

Executive Summary

The Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill (Bill) was introduced by Mr Shane Knuth MP, Member for Hill, on 19 February 2025 and was referred to the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee (the committee) for examination and report by 20 August 2025.

The Bill proposes an overhaul of the crocodile management framework in Queensland, with the primary objective of the Bill being to lower the risk of encountering a crocodile in North Queensland back down to an ‘acceptable risk’. The Member for Hill has publicly asserted that Queensland’s crocodile population is out of control, that fatal human-crocodile conflict is increasing, and that the current crocodile management framework is broken.⁴ It is said that North Queenslanders are suffering as a result and are calling for crocodiles to be removed from ‘populated waterways’.

This is the fifth time that the Member for Hill has introduced a Bill to address crocodile management in Queensland since 2017. The contents of each of the Bills have been largely the same, bar some renumbering of clauses and adjustments to the proposed membership of oversight bodies.

The Safer Waterways Bill 2018 was considered in detail by the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee (ITDEC), who produced a 78-page report in September 2018 and recommended that the Bill not be passed.

The committee, in its consideration of the Bill, has reached the same conclusion.

Recommendation 1 of this report is that the Bill not be passed.

In putting forward this fifth version of the Bill, there has been inadequate consideration of the significant work and research undertaken since the first version of the Bill was introduced. In 2018, when ITDEC tabled their report, the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan (QCMP) was in its infancy. It has now been operating for approximately 8 years and was the subject of an independent review in 2021. That review, authored by the Queensland Chief Scientist and a panel of experts in crocodilian behaviour and management, found the QCMP ‘was world-class, fit for purpose and highly effective in reducing the risks to public safety while conserving crocodile populations in the wild’.⁵ It also made 22 recommendations to improve Queensland’s crocodile management framework, including the QCMP, and accompanying education, and research and monitoring programs. Those recommendations were supported by government and have been implemented,⁶ with a number of recommendations forming ongoing processes in Queensland’s Crocodile Management.

The QCMP is also currently under review by the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI) and the committee understands that the Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation (Minister) has

⁴ Hansard, *Record of Proceedings, First Session of the Fifty-Eighth Parliament - 19 February 2025*, p 134.

⁵ Office of the Queensland Chief Scientist, *Findings from an Independent Evaluation of the Queensland Estuarine Crocodile Management Program* (Report, 2021).

⁶ Department of Environment and Science, *Response to the Independent Evaluation of the Queensland Estuarine Crocodile Management Plan* (Report, July 2022) (DES 2022 Response).

undertaken roundtable consultation sessions with a range of stakeholders concurrently to this inquiry.

In considering the Bill, the committee consulted broadly and sought to understand the unique challenges faced by those living in, and visiting, Croc Country. The committee heard from North Queenslanders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Owners, tourism operators, crocodile farmers (commercial operators), academics, conservationists and other members of the community.

It is beyond question that crocodiles are dangerous and do pose a threat to those living in and around known crocodile habitats. This is particularly given crocodile population recovery over the last 50 years, following the commercial extinction of saltwater crocodiles in the 1970's after culling and commercial hunting in the decades prior. Presumably, the 'good old days', when the risk posed by crocodiles to members of the public was considered 'an acceptable risk',⁷ refers to a time when crocodiles were almost extinct, and when public education surrounding the risk posed by crocodiles was negligible when compared with today's standards.

It is not possible, nor desirable, to return to such a time. The committee agrees that public safety should always be a paramount consideration but ultimately concluded that no amount of culling or management will ever fully erase the danger posed by crocodiles. The public must always be alert to the risks posed by crocodiles, which are inherent to Croc Country, and this is best achieved through education and current management practices. The futility of culling as a means of protecting the public was captured by a comment made at the public hearing on 11 June 2025 by leading crocodile expert, Charlie Manolis, who told the committee:

If you want to make waterways safe in Queensland, it is simple: you have to make crocodiles extinct entirely — remove every single one of them — and then put up a fence between the Northern Territory and Queensland to stop them swimming across, put up another fence between Papua New Guinea and us to stop them coming down, and then you will be able to guarantee safety.⁸

The measures proposed in the Bill do not, in the opinion of the committee, address the risks posed by crocodiles, nor economic opportunities relating to crocodile farming and egg-harvesting, in a manner that considers the complex legal and regulatory frameworks associated with crocodile management at a State, Commonwealth and International level, which Queensland is required to comply with.

