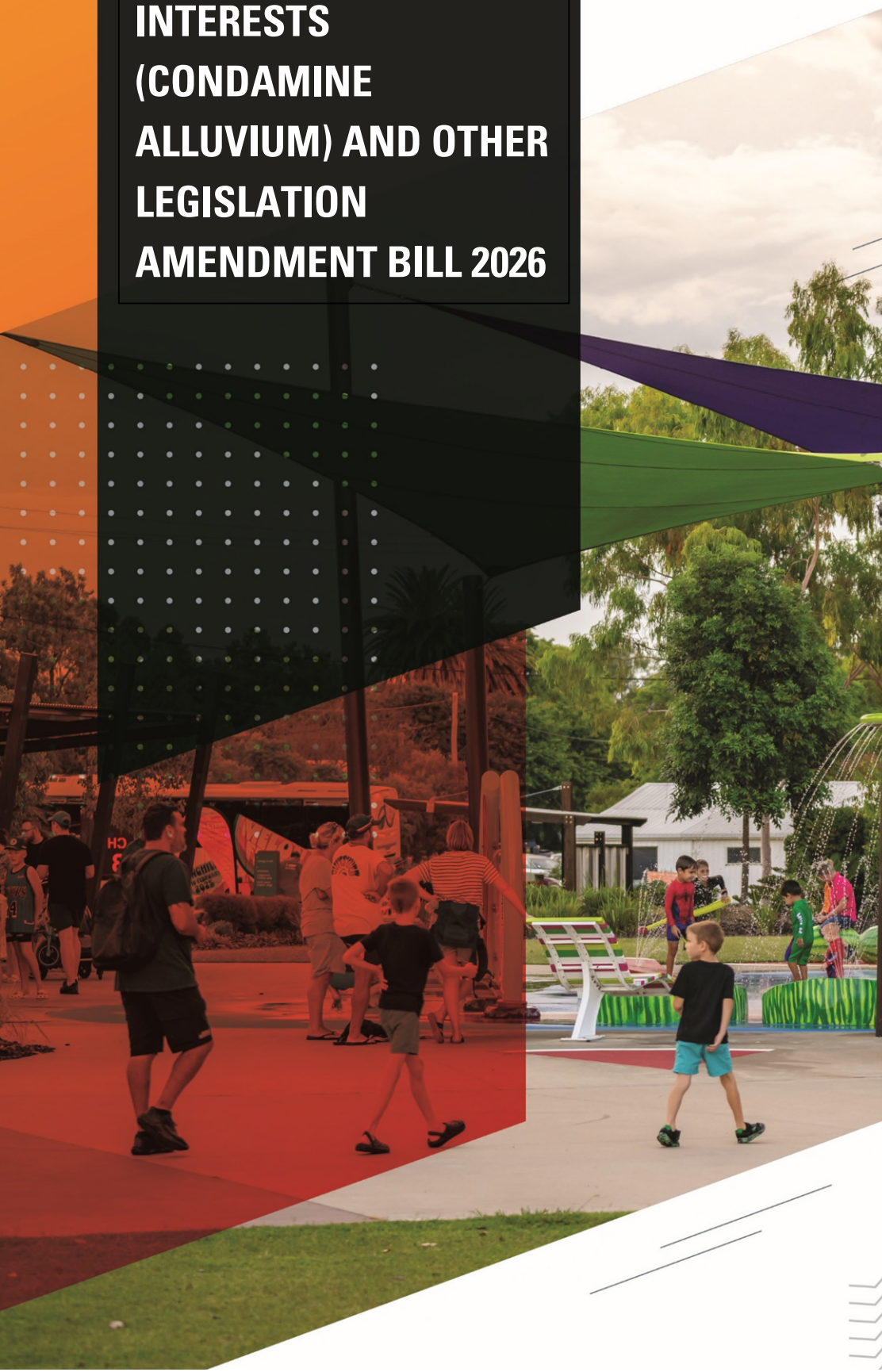


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**INQUIRY INTO
REGIONAL PLANNING
INTERESTS
(CONDAMINE
ALLUVIUM) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL 2026**



**13 April
2026**

13 April 2026

Committee Secretariat Contact

Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Phone: (07) 3553 6621

Sent via Email: PIRC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat,

RE: INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING INTERESTS (CONDAMINE ALLUVIUM) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2026

The Western Downs Region Council ("Council") oversees a vibrant local government area spanning 37,937 square kilometres, serving a diverse population of approximately 35,000 residents. Our region thrives on a robust foundation of agriculture, intensive agriculture, energy, and manufacturing industries. These sectors are bolstered by a rich and diverse workforce, including a significant number of migrant employees, who contribute to the social and economic fabric of our community

We sincerely thank the Primary Industries and Resources Committee for undertaking its Inquiry in relation to the *Regional Planning Interests (Condamine Alluvium) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026* (the Bill), which is of strong interest to our region.

