



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 14 May 2026

SUNSHINE COAST WATERWAYS AUTHORITY BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (11.41 am): Spending \$35.6 million of taxpayers' money on a new level of bureaucracy calls for robust questions. With Noosa absorbed under the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026 and our river the beating heart of our community, international brand and ethos, understandably the lack of consultation with our community during its 18 months of development, clarity of benefits and why it is needed led to concerns not only from Noosa but also from all local government areas captured under this authority.

The Noosa biosphere, incorporating our waterways, is unique, with 60 distinct ecosystems that are home to multiple species of migratory birds and our everglades being one of only two such systems on earth. We admit we are passionate about their wellbeing. Our river as well as Castaways and Weyba creeks and lakes Cooroibah, Cootharaba, Doonella and Weyba are more than assets for residents and visitors. Economically, environmentally and socially—throwing a line in, rowing, skiing, splashing or paddleboarding—every age immerses in its offerings and benefits. Fortunately, thanks to our volunteers and organisations, Noosa has a relatively healthy waterway, moving between excellent and very good for the last decade according to the Healthy Land and Water Report Card.

Maritime Safety Queensland, Noosa Council, stakeholders and user groups via the Noosa River Stakeholder Advisory Committee, known as NRSAC, have worked together since 2021 to develop and finally implement six stages of the Noosa River management plan after decades of inaction by successive state governments led to rotting hulks, dangerous intersections between water users and a lack of resourcing to enforce existing rules and legislation. Finally, the angst of the community was being addressed, with over 50 fewer noncompliant vessels on the river. However, during hearings and in Noosa submissions, concerns which we believe would have been addressed by a second version of NRSAC were aired. That led to frustration and support for a waterways authority to resolve issues such as flood mitigation or infrastructure needs identified in the MSQ 2022 demand forecasting study.

Even with the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority to become the primary decision-maker for all waterways management within its geographic area, presumably the status quo will remain whereby the current oversubscribed bucket of MSQ funds for staffing and boating infrastructure will be fought over and associated onshore infrastructure would remain the domain of local government. As it stands, I cannot see these needs being addressed by more bureaucracy. Can honourable members?

Concerningly, there is no mention within the bill of the environment or benchmarking, as the Sunshine Coast Environmental Council, the Kabi Kabi Peoples Aboriginal Corporation and the Noosa Integrated Catchment Association raised. For full integration one would have thought those would be essential, along with a definition for 'sustainable'. A major sticking point between submitters has been the composition of the seven-member board, with all three local governments adamant they have a seat at the table given what Sunshine Coast Council call 'overlapping mandates without clear hierarchy or dispute resolution'. Others see the board comprising experts in the relevant areas to avoid local

government overreach. Given the councils work together via Resilient Rivers SEQ, there is a recurring question: will this authority deliver benefits or slow things down through duplication or what communities and organisations see as already choking bureaucracy?

It appears the impetus for the authority's establishment was the urgent needs in Bribie and Pumicestone. I trust that dedicated funding buckets are going to be developed to address other identified needs, including for Noosa, to avoid all funds being consumed by one or two major issues that are prioritised over those determined less urgent.

Since the government first announced this proposed authority in 2024 as an election commitment, I have asked consistently: how will Noosa benefit? At the public hearing, I asked witnesses from Noosa to identify one project or initiative needed, and there were some suggested. On-water storage, jetties, an integrated plan and boat ramp upgrades were mentioned. These all could be addressed right now with increased funding without an authority.

Where did we get to after the inquiry into this bill? There is still a lack of clarity about where the SCWA remit begins and ends; confusion over the delineation between SCWA, MSQ, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority—AMSA—and local government; and no guaranteed voice for communities. The only reference from the department is 'to take reasonable steps to consult'. Ultimately, the government made a decision to implement this authority with a hefty price tag without consulting key stakeholders or articulating the benefits. There was not one recommendation from the committee nor amendments to address submitters' concerns. Going forward, I urge the new authority to allay concerns and the government to fund at least seven extra MSQ officers for our region and separate buckets of unknown millions for the authority to deliver tangible benefits. With a review due in three years, I urge them to ensure that is made publicly available.

I thank the chair, the secretariat and the committee for their hard work and for giving me permission to attend the public hearing. I thank all who submitted and attended for their forthright manner in responding to concerns around potential large-scale marinas or superyachts for Noosa. I especially thank the many volunteers who over decades have provided their expertise and time to our waterways. They test and audit, pick up endless rubbish, plant trees to reduce erosion and sediment and provide grassroots education on every aspect of river life. May the many issues they are confronted with be addressed in budgets and their concerns about this new authority never be realised. May the government in budget announcements not shelve one-third of that \$35.6 million in set-up costs for Noosa. Our community was never asked about this authority, and \$12 million would go a long way to delivering what is actually needed and requested instead of providing another level of bureaucracy.