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Recognising and upholding excellence in local government

20 March 2026

Submission to the State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee

SUNSHINE COAST WATERWAYS AUTHORITY BILL 2026

Submission made by

The Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents Inc. (OSCAR) The Sunshine Coast Association of Residents Inc. (OSCAR) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit peak body/umbrella group representing resident and community organisations across the Sunshine Coast and Noosa Local Government Areas in South East Queensland.

OSCAR currently comprises 36 member groups spanning from Pumicestone Passage to Noosa and from the Coast to the Hinterland and Ranges. Collectively, these organisations represent several thousand engaged, community-minded residents who are deeply committed to protecting the environmental, cultural and social values of our region.

OSCAR's overarching Vision states:

"The residents of this region enjoy being part of a connected and engaged community living in an area of outstanding natural beauty. They recognise that they are custodians of the unique and abundant biodiversity, beaches and green spaces of the region."

OSCAR aims to support member organisations by:

- 1 Advocating to local and state government and the public on policy issues that are of regional significance and of concern to our members;
- 2 Acting to resolve issues of strategic or region-wide relevance that are referred by member organisations;
- 3 Representing the member organisations on region-wide matters of interest to the community;
- 4 Maintaining awareness and responsiveness through frequent and regular ordinary meetings and dialogue with member organisations; and

5 Practising professional, honest and ethical conduct.

Introduction

OSCAR members appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to *State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee* in relation to the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority Bill 2026. Our comments are made in the spirit of offering suggestions to enhance the Bill and set it in the context of good governance, genuine engagement within and across agencies, Local Government and the community currently involved in the Sunshine Coast Waterways and across a range of disciplines and activities. Importantly any actions relating to waterways must be undertaken within the context of sustainability.

OSCAR reminds the Committee that two of the three Local Governments in the area under consideration are Designated Biosphere Reserves (Noosa Shire Council and Sunshine Coast Regional Council).

As this is a new authority where there are three very independent Local Governments as well as a significant number of State agencies involved, the community expects to see the Authority set a very high standard in decision-making, actions and community engagement.

OSCAR hopes that the new SC Waterways Authority will consider the challenges and differences as identified below and commented on by the submissions.

OSCAR Recommendations

A. Governance - Strengthen the Evidence Base on Fragmented Governance & Need for Coordination

The Explanatory Notes explicitly acknowledge “**piecemeal management of waterways**” and lack of a single coordinating entity on the Sunshine Coast, especially highlighted during the **Bribie Island breakthrough**.

Recommendation 1: That the Act include a statutory duty to coordinate across agencies, not just discretionary powers.

B. Evidenced-based, scientific decisions

The Bill allows for a board and a CEO but **does not provide for specialist sub-committee(s)**, despite the technical complexity of coastal geomorphology, sediment dynamics, hydrology, and environmental regulation. The Authority must base its management decisions on **scientific data**.

A sub-committee would:

- include independent marine scientists, hydrologists, coastal engineers, and ecologists
- advise the Board on sediment movement, climate resilience, water quality, ecological risk, and cumulative impacts
- oversee long-term monitoring and ensure evidence-based decisions

Recommendation 2 –That a Statutory Science and Technical Advisory Sub-Committee be established

C. Strengthen the Case for Independence from Ministerial or Political Influence

Board Composition and process The Bill as drafted:

- Allows the **Minister to appoint the CEO**, not the Board.
- Gives the Minister significant powers over the strategy's approval and amendments.
- Risks creating political pressure points on operational decisions.

The Explanatory Notes state the SCWA will “operate independently” yet the Bill's governance structure undermines this. Therefore this contradiction justifies

Recommendation 3

That Section 25 on Board Composition must be amended to prescribe the inclusion of:

- Statutory amendments to ensure independence consistent with standard governance norms for statutory authorities.
- 4 ex officio appointments; Noosa Council, Sunshine Coast Regional Council, Kabi Kabi People and the University of the Sunshine Coast.
- Skills-Based Board Composition with Evidence

D. Managing Ecological Risk

The waterways covered include **internationally recognised wetlands** (e.g., Ramsar-listed areas such as Pumicestone Passage) that require **science-based management and ongoing ecological monitoring**, yet the Bill lacks any reference to:

- Ramsar Convention obligations
- ecosystem condition reporting
- cumulative impact assessments
- environmental baselines required for management plans

This demonstrates why environmental expertise and data collection must be embedded into the SCWA's

To ensure that the management actions of the SCWA are in alignment with the ‘sustainable use’ part of its main purpose, the Bill **does not include environmental protection as a statutory function**. It must be mandated that actions improve ecological health, or at the very minimum maintain current baselines without degradation, and that cumulative impacts are considered.

Recommendation 4. The Bill must be amended to include:

- **Cumulative impacts** - that the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority consider and assess the cumulative environmental impacts of dredging, infrastructure development, navigation works, and other waterway activities when preparing the waterways management strategy and management program.

- **Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning** Section 18 on development of Management Plans must also include; Use of appropriate and robust Indicators of ecological health of coastal waters, waterways and adjacent land must be required along with a robust and transparent monitoring, evaluation, mitigation and reporting framework.
- **Existing State and Federal Environmental legislation** that currently applies to coastal waterways must be embedded within the SC Waterways Bill.

E. Community Engagement and Local input into Management Planning

The explanatory notes (p1) for the Bill state that the Bill is *'enabling greater local input into their management'* and will deliver *'a more holistic approach'*.

Recommendation 5. To ensure that there is greater local input and community engagement, the Bill must be amended to include:

- That minimum standards for public engagement are set, including engagement with:
 - First Nations communities
 - local residents' groups
 - environmental organisations and catchment groups
 - marine industries
- The requirement that there is public release of draft strategies with adequate consultation windows
- That existing Integrated Catchment Management Plans be considered in any management Plans
- Require transparent publication of submissions and reasons for decisions

This brings the Bill in line with modern expectations for participatory decision-making.

F. Transparency

Recommendation 6.

That the Authority make annual public reporting against KPIs, and tabled in Parliament.

This mirrors best practice in statutory authorities and improves transparency

Conclusion

OSCAR and its member groups (some of whom have made their own submissions) thank the committee for the opportunity to input into this process.

Yours sincerely



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