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HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr R Molhoek MP—Chair
Ms SL Bolton MP
Ms K-A Dooley MP
Mr JP Kelly MP
Mr DJL Lee MP
Dr BF O'Shea MP

Staff present:

Dr J Rutherford—Committee Secretary
Miss A Bonenfant—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE CROCODILE CONTROL AND CONSERVATION BILL 2025

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 2 APRIL 2025

Brisbane

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The committee met at 11.33 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's inquiry into the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025. My name is Robert Molhoek. I am the member for Southport and chair of the committee. I acknowledge the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people of this state and their elders past, present and emerging. With me here today are: Mr Joe Kelly MP, the member for Greenslopes; Mr David Lee MP, the member for Hervey Bay; Dr Barbara O'Shea MP, the member for South Brisbane; Ms Kerri-Anne Dooley MP, the member for Redcliffe; and Ms Sandy Bolton MP, the member for Noosa.

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KNUTH, Mr Shane, Member for Hill, Parliament of Queensland

TASSELL, Mr Brad, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Shane Knuth MP

CHAIR: I invite you to brief the committee on this bill.

Mr Knuth: North Queenslanders are losing more and more of our populated waterways to the increasing crocodile population. According to data from the Queensland Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, there were 1,216 estuary saltwater crocodile sightings reported in 2023 compared to just 176 sightings in 2010. Crocodiles are encroaching more and more into populated waterways, creating an unacceptable risk to human life. With almost 80 per cent of the crocodile population located in Far North Queensland, the bill would create the Queensland Crocodile Authority, based in Cairns. The bill would create an advisory committee to provide recommendations to the QCA.

The QCA will be solely responsible for all aspects of crocodile management in Queensland, including a review of the current zones under the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan, and implement a zero-tolerance policy to remove all crocodiles reported in areas deemed as populated waterways. The QCA would develop flexible policies on crocodile management through consultation with different individual Indigenous communities to deliver a management program which considers cultural sensitivities. It would: increase and oversee egg harvesting limits, permits and incentives for Indigenous communities to set up egg harvesting enterprises; allow private landowners to contact the QCA to have crocodiles removed from their property; and conduct controlled annual crocodile removal programs to reduce crocodile numbers in populated regions.

The view was expressed that keeping humans safe from crocodiles could be achieved by relocating any problem crocodiles to other locations. However, a joint DES and CSIRO study found that crocodiles like to stay close to their homes, with most remaining within 50 kilometres of where they hatched. In fact, most crocodile parents and offspring in Queensland are found within 10 kilometres of each other. The study also showed that most of the estimated 30,000 or more population are in the Far North. Experts suggest that crocodiles may become more dangerous once they have been relocated; therefore, crocodiles should only be relocated to crocodile farms, sanctuaries or properly managed reserves.

Given there are so many crocodiles that require removal, it is very unlikely there would be a desire by existing crocodile farms or sanctuaries to house all of these crocodiles. Therefore, a combination of killing and relocation to farms or sanctuaries is the best way to achieve the policy objectives. The bill would ensure that all crocodiles are immediately removed by an authorised person if located in a populated waterway. I note that, in deciding to declare a waterway a populated waterway, the QCA must have regard to the public's recreation or commercial use and enjoyment of the waterway. In unpopulated waterways, landowners who have waterways running through their properties will also be able to contact the QCA to request the immediate removal of crocodiles by qualified persons.

As well as protecting human lives, the bill aims to create a significant and sustainable crocodile industry. Under a 10-year pilot program which ceases in 2028, currently only 5,000 eggs are allowed to be harvested in Queensland. This compares to the 90,000 allowed annually in the Northern Territory. Indigenous landowners will likely see the value of crocodile eggs and the income they can generate. Significantly, the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025 will also give power to Indigenous landowners to apply to manage crocodiles on their land. If a crocodile is on their land, they may: choose to have it relocated to a farm or crocodile sanctuary; let it remain on the property; choose for it to be killed by shooting, harpooning or using traditional methods; or accept payment from a quota of high-end clients who wish to hunt crocodiles.

