

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

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Submission By: Renay Wells

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SUBMISSION — SUNSHINE COAST WATERWAYS AUTHORITY BILL 2026

Individual Submission

SUBMISSION DETAILS

Name: Renay Wells

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

I am a Master of Environment student at Griffith University, specialising in Sustainable Business and Climate Change Adaptation. My studies focus on environmental governance, integrated planning, and climate resilience. I am also a Sunshine Coast resident with a strong interest in the long-term health and management of the region's waterways, including the Pumicestone Passage and its connected catchments.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I support the intent of establishing a coordinated waterways authority for the Sunshine Coast. However, the current Bill requires strengthening to ensure it delivers improved environmental outcomes and does not simply consolidate existing management practices.

Waterways such as the Pumicestone Passage form part of a highly interconnected coastal system, linked to Ramsar-listed wetlands and subject to increasing pressures from development, water quality decline, and coastal processes. Effective governance must therefore prioritise ecological integrity, cumulative impact assessment, and integrated catchment management.

This submission outlines key recommendations to strengthen the Bill and ensure it aligns with contemporary environmental governance principles.

2. INTEGRATED AND SYSTEMS-BASED MANAGEMENT

Effective waterways governance requires recognition of the interdependence between ecological systems, economic activity, and community wellbeing.

From an environmental planning perspective, waterways should be managed as **connected catchment-to-coast systems**, where upstream land use and hydrology directly influence downstream ecosystem health.

The proposed Authority should adopt an **integrated catchment management approach**, rather than a fragmented or activity-based model of governance.

3. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

Waterways provide significant ecological and economic value through the provision of **ecosystem services**, including water filtration, habitat provision, coastal protection, and recreation.

These values are often not fully accounted for in decision-making, leading to **market failure and overuse of environmental resources**.

Recommendation:

- Require that all management actions maintain or improve ecological condition
- Embed the precautionary principle in decision-making

Where uncertainty exists, particularly in sensitive coastal environments, precautionary approaches should be applied to avoid long-term environmental harm.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH THE EPBC ACT

The Bill does not explicitly recognise the **Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)** under Part 1, Section 4.

Recommendation:

- Amend the Bill to include the EPBC Act
- Require referral and consideration where Matters of National Environmental Significance may be impacted

It is inconsistent to recognise the international significance of connected wetland systems without embedding the primary federal legislation designed to protect them.

5. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are a key driver of environmental degradation in coastal and estuarine systems.

Individual activities may appear low impact in isolation, but their combined effect over time can exceed ecological thresholds. This reflects a recognised limitation in environmental planning frameworks.

Recommendation:

Require cumulative impact assessment across:

- Dredging
 - Infrastructure development
 - Vessel activity
 - Catchment inputs
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6. ECOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT

Recommendation: Require ecological risk assessments prior to all management activities.

This ensures decisions are:

- Evidence-based
 - Transparent
 - Consistent with best-practice environmental governance
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7. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Recommendation:

- Require robust ecological indicators
- Ensure public access to monitoring data
- Implement transparent reporting frameworks

Monitoring should include water quality, sediment processes, habitat condition, and biodiversity.

8. MANAGEMENT OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Ongoing maintenance of canals, navigation channels, and shoreline infrastructure is necessary. However, current approaches should be subject to review.

The continued need for recurrent intervention indicates that existing management approaches may not be optimally aligned with natural coastal processes.

Recommendation:

- Review existing dredging and nourishment practices
- Investigate alignment with natural sediment transport processes

- Reduce reliance on repeated artificial intervention where feasible

This reflects the need to move beyond **path dependency** in environmental management.

9. INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING PROGRAMS

Effective governance should build on existing regional initiatives.

Recommendation:

- Integrate with programs such as the **Resilient Rivers Initiative**
 - Recognise existing catchment-based management frameworks
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10. LOCAL INPUT AND KNOWLEDGE

Local knowledge plays an important role in identifying environmental issues and informing management decisions.

Recommendation:

- Ensure meaningful consultation with community groups and Traditional Custodians
 - Establish mechanisms for ongoing local input
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11. GOVERNANCE AND JURISDICTION

The Bill would benefit from greater clarity regarding:

- Jurisdictional boundaries
- Roles across State and Local Government
- Interaction with existing agencies

Recommendation:

- Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms
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12. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR REFORM

The establishment of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority presents a critical opportunity to:

- Undertake a comprehensive review of existing management practices
- Align decision-making with contemporary scientific evidence
- Improve long-term ecological outcomes

The Authority should function as a framework for improving management practices, rather than simply continuing existing approaches.

13. CONCLUSION

The proposed Authority has the potential to improve waterways governance. However, without strengthening, there is a risk it will prioritise efficiency over ecological integrity and fail to address cumulative environmental impacts.

This is an opportunity to align waterways management with contemporary science and long-term sustainability.