

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

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Submission – Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Will the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026 protect the ecological character of the Ramsar-listed Pumicestone Passage or primarily facilitate boating and tourism development within it?

Pumicestone Passage is one of South-East Queensland's most ecologically significant waterways. It forms part of the **Moreton Bay Ramsar Wetland**, recognised internationally for its wetlands, tidal flats and habitat for tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds protected under international agreements.

While improved coordination of waterway management is a worthwhile objective, the Bill raises important questions about how the proposed Authority will manage waterways that also carry international conservation obligations. Activities typically overseen by waterways authorities—such as dredging, navigation channel maintenance, boating infrastructure and tourism facilities—have the potential to affect the ecological character of Ramsar wetlands if not carefully constrained.

The Bill would benefit from clearer safeguards to ensure that the Authority's planning and operational decisions fully recognise the environmental significance of Pumicestone Passage. In particular, its statutory functions and management strategy should explicitly prioritise protection of Ramsar values, require consideration of cumulative impacts across the entire Passage, and ensure that ecological health is treated as a primary objective alongside navigation and economic uses.

Without such safeguards there is a risk that management priorities could gradually shift toward facilitating boating access and tourism infrastructure in a waterway whose ecological values are the very foundation of its economic and community importance.

Accordingly, the Committee may wish to consider amendments or guidance that ensure the proposed Authority's decisions fully respect the environmental significance of Pumicestone Passage and its role within the Moreton Bay Ramsar Wetland.

- **Ramsar protection**

How will the proposed Authority ensure that its management decisions for Pumicestone Passage are consistent with Australia's obligations to protect the ecological character of the **Moreton Bay Ramsar Wetland**, particularly in relation to dredging, navigation works and tourism infrastructure?

- **Cumulative impacts**

Will the Authority be required to assess the cumulative impacts of development, boating activity and catchment pressures across the entire Pumicestone Passage, rather than considering individual projects in isolation?

- **Environmental priority**

Does the Bill provide sufficient safeguards to ensure that environmental protection and ecological health of waterways such as Pumicestone Passage are treated as primary objectives, rather than being secondary to navigation, infrastructure and tourism outcomes?

The Committee has an opportunity to ensure the Bill explicitly safeguards the ecological values of Pumicestone Passage before establishing a new authority with significant influence over its future.