This bill provides real opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through a crocodile industry, which is estimated to be worth more than \$100 million a year in the Northern Territory. Indigenous landowners in the Northern Territory called to be at the forefront of new developments in crocodile management, including allowing a quota of high-end clients to hunt saltwater crocodiles. I table this document because it relates to crocodile management in the Northern Territory. There is a culling program in place every year. I think there are about 1,100 crocodiles. The previous Northern Territory government worked with Indigenous communities to implement a program whereby Indigenous communities could have high-paying clients come onto their land and receive payment for removing a crocodile.

I want to stress that the KAP's policy has never been about wiping out the crocodile population; it is about restoring the balance between managing the crocodile population and protecting human life. Most importantly, the bill places greater value on human life by responsibly reducing the risk of crocodile attacks as much as possible. It aims to eliminate from our waterways any crocodile that poses a threat to human life while continuing to protect crocodiles from becoming extinct as a species.

CHAIR: We will deal with that document later. Thank you, member for Hill. I have a few questions to kick things off and then I will go to my colleagues. Section 6 of the bill mandates that the director and staff of the authority must reside in Cairns. Given that crocodile habitats begin north of Gladstone, go right up to the tip of Cape York and out through the Gulf Country to the Northern Territory, how will the staff be able to exercise their functions effectively if they can only be based in Cairns?

Mr Knuth: One of the main things is that 80 per cent of the crocodile population is in Far North Queensland, and it makes sense that the staff and decision-makers with regard to crocodile management are based in the area where they can be hands-on. I know you are talking about Rocky. The thing is that crocodile numbers have expanded right through past Rocky and into Bundy. There are even reports of them at Stradbroke Island. When it comes to reports of crocodile sightings and crocodile attacks, most of those are in Far North Queensland. Every day we are hearing some form of report. If those people were based down here then they would not be at the coalface. It is basically best to have them at the grassroots. They would be hearing the problems and acting on them immediately. If there were problems in the south then they could work through that with the department of environment to have that resolved very quickly. I can guarantee that if you are from North Queensland you are hearing about these problems day in and day out.

CHAIR: My recollection from the last time we looked at this bill—it or similar lapsed legislation from the previous term of parliament—was that the departmental staff who are charged with the responsibility for managing crocodiles across Queensland are fairly evenly dispersed across critical centres—there are already teams in place in other parts of the state. Are you suggesting that—

Mr Knuth: In regard to the crocodile problem and the mass of explosion in crocodile numbers, there is no such thing as evenly spaced. If it were evenly spaced, we would not have the crocodile problem at present.

CHAIR: Are you saying that the current management plan is not being implemented properly?

Mr Knuth: No way in the world. If it were implemented, we would be able to swim in the Johnstone River. We would be able to go spearfishing in the Tully River like they used to. We would be able to feel comfortable to swim in Rollingstone Creek like we used to back in the eighties, the nineties and probably even in the year 2000.

Mr JKELLY: Thank you, member, for your presentation this morning. I am sympathetic to what you are trying to do, having grown up in North Queensland. Pretty much all of the places that we would have swum and fished through my primary and high school years in North Queensland would be no-go zones now. The intent of the bill is to reduce overall crocodile numbers. Even if you do that, how would you feel safe going in the water anyway knowing that there is always the potential risk of a crocodile being around unless you completely eradicate them?

Mr Knuth: At one of the hearings we had in Cairns or Port Douglas, one of the tourist operators said that back in the nineties or even around 2000 tourists would come and ask, 'Can we swim in that water?' and she would say to them, 'It is a risk. Yes, you can. Just be careful.' It was a risk but it was an acceptable risk. She said that now it has come to the point when the tourists come to her and ask, 'Can we swim in the water?' she will say, 'You will die. You will be ripped to pieces.' We want to get it back to the point of being an acceptable risk. There is always going to be a risk but we want it to be an acceptable risk. Now, if your boat collapses in the Russell River and you have to swim to shore, you are likely going to die.

Mr JKELLY: The last time I had anything to do with this bill was 2017. That is obviously a few years ago now. One of the things we did then was analyse all of the crocodile attacks in North Queensland. All of the attacks involved people engaging in one of two activities or both: one was consuming alcohol and the other was swimming at night. There was only one attack that did not involve either of those two factors. In your experience, has that changed over time since we last looked at this?

