

Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

Submission No: 089

Submission By: Ken Mewburn

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The Chair
State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Chair,

Submission-Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026

General Comment:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposed Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill. I support the development of Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority and make the following suggestions in relation to the SCWA Bill 2026.

SCWA Bill

The SCWA Bill 2026 proposes the establishment of a new statutory body to manage the waterways of the Sunshine Coast. This includes the Pumicestone Passage, Noosa Lakes, Noosa River, Mooloolah River and Maroochy River. This covers a large geographical area and a diverse range of management needs. The Bill is based on the Gold Coast Waterways Authority Act 2012.

A subtle difference between the GCWA and SCWA is the diversity in the range of management. The GCWA has little requirement for environmental management whereas the SCWA has a complex mix of environmental and commercial interests. This does not appear to be clearly recognised in the proposed Bill.

A clear omission in Part 1, section 4: Relationship with other Acts is the EPBC Act 1999 which is the primary Act covering issues relating to the Ramsar designation of Moreton Bay Marine Park which includes Pumicestone Passage.

The omission of reference to the EPBC Act may have reasons not adequately explained in supporting documents, however, could be indicative of a limited priority for environmental issues in the areas where they are significant and should take precedence in management decisions for the specific area.

The protection of species, including migratory birds and the integration of the Migratory Bird Agreements which exist for the Moreton Bay Ramsar area and Pumicestone Passage, should be specifically noted, in the Act and in the IMS and Masterplan.

Management Strategy

I agree with the requirement of the 10-year Management Strategy and suggest the creation of a Masterplan in addition to the requirement listed for a **Waterways Management Strategy** to guide the objectives to be achieved in relation to SCWA. Developing a Management program for a financial year and a 3 year period will ensure that any Masterplan or Management Strategy is reviewed in a timely manner. There are some examples of an Integrated Management Strategy and several local Management Plans for Pumicestone Passage and other waterways in existence from which the creation of a Masterplan could be designed.

The requirement to develop a Waterways Management Strategy, should include the requirement to development a Waterways Masterplan.

Scope of Management

The proposed SCWA could hold a broader mandate than the GCWA and include sand and sediment monitoring and the coastal management of the Bribie Island Spit. Bribie Island Spit should be subject to Queensland Coastal Management Plans and the Sunshine Coast Council Shoreline Erosion Management Plan (SEMP) as applies to other areas of the Sunshine Coast. Bribie Island Spit has been subject to anthropogenic influence and the ultimate consequences culminated in the breakthrough in 2022. The SCWA should be a major benefit to management of Bribie if given the appropriate mandate. Bribie Island, in addition to its valuable role as a barrier island, is a vital habitat for wildlife and coastal vegetation within the Passage. A large area of this has been lost with the loss of the Spit demonstrating the consequences of limited and ineffective management. Important cultural heritage values and sites were also lost with the erosion of the Island.

In addition to the individual requirements of the other waterways within the SCWA, Pumicestone Passage will require significant consideration to mitigate the consequences of the Bribie Island breakthrough and restore the original dynamics upon which the local ecology is dependent. These considerations will include the central section, the area embracing the “Narrows and the Skids” which is critical to the dynamics and the retention of the area as a double ended estuary rather than a divided two estuary system. This area is at risk of closure due to increased sand and sediment movement and deposition, and the risk will be further exacerbated by development that impacts the region. Ignoring previous government produced documents that provided justified population recommendations for the catchment and development limitations has created a more difficult management challenge. Cumulative impacts from progressive change are evident and need specific consideration for each catchment.

Relationship with existing agencies and organisations

The relationship between the SCWA and the current government, council and NGO management that controls the management and decisions relating to the Pumicestone Passage must be clarified and allow the SCWA to have the ability to make decisions. The Pumicestone Passage has management input from 14 different government and NGO's with complex overlapping responsibility. Unless the SCWA can be a primary decision maker, it simply introduces an additional layer of management.

The relationship with MSQ will be an important feature of SCWA. The operation of MSQ functions must be integrated with the SCWA.

Content of Management Area

The SCWA covers a network of waterbodies, within the local government boundaries of three councils, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast and Noosa. It embraces two Biosphere areas, the Noosa Biosphere and the Sunshine Coast Biosphere. The SCWA area is subject to the complex differences in hydrological dynamics, ecological communities and recreational uses. There are environmental and navigational problems caused by sand movement in the Maroochy and Mooloolah river systems.

The above demonstrates a need for the SCWA to have primary responsibility for decision making and the guidance of effective masterplanning. It also demonstrates the importance of compliance and consideration of environmental controls and responsibilities and the variability of the different waterways.

Ecological and Environmental Management

Ecological protection needs to be a non-negotiable baseline. The Pumicestone Passage is part of the Moreton Bay Marine Park and as such is included as part of a Ramsar designated wetland. Action within the Passage and the tributary creeks may impact Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES). The requirement for Referral under the EPBC Act will apply to the management requirements for the Passage.

The overlay of the Ramsar Status should, however, not preclude efficient management of the area or compliance with the Roles and Responsibility assigned to locations with Ramsar designation. The requirement for Referral and approvals under the EPBC Act does demonstrate the essential requirement for effective management planning allowing advanced application for approvals. This provides for "proactive" management rather than "reactive" response.

The creation of the SCWA provides an opportune time for review of previous management policies and operational restrictions applied to management. Beach nourishment along Golden Beach is an example of less than optimum outcome due to restrictions imposed on location for dredging. The boundary of the FHA should be reviewed or beach nourishment dredging permitted within the boundary to avoid operation within the Depth of Closure for the beach. Alternatively, review the use of

beach nourishment as an erosion control and consider alternatives such as undercurrent stabilisers.

The SCWA operates within an area specified for wetland management under the Resilient Rivers program. This is a partnership between the Council of Mayors (SEQ), Southeast Queensland Councils, the Australian Government, the Queensland Government, water utilities, key regional waterways and catchment organisations and the community.

The emphasis on ecological preservation cannot be overstressed. Resilient Rivers was established as a response to the devastation of the 2011 and 2013 floods to deliver co-ordinated catchment management to improve health and resilience to Southeast Queensland's Catchments waterways with particular attention to the Ramsar listed Moreton Bay, a wetland of international importance.

It is important that SCWA works in co-operation with RRSEQ and supports the key goals designed to improve the waterways. As a financial contributor to the RRSEQ, the State Government should use the benefits derived from this program to assist the SCWA to enhance the environmental values of all the waterways included in the SCWA area.

Composition of Board

The format of the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Board should include Ex Officio appointment from each council and a First Nations Representative from Kabi Kabi. The selection of a board without expertise concerning the waterways for which it takes management control will diminish the potential benefit of the SCWA. Inclusion of ex Officio appointments from the councils and First Nations will ensure that expertise exists.

Appointment of a CEO could be best achieved through a competitive and merit-based recruitment process. A ministerial appointment of the CEO may be a reason for tension between the CEO and the board. The board should be accountable to the Minister.

Community Consultation

The Board should ensure effective community consultation. Community consultation is an asset to any management program; however, it is often either undervalued or poorly utilised. Community consultation should include ongoing updates to community organisations and meetings with such as convenient and warranted, which ideally should equal a frequency commensurate with major planned works within the SCWA Authority area.

Conclusion

The formation of the SCWA is an opportunity to correct previous management deficiencies, create new and improved methodology to achieve objectives and provide an opportunity for holistic management of the total catchment system.

Integration with current catchment plans and environmental recognition is a critical factor in addition to recognising the different and complex natures of each of the waterway catchments involved.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Mewburn', written in a cursive style.

Ken Mewburn OAM

