

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Submission No: 047

Submission By: Sunshine Coast Environment Council

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The Secretariat
State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
By email: SDIWC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Secretariat

Submission: The Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026 by the Sunshine Coast Environment Council

Executive Summary

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council (SCEC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the proposed *Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority (SCWA) Bill 2026*.

The scope and purpose of this Bill is extensive and carries inherent risks and potentially positive opportunities. To deliver on its stated purpose of sustainable use, significant amendments are required.

In its current form, the Bill lacks sufficient safeguards to ensure that management actions sustainably maintain or improve ecological health, adequately consider cumulative impacts, and are informed by robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. There are also gaps in governance, including insufficient clarity on jurisdictional boundaries and a lack of mandated local and First Nations input.

SCEC considers that the Bill must be strengthened to embed ecological integrity as a core decision-making principle and approach, ensure transparent and science-based management, and provide for meaningful local participation in governance and planning.

Key recommendations of this submission include:

1. Strengthening ecological risk management and cumulative impact assessment
2. Embedding robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting frameworks
3. Ensuring genuine local and First Nations input into management planning
4. Clarifying jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities
5. Improving governance through strengthened, representative board composition

1. Introduction

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council (SCEC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill. 2026*. Though expresses concern at the lack of community consultation prior to the Bill being tabled.

The Sunshine Coast's waterways, including its rivers, estuaries, wetlands and coastal systems are of profound environmental and cultural significance. These interconnected systems support critical habitats for fish, shorebirds, marine species and riparian ecosystems, while also providing essential ecological functions. They underpin the region's identity and lifestyle. SCEC urges the Bill be strengthened to embed ecological integrity as a core decision-making principle and obligation, ensure transparent and science-based management, and provide for meaningful local participation in governance and planning.

2. Acknowledgement of Country

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council acknowledges Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Country and acknowledges Kabi Kabi People and Jinibara People as Traditional Custodians of the Sunshine Coast region and pays respect to Elders past and present.

3. About Sunshine Coast Environment Council

Established in 1980, the Sunshine Coast Environment Council is the peak not-for-profit and non-partisan environmental advocacy organisation for the greater Sunshine Coast and adjoining regions.

As the Regional Conservation Council, SCEC represents 50 member organisations operating across:

- Noosa and Sunshine Coast Hinterlands
- K'gari
- coastal areas from Cooloola to Yarun (Bribie Island)
- six regional catchments.

These groups collectively represent almost 10,000 individuals, with SCEC engaging a further 5,000 supporters in environmental protection, conservation, restoration and sustainability initiatives.

3. Key Strategic Issues

3.1 Managing Ecological Risk

The Bill currently does not explicitly require that management actions are underpinned by ecological risk assessment. Given the scale and potential impacts of activities such as dredging, sediment management, and infrastructure, this represents a significant gap.

SCEC recommends the Bill mandate a precautionary, science-based approach to ecological risk, including:

- In the preparation of a Waterways Management Strategy (Part 3, Division 1) and a Waterways Management Program (Part 3, Division 2), mandatory ecological risk assessments of direct and indirect impacts prior to all proposed management activities must be undertaken.
- A requirement that actions result in no net decline in ecological health with reporting mechanisms to monitor this
- Application of the Precautionary Principle where data and relevant information is lacking or uncertain

- SCEC does not support the intention that an amendment regulation will implement components in subordinate legislation, specifically tidal works development assessment due to the complexity, potential permanence and risk of such substantive works. It is fundamental to have such activities in the primary legislation to ensure the necessary scrutiny and assessment commensurate with the scale, extent, nature and impact of such works

3.2 Cumulative Impact Assessment

The Bill does not address cumulative impacts arising from multiple activities across waterways. Incremental impacts from dredging, and coastal infrastructure, can cumulatively and irreversibly degrade ecological systems.

SCEC recommends:

- A statutory requirement to assess cumulative impacts at catchment and regional scales
- Integration of cumulative impact modelling into management strategies
- Consideration of climate change as a compounding stressor

3.3 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

Effective and sustainable waterway management requires transparent and ongoing monitoring systems. The Bill must include clear requirements for monitoring ecological health and evaluating management effectiveness, impacts and adaptive management strategies.