Mr Knuth: In regard to the second latest death that happened at Cooktown, the doctor slipped in the water and bang—he was taken by a croc. The media reported that someone was throwing skeletons in. He was not doing that. Every time a croc takes someone, you hear reports of someone throwing in skeletons, so 'Don't feed the crocodiles.' It seems to be a way of finding another excuse to do something about the crocs. If there were fewer croc numbers like there were in the eighties and nineties, when he fell in the water he would not have had to worry about being taken by a croc.

Let's not keep educating people about how to be croc wise and that you should not throw scraps in the water. That is fair enough, but I think we have focused too much on being croc wise and doing croc counts. I can use figures of how many crocodiles there were in 2010 to now. We all know that we have a big, bad crocodile problem. This is why I have introduced this bill. If the bill I introduced in 2017 had been passed by the government at the time, we probably would not have had more deaths.

CHAIR: How many deaths have there been, say, in the last decade?

Mr Knuth: There have been at least 10 or 12. I would say there have been at least 20 attacks. To add to this, there was a dad and a daughter walking along a creek in Cairns where there is a walking track and a crocodile jumped up and grabbed the dog. They were fortunate that it grabbed the dog rather than the four-year-old daughter. We are in that circumstance where the crocs are not just in the water; they jump out of the water. Let's not just look at people and say that they are the problem. Let's do something about the crocodiles so we can make it safer for everyone who uses those waterways.

Mr LEE: I have some sympathy for where you are coming from. The explanatory notes to the bill state—

There may be some areas of the Bill that may encroach on the commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Are you able to specify what those areas of conflict are?

Mr Knuth: No. I am basically saying that there may be or there could be. For the previous bill, we went to Canberra and met with the federal minister. He said that Queensland managed its own biodiversity and there were no problems when it came to the culling of crocodiles. I have put that in as a safeguard just in case.

Mr LEE: You have flagged it but there is no specific knowledge of any conflict at this stage.

Mr Knuth: That is right.

Mr LEE: The bill also specifies a good character criteria in relation to the appointment of a director of the Queensland Crocodile Authority. What good character criteria must be satisfied before a person is appointed? Does the bill define 'good character'?

Mr Knuth: That will be under the operation of the minister and the department. They will define what is meant by 'good character' in appointing those positions to the Queensland Crocodile Authority.

Mr LEE: There is no definition in the proposed legislation. That is at the discretion of the department to define.

Mr Knuth: The department and the minister.

Mr LEE: I have a follow-up question in relation to the declaration of crocodile sanctuaries. The bill proposes the declaration of sanctuaries but does not provide a framework as to what these are and how they will operate. What purpose would the crocodile sanctuary serve and what circumstances would be appropriate to declare them?

Mr Knuth: Currently there are planning laws in relation to crocodile sanctuaries. At present we have one potential crocodile sanctuary in Innisfail. There is a business case going forward. When it comes to a sanctuary, there will be a combination of potentially state and local government planning laws. The Queensland Crocodile Authority will work with those other authorities.

Mr LEE: One of the other things I see in the submission is reference to Australian entities only being in control of the sanctuaries. In terms of industry practice, there is international involvement. I just wondered how you would resolve that conflict.

Mr Knuth: Could you repeat the question?

Mr LEE: You talk about Australian entities controlling the operations of the sanctuaries.

Mr Knuth: That is the bill I have introduced. It is up to the minister and the government to work with those entities.

Mr LEE: Existing entities.

Mr Knuth: Existing entities, yes.

Mr LEE: My understanding is that the bill is framed around only Australian entities operating sanctuaries; is that correct?

Mr Knuth: Yes, that is right. I totally agree.

CHAIR: That could present some challenges.

Mr LEE: It could present some challenges, yes.

CHAIR: I went on one of those Daintree trips probably 20 years ago. We spent the whole trip anxiously looking for crocs and never got to see one. We saw a few twigs in the river at one point that we thought might have been a croc—it was croc size above the surface. I contrast that to when I was living in the Northern Territory many years ago and I went to Yellow Water Billabong. It was action packed—there were crocs everywhere. We were well prepared and well briefed for that. Has there been any discussion with tourism operators around whether they want more crocs or fewer crocs to make their tours legitimately more interesting for visitors?