Recommendations

The committee made 8 recommendations, found at page xiii of this report.

The committee's first recommendation, that the Bill should not be passed, finds support from a majority of submitters to this inquiry. The committee accepted 190 written submissions to the Bill and conducted public hearings and briefings in Cairns and

⁷ Hansard, *Record of Proceedings, Public Briefing – 11 June 2025*, Brisbane, p 11.

⁸ Hansard, *Record of Proceedings, Public Hearing – 11 June 2025*, Brisbane, p 14.

Brisbane. The committee was briefed by the Member for Hill, and DETSI, including members of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's crocodile management team (QPWS).

The evidence provided to the committee refutes the underlying premise of the Bill. In stark contrast to the public statements made by the Member for Hill, the committee heard that Queensland's crocodile population is relatively stable. Also, the evidence refutes any suggestion of an increase in fatal human-crocodile conflict, with the average rate remaining steady at 0.4 fatalities per year over the last 40 years. Further, in recent years, where fatal human-crocodile conflict has occurred, there is evidence that in some cases human recklessness has contributed to fatalities. The evidence received by the committee regarding Queensland's 'crocodile problem' is addressed in section 2 of this report.

In addition to Recommendation 1, the committee has made a number of comments and recommendations around the existing approach to crocodile management. The evidence heard by the committee during this inquiry demonstrates that there is scope for improvement. In particular, building on the evidence heard about the importance of zone management and education, there is scope for:

- modification to existing zone boundaries to address atypical crocodile populations
- improved 'Be Crocwise' signage in certain areas where risk is higher, like boat ramps; and,
- better utilisation of the QWildlife application as a means of providing up to date information to the public about crocodile sightings and the departmental response.

These areas for improvement, and others, are captured by recommendations 2 to 8 and various committee comments throughout this report.

While there is room for improvement in how crocodiles are managed in Queensland, the evidence received by the committee during this inquiry has not suggested that the current framework is broken. The committee repeatedly heard from submitters that Queensland's Crocodile Management Framework appropriately balances zone management and removal of problem crocodiles, public education and research and monitoring. The existing regulatory and operational framework for crocodile management in Queensland is addressed in section 3 of this report.

Section 4 of this report examines the proposals in the Bill in detail and stakeholder feedback on the measures proposed. The main themes considered by the committee included the proposal to establish the Queensland Crocodile Authority (QCA), the introduction of annual culling, the creation of zero-tolerance zones, the impact of the Bill's proposals on commercial trade and farming, and the purported 'special provisions' for traditional owners and how those proposals interact with native title and Indigenous Land Management frameworks.

Human rights and fundamental legislative principles

The committee examined whether the Bill complied with the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* and the *Human Rights Act 2019*. This is addressed section 1 of the report and in detail in section 4.

The committee concluded:

- the explanatory notes tabled with the Bill contained sufficient detail to allow consideration of the Bill's compliance with the *Legislative Standards Act 1992*
- the Bill does not have sufficient regard to the fundamental legislative principle regarding the delegation of legislative power
- the statement of compatibility tabled with the Bill is insufficient in its examination of the rights engaged by the operation of the proposed Bill, given that it did not contain any information for the committee to consider about the Bill's interaction with the *Human Rights Act 2019*; and
- absent proper consideration of those rights, and justifications for any potential limitations, the Bill is not compatible with the *Human Rights Act 2019*.