Council's submission includes four (4) recommendations. These recommendations are based on Council's deep knowledge of the Western Downs region, industries and population and are aligned to Council's long-established advocacy priorities. We believe that the insights provided will offer valuable contributions to the enquiry process and help shape policies that foster growth and inclusivity in regional areas like ours.

For any further information or questions, please contact myself on daniel.fletcher@wdrc.qld.gov.au or Todd Summerville at todd.summerville@wdrc.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Fletcher
General Manager Community & Liveability

Contents

1.	About the Western Downs Regional Council	3
2.	Executive Summary.....	4
3.	Role of the Regional Planning Interests Framework.....	4
4.	Administrative and Governance Considerations	5
5.	Priority Agricultural Areas and Groundwater Protection.....	6
6.	Drafting Clarity for Priority Living Areas	6
7.	Recommendations.....	6
8.	Conclusion.....	7
9.	Contact Details	7

1. About the Western Downs Regional Council

The Western Downs is located on the Darling Downs, approximately 207 kilometres north-west of Brisbane and 83 kilometres north-west of Toowoomba. The region encompasses the centres of Dalby, Chinchilla, Jandowae, Miles, Tara, and Wandoan, covering nearly 38,000 square kilometres. Combining country lifestyle with modern living, excellent retail offerings and conveniences, the area is home to a population of around 35,000 people and has a large working age population of 60.9% aged 15-64 years.

Built on agriculture and thriving in the intensive agriculture, energy and manufacturing industries, Western Downs Regional Council is focused on making our region a great place to live, work, visit and invest and to ensure our future generation have the opportunity to do what they love whilst enjoying a regional lifestyle and continue the strong economic growth of the region.

Council manages Australia's second largest road network with highways leading into the region including the Bunya, Leichhardt, Warrego & Moonie, an extensive water, gas, and sewage network, and one of Australia's largest cattle saleyards. Located in the heart of the resource rich Surat Basin, the Western Downs has a diversified energy portfolio with five pillars of energy generation: Coal, Gas, Hydrogen, Wind, Solar and BESS cementing our reputation as the Energy Capital of Queensland. This contributes to the region's strong economic growth, investment, and consistently high employment with a GRP of \$5.28 Billion.

Council's five-year [Economic Development Strategy](#) (2023 to 2028) addresses critical issues and clearly articulates a strategic pathway for the Western Downs to diversify and grow its economy, building on the region's competitive advantage and further attracting business and investment in value-adding opportunities and emerging markets. The Economic Development Strategy focuses on five key pillars:

- **Jobs & Skills** - The Western Downs workforce is growing, optimised and fit for the future.
- **Liveability & Infrastructure** - The Western Downs is equipped with modern infrastructure and quality essential services across the region to enable liveability and wellbeing, whilst sustaining population growth.
- **Population** - The Western Downs demonstrates population growth to meet workforce demands.
- **Productivity & Innovation** - The Western Downs is a recognised leader in agribusiness, energy and manufacturing, and local productivity continues to increase.
- **Sustainability & Resilience** - The Western Downs is future-proofed for a changing climate and transitioning economies, and circular economy principles are stimulated.

This strategy aligns closely with the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) and attracting and enabling development, ensuring the Western Downs is a diverse region at the forefront of the changing world.

2. Executive Summary

Western Downs Regional Council (“Council”) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Primary Industries and Resources Committee in relation to the Regional Planning Interests (Condamine Alluvium) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill).

Council acknowledges the State Government’s intent to strengthen protections for the Condamine Alluvium groundwater system and to improve the efficiency of regulatory processes. Council also recognises the ongoing importance of the coal seam gas industry to the Western Downs regional economy.

Council notes that the timeframe for this inquiry has limited the opportunity for detailed internal and technical analysis. Accordingly, this submission raises several key matters of principle and implementation that warrant further consideration as the Bill progresses.

3. Role of the Regional Planning Interests Framework

The *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014* (RPI Act) has, to date, provided a structured mechanism for integrating land use planning considerations with resource development.

