

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Submission No: 044

Submission By: Sandy Bolton MP, Member for Noosa



Member for Noosa

19 March 2026

Mr Jim McDonald MP

Chair

State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee

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Dear Mr McDonald 

Submission on Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Since the announcement of the proposed Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority (SCWA) during the 2024 state election campaign, numerous requests for information and consultation had been made to Minister for Transport and Main Roads on behalf of the Noosa electorate.

Detail was sought regarding how the proposed statutory authority would be resourced, how local issues would be represented, and the rationale for the inclusion of Noosa River and adjoining waterways given the extensive work already undertaken through the Noosa River Management Plan. This plan was based on significant public consultation with river users, residents, businesses, environmental groups and Noosa Council, over an extensive period, with its final stage only commenced earlier this year.

This submission is made as the various questions raised that have not been adequately addressed to date nor within the *Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026* (the Bill), or the public hearing on 18 March, and we seek clarity on these as below:

Consultation: Clause 19 of the Bill states that SCWA must take 'reasonable steps' to consult with stakeholders and the public. Details are required on what these steps will be given there has been no real consultation with the Noosa community, Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners or Noosa Council. This must incorporate a public forum to ensure that all users of our river and waterways are heard including commercial operators, recreational and sporting groups, Kabi Kabi Aboriginal Corporation (KKAC), environmental advocates, tourism representatives, and the broader community, as well as Noosa Council, Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). Importantly, that the minutes of the forum and any engagements be publicly available as part of a transparent process.



Funding: with \$35.6 million of taxpayer money allocated to the SCWA over three years for establishment costs and core operations, further details are required on the funding mechanism and reporting framework, as well instances where additional funding is required, such as for dredging activities. Also, an analysis on the comparative budget and operational performance objectives of the existing Gold Coast Waterways Authority (GCWA), and what proportion of any funding will be allocated to additional MSQ officers and whether any funding will be utilised from existing or future MSQ budgets.

Rationale: the inclusion of Noosa River and the adjoining waterways requires clarification as to why, given the requests to governments over many years has been for extra MSQ resources on the ground for monitoring and compliance, as well infrastructure, not another level of bureaucracy.

Resources: as above, must be a fiscal priority, including additional MSQ officers to ensure safety, amenity and compliance. Assurances must be provided that no funding for the SCWA come from existing operational budgets, such as from MSQ.

Customisation: must be prioritised to reflect that the communities incorporated under the SCWA and associated waterways systems are unique. So far, there has been no indication as to how this will occur, and in the public hearing, no mention of how the SCWA interacts with local governments regarding foreshores under their management.

Representation: Noosa River and its adjoining waterways must be appropriately represented for the Noosa community in the composition of the seven-person Chair and Board. This to ensure that relevant local knowledge to specific issues is considered in any decision making by the SCWA, including for dispute resolution, and that this representation is not politically biased. So far, there has been no mention of how this will be addressed, including in the public hearing.

Governance: with Clause 24 providing that the SCWA board 'has the powers to do anything necessary or convenient for the performance of its functions', detail is required regarding transparency and oversight, including the criteria the Minister will use to review the authority every three years, as required by Clause 68.

Responsibilities: with the public hearing confirming MSQ will fulfil different roles with the SCWA compared with the existing GCWA, and the rest of Queensland, duties must be clearly delineated to avoid blurred lines, including clarity for the public in reporting concerns over waterways issues.

Conclusion

Directing public resources, especially when there have been serious funding shortfalls over many years 'on the ground', to the establishment of a new statutory body that government has yet to reveal the reason why beyond being a 'one stop shop' misses relevant points. These include the very real risk of duplication of effort, and potential loss of the direct contact river users currently enjoy with the agencies, resulting in ultimately slower processes from the added extra 'layer'.

Importantly, without a substantial increase in budget for MSQ, our rivers will continue to experience ongoing resourcing shortfalls, which leads to the issues consistently raised over decades being unresolved, resulting in greater costs to taxpayers through addressing wrecks, pollution and unsafe waterways.

Alternatives to an SCWA have been suggested over the last eighteen months that warrant consideration as they are much more economical and issue focused, such as what was piloted via the Noosa River Stakeholder Advisory Committee (NRSAC) that could be convened as needed for serious matters such as Pumicestone passage. Of note, the existing Noosa River Management Plan developed via the NRSAC was acknowledged by the current government in 2025 for its high level of compliance, staged approach, and community endorsement. Any efforts going forward must follow this format, especially regarding any changes to the various aspects of our rivers and foreshores.

From what has been heard and read so far, there is nothing in the establishment of the SCWA that will address any of these concerns. With the government pushing for a 1 July 2026 commencement date, these concerns and the questions that remain, must be addressed as a priority.

Yours sincerely



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Member for Noosa