Mr Knuth: The management of crocodiles has been a dismal failure by consecutive governments that have allowed it to the point where it is good business for croc tourism. It is sad that it has got to that point. The tourism industry is quite frustrated. They are trying to promote our pristine waterways and beaches. When tourists go there all they see is croc signs. They ask the locals, 'Can we swim there?' A lot of tourists are shying away from going there and are coming down to swim at the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. You may not hear about this, but I have been advised that this happens in regard to the tourism industry up there. It is very difficult for them to say, 'Yes, we have promoted these pristine waterways but if you swim there you will likely be ripped to pieces.' When it comes to finding a balance, someone may lose out—that will basically be croc tourism, but the other tourism aspect will increase because the tourists who come here do not have to worry so much about being taken by a crocodile.

CHAIR: Isn't it fair to say that swimming in North Queensland is risky for at least six months of the year with marine stingers and blue-ringed octopus and all manner of other things?

Mr Knuth: Absolutely. However, you can hop in a boat and a marine stinger will not jump out of the water and grab you and pull you in.

CHAIR: That is a fair comment.

Mr Knuth: When boaties are fishing, they are looking in the water for a croc that is going to lurch out and grab them, whereas they do not worry about the stingers. We do have sharks. Sharks are a big issue when it comes to boaties losing their catch to the sharks. Inshore, around our beaches and our estuaries, there is a great fear of the crocodile.

Ms BOLTON: I am not going to put words in your mouth, but I think you said that the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan is not operating as it should or it was not doing the job.

Mr Knuth: I will give you an example. Rollingstone Creek is classed as zone E. Rollingstone Creek is one of the beautiful crystal clear swimming holes. I would swim there when I was a kid and people still swim there to this day. They discovered three crocs in that special swimming hole. Young kids were swimming there. The department came along and said that they were not showing aggression and because it is zoned the way it is they had no authority to move the crocs. In my view, those crocs should have been removed straightaway. That is why this bill provides for a declaration of populated waterways.

Ms BOLTON: Going back to the Safer Waterways Bill, which I think was in 2019, there were a number of things that, in part, would have improved the Crocodile Management Plan. You touched on one just then—reclassify zoning and develop place-based management plans. That was one thing I identified. Other things were more consultation with communities, the involvement of Indigenous rangers, plus using newer technologies. Over that period of time—we are talking six years now—has anything been done in any realm in terms of what was raised?

Mr Knuth: It is very important to engage with the committee on this. We can put up all the crocodile signs, we can put out the zones, we can have zones that are removed immediately and zones where crocodiles are showing aggression. You can have all the information out there, but if you are not going to deal with the explosion in numbers then you are completely wasting your time, money and resources on education or zones or whatever it is. This is why the Queensland Crocodile Authority is going to be established through legislation. A core part of the bill is to identify all the areas that are populated waterways. It is zero tolerance. That means that even if a crocodile has not shown aggression, that crocodile will still be removed because it is in a populated waterway.

Ms BOLTON: I want to go to the demand and supply chain. Last time, if crocodiles were taken to farms then at the end there was the issue of the demand for product, including the skins. I think skins were being held in storage and there was a clog in the pipeline. Has any of that been addressed? For example, if you were successful with your bill and there is even more product, and we are talking about Indigenous jobs and businesses, will we have a problem at the other end? How will that work? Has any analysis been done on that?

Mr Knuth: That is why I indicated that most crocodiles only travel about 50 kilometres and the majority are found within about 10 kilometres of where they were born. Part of the bill is about removing them either to a crocodile farm or a crocodile sanctity, or killing them. We do not have enough crocodile farms or sanctuaries to cater for all the crocodiles that need to be removed to make our waterways safe. If we are working from now on, it will still take a long time. However, with the Olympics coming to Rockhampton, I can assure you that many of those crocodiles will be removed very quickly and not only in the Rockhampton area but also in the surrounding regions. I am not supportive of the Olympics, but if we could get rid of all the crocodiles through the east coast of Queensland then I would be content in supporting them.

Ms BOLTON: I am trying to get clarification: has any assessment been done on what to do with the product at the end? The bill refers to all parts of the carcass so if they are to be killed—

Mr Knuth: That was in the last bill; it is not in this bill. That is probably why I am a bit confused about the question that you have asked.

Ms BOLTON: So this still does not have—

Mr Knuth: No, it does not have that.

