want to take any questions?

**Mr Price:** No, I have said what I wanted to say.

**CHAIR:** Good. Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for appearing before the committee today. Thank you for the evidence that you provided. A record of these proceedings will be on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 1.06 pm.**