

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

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Submission By: Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance
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SUBMISSION

To: State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
Re: Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026
From: Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance
Date: 9/3/2026

Personal Details

Name: Andrew McCarthy – Secretary NBFA

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My Interest in This Bill

The Noosa Boating & Fishing Alliance, which represents over 3,000 local residents, ratepayers, and business owners who depend on healthy, accessible, and ideally well-managed waterways.

We make this submission because the management of the Noosa River directly affects our over 3000 members and because we have serious concerns about ensuring balanced representation in any new governance structure.

Oury Position

We SUPPORT the establishment of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority, but with specific conditions regarding board composition, consultation, and accountability.

Reasons for Our Position

1. The Current System Is Fragmented and Ineffective

For too long, management of the Noosa River has fallen between the cracks of multiple agencies. Council points to the state. The state points to another agency. Everyone points elsewhere, and problems persist.

We have seen this most clearly with dumped vessels in the river – an issue our community has raised for two decades. The fundamental reason for inaction was always the same: "too many layers of government involved" and "it's all too hard."

The SCWA offers a single body accountable for coordinating the work that currently falls through the cracks. This is not "another layer of bureaucracy." It is one less layer of excuses.

2. The Marine Park Threat Remains Real

In 2023, our community defeated a proposal to declare a Conservation Park over the Noosa River and lakes. This move would have devastated local businesses and locked out recreational users. That proposal was initiated and driven by a well-established and organised local conservationist group.

The SCWA bill, as currently drafted, does not prevent a future Marine Park declaration. That power remains with the Environment Minister under separate legislation. However, a well-functioning SCWA with a board that genuinely represents recreational and commercial users creates a powerful political safeguard. No Environment Minister will easily override a popular, professionally-run Authority trusted by locals.

But this depends entirely on who is appointed to the board. If the board is captured by narrow interests, the river remains at risk.

3. Board Composition Must Reflect All Users

We note concerns that the bill does not guarantee a Noosa representative on the seven-member board. While we understand that the board is intended to represent waterways interests rather than postcodes, we strongly urge the Committee to ensure that the appointment process delivers genuine balance.

The board must include members who:

- Understand the needs of recreational boaters and fishers
- Represent tourism operators and small businesses
- Bring local knowledge of the Noosa River system
- Can balance environmental protection while guaranteeing public access

The 2023 Conservation Park push demonstrated what happens when decision-making is captured by a single agenda. That must not ever be repeated.

4. Public Consultation Must Be Genuine and Ongoing

The bill mandates public consultation on the waterways management strategy. I welcome this, but urge that consultation be:

- Genuine – not tick-box exercises
- Accessible – held at times and places that allow working people to attend

- Ongoing – not a one-off event
- Representative – actively reaching out to user groups, not just waiting for submissions

The Noosa Boating & Fishing Alliance represents thousands of locals who use this river every week. We expect to be at that table.

5. The \$36 Million Investment Must Deliver Local Benefits

We support funding for professional waterway management. Hydrologists, navigational experts, environmental scientists, and infrastructure planners are exactly what our river needs – people who will actually do the work, not just study it.

But this investment must deliver tangible outcomes for Noosa:

- Functional, well-maintained boat ramps
- Clear, properly placed navigation markers
- Active management of sand movement
- Coordinated response to wrecks and hazards
- Dredging when the bar closes, not after years of studies

The community will be watching closely to ensure this funding translates into on-water results.

Specific Recommendations

1. **Board Appointments:** The Committee recommend the appointment process actively seek candidates who represent recreational and commercial waterway users, with demonstrated local knowledge and a track record of balanced decision-making.
2. **Noosa Representation:** That the Committee note the importance of Noosa's unique character being understood within the SCWA, and encourages the Minister to ensure Noosa voices are included in the board's composition.
3. **Public Consultation:** That the waterways management strategy consultation be required to include targeted engagement with recognised user groups, including the Noosa Boating & Fishing Alliance.
4. **Accountability:** That the three-yearly reviews of the SCWA include public reporting on how community input has been incorporated into decision-making.
5. **Marine Park Interface:** That the Committee seek clarification on how the SCWA's role interacts with the Marine Parks Act 2004, and whether any mechanism exists for the SCWA to formally advise on or object to proposed conservation or marine park declarations affecting its waterways.

Conclusion

We support the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority because we believe professional, coordinated management is the best path forward for our river. But support is not unconditional. It depends on:

- A board that genuinely represents all users
- Consultation that is real, not performative
- Accountability that is transparent and ongoing
- A clear understanding that the 2023 Conservation Park threat must never succeed

The Noosa River is in very good health. The science proves it. Our job now is to keep it that way – accessible, sustainable, and managed by people who understand that a healthy river and an accessible river are one and the same.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew McCarthy – Treasurer, Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance - Noosaville

Craig Vella – President, Noosa Boating Fishing Alliance - Tewantin