Ms BOLTON: I am sorry, I thought it did.

Dr O'SHEA: The department says that there are about 20,000 to 30,000 crocodiles in Queensland. Would you agree with that?

Mr Knuth: No. While I accept the count, I think it must have been a one-eyed drunken sailor who did the last count. The chair just spoke about not seeing a crocodile in the daytime. If you go to the northern rivers at night time and shine a torch you will see a lot of crocodiles. When you take in the Gulf of Carpentaria right up to Cape York, the Torres Strait and back down the east coast, I would say that there are way more than 30,000. Every day I deal with people who deal with crocodiles. I

feel embarrassed telling them that the estimate is 30,000 crocodiles in Queensland. I will give you one example. One of the farmers in Tully said to me, 'Shane, I can show you three crocodiles right now in the bore drains on my property.' I went for a drive and there they were. That is how easy it is to see a crocodile. The mayor of the Hinchinbrook council took the local media to his property and was able to show them three crocodiles in the bore drains and dams on his place.

Dr O'SHEA: That goes to one of my other questions. What happens now if there are crocodiles on somebody's property? What can they do about them?

Mr Knuth: That is one of the great things about the bill. There is a lot of frustration in regards to crocodiles in bore drains, dams and local waterways. Landowners would be able to contact the Queensland Crocodile Authority and those crocodiles would be removed. We have so many cattle taken every day all along the east coast. They used to report it to us and now they feel it is a waste of time. They are trying to do their best to save their cattle. When there are floods, before they know it they have a 16-foot crocodile in their dam lurching at their cattle. Many dogs have also been lost on those properties. From the feedback that I have had, it will be a big relief for landowners if the Queensland Crocodile Authority can have crocodiles removed from their properties because they are presently really pulling their hair out.

Dr O'SHEA: With the current situation, if a landowner has a large crocodile on their property can they contact the department to come?

Mr Knuth: No, not at all. It is a complete waste of time. They have put in complaints. They have contacted them and are told, 'If it's not showing aggression or it's not in the zone then it's not of importance to us.'

Dr O'SHEA: Can you explain to me how egg harvesting works?

Mr Knuth: Basically, the eggs are harvested by Indigenous communities through the Northern Territory. There is a trial here but there has never been any grunt behind that trial. Basically, the eggs are sold to the crocodile farms at a reasonable price. The eggs will hatch and the crocodiles will be grown and used for skins and other things. There is a financial return in collecting the eggs and there is a financial return as those crocodiles grow. I am not an expert in this area, but we do know that the younger crocodiles are much more suitable when it comes to crocodile skins.

Dr O'SHEA: With the 90,000 in Northern Territory, do they have a lot more crocodile farms in the Northern Territory than we do here?

Mr Knuth: I am not sure how many crocodile farms there are. There is a reasonably sustainable industry in the Northern Territory and they are looking to expand it. There is now an annual cull in the Northern Territory, which I think is about 1,200. The government is communicating with the Indigenous communities about bringing in high-paying clients to provide an economic benefit to those communities.

Ms DOOLEY: Good morning, Shane and Brad. I admire your tenacity, Shane. This is the fifth attempt at introducing this bill. As someone who has run for my community five times and then won on my sixth, I am cheering you on. I cannot speak to how the House will vote, but I admire your tenacity. You are obviously a great member for your community in bringing this bill forward. I put that on the record. You mentioned that you did speak to the federal minister. Can you say who that was?

Mr Knuth: Yes, it was Josh Frydenberg. Robbie Katter and I went down.

Ms DOOLEY: In the former government?

Mr Knuth: Yes, in the former government.

Ms DOOLEY: Has there been any approach to the current minister?

Mr Knuth: No. They have never had an issue. They said that there will not be an issue coming from the federal government as Queensland manages its own biodiversity. These are not the exact words, but they said they would have no concerns in regards to the culling of crocodiles in Queensland.

Ms DOOLEY: I will press you on that because the current minister is Tanya Plibersek and it is a different government. I appreciate we are on the cusp of a federal election so that could change. Do you have something in writing from a federal minister around the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, as there can be potential conflicts?

