

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Submission No: 030

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Publication: Making the submission and your name public

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority

Introduction

I support the establishment of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority (SCWA) as a single, dedicated entity to coordinate the sustainable use, management, and development of the Sunshine Coast's waterways. The current fragmentation across agencies has hindered effective planning and timely responses, particularly in sensitive and dynamic environments such as the Pumicestone Passage.

2. Background

For decades, warnings about erosion at northern Bribie Island and instability at the Caloundra Barwent unheeded. The January 2022 breakthrough of Bribie Island, which created a new tidal channel into Pumicestone Passage, caused significant erosion, infrastructure damage, and ecological disturbance—impacts that could have been avoided through active coastal management.^[1] These events are documented in the Bribie Island Erosion and Breakthrough Review commissioned by the Queensland Government, which made short-term emergency works and long-term management recommendations. The Sunshine Coast Council and Queensland Government are now implementing those through the Bribie Island Breakthrough Action Plan and emergency dredging works at Golden Beach and Diamond Head to protect community assets and habitats

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3. The Unique Significance of Pumicestone Passage

The Pumicestone Passage—a 35-kilometre tidal waterway separating Bribie Island and the mainland—is part of the Ramsar-listed Moreton Bay Marine Park and a declared fish habitat. It supports seagrass, mangroves, migratory birds, turtles, and dugongs while offering major recreational, cultural and economic value

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Its management is inherently complex, with multiple jurisdictions (Sunshine Coast Council, City of Moreton Bay, Queensland Parks and Wildlife, and Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners) and varied land uses including urban areas, agriculture, and national parklands.

4. Key Considerations for the SCWA

a) Representation and Decision-making:

- Board membership should reflect diverse expertise in ecology, coastal engineering, planning, and community engagement.
- Consider ex-officio membership for the Sunshine Coast Mayor or a nominated representative to ensure local accountability.
- Appointment of members should rest with the SCWA CEO to maintain operational independence.

b) Responsiveness and Localisation:

- The SCWA must maintain flexibility to tailor management plans to each waterway's needs, using shared data systems for efficiency.
- Establish community reference groups—such as the Pumicestone Passage Catchment Management Body (PPCMB) and the Caloundra Residents Association (CRA)—to provide evidence-based local input.

c) Transparency and Accountability:

- Commit to open reporting and community engagement.
- Ensure operational consistency with council and state planning frameworks.
- Embed an independent review mechanism to monitor performance.

5. Priority for Pumicestone Passage

Given the extraordinary environmental, economic, and social value of Pumicestone Passage, the SCWA's initial focus should be on implementing the long-term recommendations of the Bribie Island Erosion and Breakthrough Review, including:

1. Restoring the barrier function of Bribie Island to protect Caloundra and other coastal communities.
2. Stabilising the Caloundra Bar in its original position.
3. Integrating coastal engineering, habitat restoration, and monitoring to maintain tidal exchange,

salinity, and ecological processes.

These actions are critical to safeguard the health of the Passage, protect local infrastructure, and sustain livelihoods dependent on this remarkable environment.

6. Conclusion

The establishment of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct decades of fragmented management and secure the long-term resilience of the Sunshine Coast's river and coastal systems. Pumicestone Passage, given its high environmental and strategic importance, should be a foundational focus of the Authority's inaugural strategy and funding priorities. Delays will escalate costs and risks to homes, ecosystems, and the regional economy.