26 October 2025

Primary Industries and Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

RE: Inquiry into Sugarcane Bioenergy Opportunities in Queensland

Acknowledgment of Country

The Capricorn Conservation Council acknowledges and respects the Darumbal People and Woppaburra People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters we work to protect. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and recognise their ongoing connection to Country.

1. Introduction

Since 1973, the Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC) has been a leading community-based environmental organisation in Central Queensland. The organisation advocates for sustainable land use, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection, guided by Traditional Owner leadership and science-based decision-making.

CCC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into sugarcane bioenergy opportunities in Queensland. The expansion of bioenergy presents an important opportunity to advance Queensland's renewable energy goals, strengthen regional economies, and support sustainable industry transitions when developed responsibly and transparently.

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2. Role and Benefits of Sugar Cogeneration

Cogeneration using sugarcane bagasse already contributes to Queensland's renewable energy generation mix. CCC supports continued investment in this technology as it has the potential to enhance regional energy reliability and affordability, particularly for agricultural users, while supporting decarbonisation efforts across the state.

Expansion of cogeneration can also create local employment and infrastructure opportunities, building resilience in regional communities that are closely tied to the sugar industry. However, such development must be supported by strong environmental oversight to ensure that projects protect biodiversity, water quality and community well-being.

Transparent communication and monitoring will be important to maintain public confidence in the industry's sustainability credentials.

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3. Biofuels and Advanced Energy Products

The production of biofuels, including ethanol and other renewable fuels derived from sugarcane by-products, offers clear potential for regional economic diversification and emissions reduction. Stable and long-term policy frameworks are essential to provide investment certainty for producers and growers and to ensure that bioenergy developments meet sustainability standards.

CCC also supports open communication between industry, communities, and Traditional Owners during the development and operation of new bioenergy initiatives. This collaboration will help ensure that biofuel and advanced energy projects contribute positively to both local economies and environmental outcomes.

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4. Infrastructure and Regional Planning

Appropriate infrastructure and land use planning are critical to supporting sustainable bioenergy development. CCC recognises the importance of maintaining efficient grid and transport connections near existing mills and ensuring that new projects are integrated within regional planning frameworks. Development should avoid areas of high conservation value or ecological sensitivity.

Government, industry, and Traditional Owners must work collaboratively to plan and manage bioenergy expansion. Coordinated regional planning can ensure that future projects deliver economic benefits while also maintaining the ecological integrity and cultural values of surrounding landscapes.

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5. Environmental and Cultural Considerations

Bioenergy development must be grounded in environmental responsibility. CCC recommends a "waste-first" approach, prioritising the use of existing residues such as bagasse and cane trash rather than clearing additional land for feedstock production. This approach maximises the climate and resource efficiency benefits of the industry while minimising ecological impacts.

All new projects should undergo full environmental impact assessments to evaluate and mitigate potential impacts on biodiversity, water, and air quality. Furthermore, Indigenous co-governance and ongoing consultation should be embedded in planning and monitoring

processes to ensure Traditional Owners have a genuine leadership role in decision-making related to Country.

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6. Community and Economic Benefits

A sustainable sugar bioenergy industry can provide lasting benefits for regional Queensland. It has the capacity to diversify income for growers and millers, support new local jobs in renewable energy and engineering, and stabilise local economies by providing alternative revenue streams to the sugar market.

Community-led renewable projects can also strengthen regional resilience by generating affordable, locally produced energy. When managed responsibly, sugarcane bioenergy can help build stronger communities while contributing to Queensland's broader clean energy transition.

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7. Recommendations

The Capricorn Conservation Council recommends that the Committee:

1. Support continued investment in efficient, sustainable cogeneration.
2. Provide stable, long-term policy frameworks for renewable fuels and bioenergy.
3. Integrate environmental safeguards and Traditional Owner engagement into all new developments.
4. Prioritise the use of existing by-products to reduce waste and avoid new land clearing.
5. Ensure regional planning aligns bioenergy development with environmental and community outcomes.

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8. Conclusion

The Capricorn Conservation Council supports a sustainable and regionally driven approach to sugarcane bioenergy. With clear policy direction, environmental accountability, and Traditional Owner leadership, Queensland can strengthen its renewable energy future while protecting biodiversity and regional livelihoods.

CCC appreciates the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry and stands ready to collaborate with government, industry, and community partners to help build a bioenergy sector that is both environmentally responsible and economically resilient.

Respectfully,

Capricorn Conservation Council

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