Mr Knuth: I believe in that regard that we manage our own biodiversity, particularly when it comes to the culling of crocodiles. In regards to our conversations with Josh Frydenberg and the department, I fully believe that there will not be an issue. There are always going to be boxes to tick but I do not see that as a concern in regards to our communication with the federal government.

Ms DOOLEY: The explanatory notes state that the costs of the authority 'will be met from within existing departmental allocations.' Does this bill mean that it only serves to take the existing DETSI crocodile workforce?

Mr Knuth: Basically, it will be cost neutral. On the other side of it, all of the bills that have been introduced in the parliament by the government say exactly the same thing.

Ms DOOLEY: So it would just be giving them a new name?

Mr Knuth: That is right.

Ms DOOLEY: How will this actually deliver any greater benefit than the existing departmental structure?

Mr Knuth: One of the things in regards to crocodile management is that we want the authority to be at the coalface. We want it to be in the community where the concerns are being raised day in, day out, rather than at No. 1 William Street, which was a \$700 million build. There are departmental staff who have been doing surveys and counts, giving directives on how to remove crocodiles—you name it. We want to ensure that that resource is moved from here and put there and that it is a priority where we can count on the department having our back.

CHAIR: I will ask the department to update us at some point on the distribution of staff. I am sure when we raised that question in the past there were only a handful of people in Brisbane and the majority of the staff involved in managing crocodiles across the state were fairly well dispersed.

Mr Knuth: I do not believe that they are well dispersed because if they were well dispersed then we would not be having the crocodile problems that we have at the moment. We believe that they are understaffed. This is why we need a grassroots crocodile authority that is hands-on and that deals with the issues day in, day out, rather than one that just hears about what is going on 1½ thousand kilometres away.

Ms DOOLEY: Clause 10 of the bill states one of the functions of the authority's director is to 'refer the suspected commission of offences relating to crocodiles or crocodile eggs to the police service'. Currently offences of this nature are enforced by conservation officers under the Nature Conservation Act. On what basis did you determine—

Mr Knuth: We would probably have to talk to the drafters. I think that was the advice that we received. We would have to go back to the drafters for that.

Ms DOOLEY: I want to flag that Queensland police officers have their hands full doing other policing matters.

Mr Knuth: Yes. I think that is a part of it but I believe the drafters see the benefits of having that in. I could be wrong, but I think that was the case.

Ms DOOLEY: I am not sure in your explanatory notes if you indicate a number for culling like the Northern Territory does; have you made that proposal?

Mr Knuth: The great thing about the Crocodile Authority is that they will work with all of the different Indigenous communities. The nature of the bill itself is to ensure crocodiles do not become extinct. The other side is to make our waterways safe; to work with the Indigenous communities in the sense of the quota—the actual bringing in of high-paying clients—to ensure they are registered and licenced to do that. Everything with regard to the authority is done according to the book. One of the big focuses is that the Indigenous community do not have to worry; they just enter a negotiation and explain how many crocodiles they believe can be culled on the Indigenous land. There are different Indigenous communities, and they deal with each community individually. Indigenous communities are always looking for economic benefits. They see the thousands of crocodiles through their river system as an opportunity that is being wasted.

CHAIR: Member, have you undertaken any direct consultation with Indigenous communities?

Mr Knuth: I have, with Indigenous leaders over the years and recently as well. With regard to the Indigenous people I have mentioned and who have been contacted: it is in the email so it is all there.

CHAIR: Given the saltwater crocodile population density is the highest up in the north-west Cape York Peninsula and that sections of the coastline from Cooktown to Rocky only account for 20 per cent of the population, it points to the fact that there would need to be some fairly serious engagement with Indigenous communities north of Cooktown.

Mr Knuth: One of the things the bill talks about is populated waterways. With Indigenous communities, it is all about entering into an arrangement where they can bring in high-paying clients. They can use traditional methods—whatever is agreed within those communities. There would be some engagement, yes.

CHAIR: I am not as familiar as you would be with North Queensland, but can you give us an overview on which river systems and key locations are of concern? I am sure it is not just Cairns. I am hearing that there are concerns down in the Whitsundays.

Mr Knuth: That is right. In 2017, when I introduced the bill, we had the committee asking: 'We are seeing quite a few crocodiles now in Townsville, can we have a public hearing in Townsville?' Then one said, 'At the Pioneer we are starting to get crocodiles'.

