

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

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State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee

Dear Sir, Madam

This submission supports the establishment of a dedicated waterways authority; however, it raises **critical concerns** regarding governance, environmental protection, scope, and legislative gaps that must be addressed to ensure the Authority is effective.

The community has consistently called for the establishment of a waterways authority to ensure that issues are addressed in a timely, coordinated, and accountable manner. This call has arisen from sustained frustration with fragmented governance arrangements, where multiple agencies have resulted in delay, inaction, and a failure to respond appropriately to emerging risks. Of particular concern has been the repeated dismissal of local knowledge. Community requests for an assessment of wash-over impacts on Bribie Island prior to the breakthrough were not acted upon, despite clear warnings. The consequences of this failure have been significant and avoidable. In this context, **it is imperative that the proposed authority embeds genuine community representation**. The committee meetings must include representatives from local councils, Traditional Owners, scientific experts, and community groups to ensure decisions are informed, transparent, and grounded in both evidence and lived experience. The Board and/or the CEO and designated public service staff need to be located in the Sunshine Coast region in order to be accessible to the public.

The Bill, as currently drafted, contains a critical gap in its treatment of ecological and environmental protection. While Maritime Safety Queensland provides an established framework for vessel safety, there is no equivalent authority or mandate to safeguard the ecological integrity of the waterways themselves. This imbalance must be addressed. The protection of fauna, flora, and ecological processes is not secondary to navigational safety; it is fundamental to the long-term sustainability of the waterway. Migratory birds, for example, rely on sandbanks for feeding and roosting, and declining water quality directly threatens marine life. The Bill must therefore require a **comprehensive environmental monitoring regime**, incorporating both rigorous scientific testing and a **visible on-water presence**. The Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority must be **appropriately resourced and empowered to actively monitor environmental conditions** and regulate activities that may compromise water quality or ecosystem health.

The Bill must also explicitly recognise and address cumulative impacts. It is well established that the degradation of waterways is rarely the result of a single action, but rather the accumulation of multiple pressures over time. Accordingly, **all impact assessments must consider cumulative effects across the waterway and its catchment**, rather than assessing proposals in isolation. This requirement should be clearly embedded in the legislation, alongside provisions ensuring that assessments are conducted transparently and made publicly available prior to decision-making.

While the proposed authority is to operate under the Department of Transport and Main Roads and focus on navigable waterways between Noosa and the southern end of Pumicestone Passage, this scope is insufficient if it does not account for the interconnected nature of water systems. Waterways are not discrete entities; they are shaped by their broader catchments, including creeks, canals, and non-navigable tributaries. Activities occurring upstream or outside designated navigable areas can have significant downstream impacts. To be effective, **the authority must have the capacity to consider, influence, and where necessary regulate activities across the broader catchment** that may adversely affect waterway health.

Finally, given that Pumicestone Passage forms part of a Ramsar-listed wetland of international significance, the Bill must explicitly require that **any major management actions be referred under the EPBC Act**. This is essential to ensure the protection of Matters of National Environmental Significance and to uphold Australia's international environmental obligations.

In summary the Bill needs to include:

- Powers for the authority to regulate activities which may degrade water quality or ecosystem health.
- Comprehensive monitoring programmes, including scientific testing. Assessments which consider the entire waterway and catchment.
- Dedicated on water presence for environmental oversight.
- Powers for the authority to influence or regulate activities that may adversely affect waterway health, including those outside and navigable areas.
- Cumulative impact assessments for all relevant proposals.
- Committee meetings need to include representatives from local councils. Scientific experts, community groups, and traditional owners.
- Mandatory transparency, with assessments publicly available prior to decisions being made.
- Referral under the EPBC Act for any major management actions.

The establishment of a Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority is strongly supported. However, **without the inclusion of the above measures, the Authority risks replicating the very governance failures it is intended to resolve.**