

# Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

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**Case for River-Specific Protection: Why the Noosa River Cannot Be Managed as Just Another Catchment**

The Noosa River is not a typical east coast waterway, and it cannot be effectively protected within broad, regionalised catchment frameworks. Its hydrology, ecology, and pressures are fundamentally distinct, and any management approach that treats it as interchangeable with other systems risks accelerating its decline.

Current planning instruments such as regional catchment strategies and report card methodologies developed by Healthy Land & Water serve a purpose at a macro scale, but they are inherently limited. By design, they aggregate data across diverse systems, smoothing out local variation and masking critical differences. In the case of the Noosa River, this results in a misleading picture of environmental condition and risk.

The Noosa system is heavily influenced by low-nutrient, sand-filtered inflows, including those from areas such as Teewah Creek. This gives the river naturally high water clarity and a sensitivity to disturbance that is not reflected in standard regional benchmarks. Applying generic water quality targets to such a system fails to recognise that even small deviations from its natural state can represent significant ecological decline.

Furthermore, the persistent narrative that upper catchment inputs particularly from Kin Kin Creek—are the primary source of degradation is an oversimplification. While these inputs are relevant, they do not account for the dominant pressures currently affecting the river's lower reaches. Vessel traffic, wake-induced erosion, shoreline modification, and intense recreational use are immediate and measurable drivers of ecological stress. These impacts are largely invisible within catchment-scale reporting frameworks.

Local monitoring undertaken by Noosa Shire Council provides a more accurate and responsive understanding of conditions within the river itself. This data captures site specific trends and pressures that are essential for informed management, yet it is often subordinated to broader regional assessments that lack this level of resolution.

To continue managing the Noosa River within a generalised regional framework is to ignore its defining characteristics. It dilutes accountability, misdirects management effort, and ultimately places a unique and vulnerable system at risk.

What is required is a governance model that recognises the Noosa River as a special class waterway. A proposed Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority must not simply consolidate existing arrangements; it must embed river-specific management within its structure. For the Noosa River, this means establishing bespoke ecological thresholds, prioritising in river pressures, and elevating local data as a primary decision making tool.

In practical terms, success will depend on shifting from a "one size fits all" approach to one that is explicitly tailored, evidence based, and place specific.

The Noosa River's uniqueness is not a constraint it is precisely why it demands a different standard of care.