CHAIR: Sorry, where is the Pioneer?

Mr Knuth: The Pioneer River is in Mackay. There has been an increase in the number of crocodiles—where they have spread out to. Now they are going right down past Bundaberg. If you are looking for a location for a hearing, obviously you want a hearing where the majority of the complaints are, which is in Cairns. It is right at the door of Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Back then, it was, 'We are starting to see crocodiles.' Now it is, 'We have a lot of crocodiles. We want something done about it.' You can see how much crocodiles have spread since I first introduced the bill in 2017.

CHAIR: You mentioned earlier the mayor of Hinchinbrook. I have heard anecdotally that there are concerns about crocodiles down further south around Proserpine?

Mr Knuth: Yes, that is right. I have flown over the Burdekin River, for example, in a helicopter and there was just croc after croc.

CHAIR: The Burdekin—

Mr Knuth: That goes through Home Hill.

CHAIR: So if we had to pick a spot to go as a committee, where would we go? It sounds like there are a lot of spots!

Mr Knuth: One of the important places is obviously Cairns. That is a definite because it would give Indigenous communities an opportunity to come down and speak. I would say Townsville, definitely. A place where they are very frustrated is Ingham, particularly after the mass floods. There have been reported of crocodiles in the gutters, at their fences and on the main roads and back roads. That would be a very good place to go for a public hearing. You are looking at 280 kilometres from Cairns to Ingham. The way I see it, Townsville would be a good area but Ingham is a rural area where the farmers are annoyed about all the crocs in their bore drains and on their farms. There are also beautiful freshwater creeks that have been taken over—once people could swim in them but now they can't. They are beautiful creeks. Rollingstone is one example.

In terms of river systems, the Russell River that runs in through Cairns is a huge problem. They used to spearfish in the Tully River. They used to ski in the Johnstone River that runs through Innisfail. What I mean is: the recreational aspect has been stolen from them. It is great, and I very much support the beautiful \$300 million footbridge there. You have sports stadium and big shopping centres, but, in the north, we rely so much on our waterways, and they have just been taken over by crocodiles—crocodiles that want to kill us. They want to kill us and eat us. This is the frustrating thing about it. Then we make a complaint about it and they say, 'Oh well, we will put up a croc sign and we will do another count'. We want real action here.

CHAIR: I think we will take that as a concluding statement. Are there any other questions?

Ms BOLTON: I have one. When you spoke about crocodile control you used the word 'extinct'. I am wondering why you did not use other terminology in the bill as a way of measuring such as 'threatened', 'vulnerable' or 'endangered'?

Mr Knuth: It could be my figure of speech; the language that I use. It could be my bush slang!

Ms BOLTON: How hard is it to get an increase in the number of eggs that can be harvested or taken?

Mr Knuth: I think that is for the authority to work out. That is the dialogue for the authority to have in working with the department to do an assessment of how many eggs. Nothing has happened. They have 90,000 over in the Northern Territory and we are doing a trial here in which there seems to be no interest by the departmental side. I believe that we just need to get in there, make an assessment of this and say, 'We can achieve this.' There are so many economic benefits for Indigenous communities in doing egg harvests.

Ms BOLTON: To do more egg harvests?

Mr Knuth: To do more, yes.

Mr LEE: I have a question that goes to the decision-making of the Crocodile Authority in terms of the bill. The decision-making authority seems to be very broad. Have you considered amending the bill in respect of the factors that might be taken into consideration when that authority is exercising a discretion?

Mr Knuth: A government introduces a bill. Obviously, they will then hear public feedback and say, 'We need to add this or include that.' We are not ruling out anything in regard to amendments because that happens with every bill. That is the benefit of committees; they can point something out. We always want to ensure the committees find a way to make things happen rather than things not happen and then look at the little things and say, 'We cannot agree with that, so let's stop this altogether.' Then next minute, we get a report of 3,000 crocodile sightings a year rather than 1,200 a year. You get to that stage. I have been here. I think I started off in around 2015. That is 10 years that I have been on about this and now the population has doubled—if not tripled—since the first time. There can always be a little bit of ground for movement, yes.

CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes this briefing. Thanks to everyone who participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. We do not have any questions on notice, so I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 12.26 pm.