In Council’s experience, the Regional Interest Development Approval (RIDA) process has:

- provided a clear and consolidated pathway for assessing land use impacts;
- ensured that agricultural and settlement considerations are assessed alongside environmental risks; and
- supported transparency and certainty for landholders, proponents, and communities.

The proposed removal of the RIDA requirement for certain coal seam gas activities represents a significant shift from this integrated model. While Council understands the intent to streamline approvals, there is a risk that the removal of this pathway may reduce the visibility and consistency of land use considerations within the overall regulatory framework.

4. Administrative and Governance Considerations

4.1. Potential for Increased Administrative Demand

The Bill places greater reliance on the Environmental Authority (EA) framework as the primary regulatory mechanism.

While this may simplify approval pathways at a system level, Council is concerned that, in practice, it may create uncertainty regarding the role of local government in reviewing or responding to EA applications, amendments, and compliance matters affecting Priority Agricultural Areas (PAAs) and Priority Living Areas (PLAs).

Without clear statutory guidance, there is a risk that:

- local governments may face increased expectations to engage in assessment processes;
- assessment effort may be duplicated across agencies; and
- council resources may be diverted from strategic planning functions.

Council considers that greater clarity regarding the intended role, and limits, of local government would assist in ensuring the framework operates efficiently and as intended.

4.2. Integration of Land Use Planning and Environmental Regulation

Environmental Authorities are primarily designed to manage environmental risk and compliance.

Council notes that broader land use considerations, such as:

- compatibility with surrounding land uses;
- cumulative impacts on agricultural productivity; and
- interface with existing and future residential areas

may not be explicitly or consistently addressed within the EA framework alone.

The RIDA process has historically provided a mechanism for these considerations to be assessed in a coordinated manner. Its removal highlights the importance of ensuring that land use planning considerations remain appropriately integrated within the revised framework.

5. Priority Agricultural Areas and Groundwater Protection

Council strongly supports the protection of the Condamine Alluvium and Priority Agricultural Areas as assets of state and regional significance.

Council notes that while the Bill strengthens provisions relating to groundwater impacts, agricultural viability is influenced by a broader set of factors, including land use conflict, cumulative development impacts, and infrastructure interface.

In this context, Council considers it important that any revised framework continues to provide a clear and transparent mechanism for assessing these broader land use implications.

6. Drafting Clarity for Priority Living Areas

Council also wishes to draw attention to what appears to be an unintended consequence of the current drafting.

On its reading of the Bill, the removal of the RIDA requirement may have the effect of enabling certain coal seam gas activities, including drilling, to occur within Priority Living Areas without a dedicated regional interest assessment.

Council assumes this outcome is not intended, given the established purpose of Priority Living Areas to protect existing and planned residential communities from incompatible land uses.

Council therefore recommends that this aspect of the Bill be reviewed and clarified to ensure that Priority Living Areas continue to receive appropriate protection consistent with the policy intent of the RPI framework.

7. Recommendations

Council has made four (4) of recommendations for consideration by the Inquiry. These are summarised here:

1. Whether a Modified RIDA Pathway Should Be Retained

Exploring whether a streamlined or risk-based version of the RIDA process could be retained for Priority Agricultural and Living Areas to preserve integrated land use assessment.

2. Clarification of Local Government Role

Providing clear statutory guidance on the role of local government within the EA framework to avoid unintended administrative burden and duplication.

3. Maintaining Integration Between Planning and Environmental Assessment

Ensuring that land use planning considerations remain explicitly embedded within the regulatory framework.

4. Review of Priority Living Area Protections

Addressing the apparent drafting issue to ensure that Priority Living Areas are not exposed to incompatible development outcomes.

8. Conclusion

Council supports the objectives of the Bill and recognises the importance of both groundwater protection and regulatory efficiency.

However, Council considers that further refinement is required to:

- maintain the integration of land use planning and environmental regulation;
- provide clarity regarding roles and responsibilities; and
- ensure that Priority Agricultural and Living Areas continue to be appropriately protected.

Council would welcome the opportunity to work constructively with the State in refining the framework to achieve these shared objectives.

9. Contact Details

For any further information or questions, please contact Daniel Fletcher, General Manager Community & Liveability on daniel.fletcher@wdrc.qld.gov.au or Todd Summerville Manager Planning & Environment at todd.summerville@wdrc.qld.gov.au should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.



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