SCEC recommends:

- Establishment of measurable ecological indicators (for example; water quality, biodiversity, habitat extent and condition)
- A Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting (MELR) framework
- Transparent Public reporting and open data access
- Adaptive management triggers linked to monitoring outcomes
- Monitoring and reporting of cumulative impacts and changes per 3.2

3.4 Local and First Nations Input

The Bill's Explanatory Notes state an intention for greater local input, however the Bill does not mandate this. Effective and appropriate management requires structured, ongoing engagement with relevant parties, groups, rights holders and local communities.

It is inappropriate that the Kabi Kabi Aboriginal People's Corporation, as Native Title holders and as the Traditional Owners over these waterways and catchments have not been consulted to date. This also extends to the Jinibara Peoples Aboriginal Corporation as Native Title holders whose Country connects with that of Kabi Kabi

SCEC recommends:

- Mandatory consultation with Traditional Custodians, Catchment Management Groups and representative bodies
- Establishment of catchment-based advisory sub-committees
- Integration of Catchment Management Plans and Strategies including but not limited to;
 - Local government Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategies, Shoreline Erosion Management Plans, related policies and strategies
 - Resilient Rivers Catchment Action Plans
- Long-term resourcing for First Nations, NGO and community participation

3.5 Jurisdictional Clarity

The Bill lacks clarity regarding jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities, particularly in relation to upstream limits, artificial waterways, and funding responsibilities.

SCEC recommends:

- Clear definition of spatial jurisdiction for each waterway
- Clarification of State vs Local Government roles and responsibilities
- Guidance on management of canals and modified systems
- Clear definition, explanation and framework for the term ‘marine zones’
 - This term does not appear in the Explanatory Notes¹ or the Bill²
 - This SCWA Act does not affect the operation of the *Marine Parks Act (2004)*³ which generally designates and administers ‘marine park zones’
 - However, the term ‘marine zones’ is used in;
 - the Explanatory Speech by Minister Mickelberg on 4th March 2026,⁴
 - the Departmental Briefing Note to the Committee 18th March 2026⁵
 - the Public Briefing to the Committee by a representative of the Department of Transport and Main Roads on 18th March 2026⁶

3.6 Board Composition and Governance

Strong and good governance is essential to ensure independent and evidence-based decision-making. The current provisions do not guarantee representation from key regional stakeholders.

¹ <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5826t0275/5826t275.pdf>

² <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5826t0274/5826t274.pdf>

³ <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5826t0274/5826t274.pdf>

Part 1, 4(d)

⁴ https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/events/han/2026/2026_03_04_WEEKLY.pdf#page=58

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<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/SDIWC-1AF9/SCWAB2026-5266/Departmental%20Brief%20by%20Transport%20and%20Main%20Roads%20-%2016%20March%202026.pdf>

⁶

<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/SDIWC-1AF9/SCWAB2026-5266/Proof%20-%20Public%20Briefing.%2018%20March%202026.pdf>

SCEC recommends ex officio Board positions for:

- Sunshine Coast Regional Council
- Noosa Council
- Moreton Bay Regional Council
- Kabi Kabi Native Title holders
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- SCEC also recommends transparent appointment processes and skills-based selection criteria

Conclusion

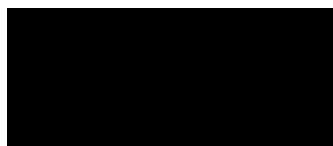
The Sunshine Coast waterways hold profound environmental, cultural and community importance. To avoid and minimise potential risks to these values arising from management activities under the proposed Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority, it is essential the Bill establishes a strong and transparent framework for environmental protection, including clear requirements for ecological risk assessments and the consideration of cumulative impacts.

As these waterways are not only vital ecological systems, but also living cultural landscapes and community assets that underpin the region's identity and wellbeing, it is critical that Kabi Kabi peoples are represented on the Authority's Board and that meaningful community input is embedded as a compulsory element of decision-making.

Overall, the Bill requires strengthening to ensure ecological protection, appropriate local input, and effective governance. SCEC urges these recommended amendments be adopted.

Thank you for due consideration of our submission. We also welcome the opportunity to give evidence at the Committee hearing scheduled for the 1st of April and any other assistance we may provide.

Yours sincerely,



Narelle McCarthy
Advocacy and Engagement Manager
On behalf of the Sunshine Coast Environment Council Inc.

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