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

Staff present:
Dr A Ward—Committee Secretary
Miss A Bonenfant—Assistant Committee Secretary

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

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 8 May 2025

CAIRNS

THURSDAY, 8 MAY 2025

The committee met at 9.57 am.

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare open this public hearing 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 this committee. I acknowledge the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people of this state and their elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge the former members of this parliament who have participated in and nourished the democratic institutions of this state. Finally, I acknowledge the people of this state, whether they have been born here or have chosen to make this state their home and whom we represent to make laws and conduct other business for the peace, welfare and good government of this state. With me here today are: Mr Joe Kelly MP, member for Greenslopes and deputy chair; Ms Sandy Bolton MP, member for Noosa; Mr David Lee MP, member for Hervey Bay; and Ms Kerri-Anne Dooley MP, member for Redcliffe.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

[redacted]

CHAIR: I now welcome [redacted]. I want to acknowledge the member for Hill, who is here in the gallery today. [redacted] would you like to make an opening statement?

[redacted]**:** I am speaking on behalf of the management of [redacted] but I am not actually employed by them. They have other business that they could not get away from and because this is an important topic they provided a couple of submissions. They appreciate the opportunity to speak to you so, on their behalf, I thank you very much for this opportunity. In light of recent events, I have a statement that they have shared with me that aligns with the submissions and I am happy to provide that to the committee. Because it will probably take longer than my allotted two or three minutes, I thought I would summarise that.

[redacted] owners have been operating in the Far North, [redacted] since 2008. Their personal experience is of seeing more and more crocodiles present in the area. They are looking for a responsible management framework to protect the safety of people and for the conservation of the animals themselves. They have had interactions where the staff have felt unsafe and have had staff leave the business due to repeated and increasing interactions.

I have taken not only [redacted] and their management team's word for this; I have spoken to other tourism operators from the area as well as down south in the Whitsundays. That is a common theme that is being experienced. There are more and more crocodile interactions. For the conservation of the animals and, most importantly, the protection of humans, they welcome the opportunity in the bill to look for more contemporary and responsible management of the animals, keeping human safety at the peak of their focus.

Mr J KELLY: In your submission you note that there is little to protect yourselves or guests from a crocodile. Would that still be an issue even if crocodile numbers declined? How have you managed those sorts of risks to date?

[redacted] The crocodile signs are out there and the feedback from guests and other visitors to the area is that there is so much signage that they ignore it. The company have adapted their operations to the education of their guests and also adapted their operations for their crew, taking a tender from the beach to fetch the moored vessel. They mix up their pattern. Crocodiles seem to be monitoring their patterns. They have taken action. If the population numbers were reduced due to removal or whatever method is chosen, you are in crocodile country and you always have to be crocodile responsible and you always have to have crocodile education. The company is committed to continuing that.

Greater populations mean a greater chance of interactions and the consequences of those interactions can be quite severe. This is where they are calling for that responsible management, keeping human safety at the forefront. We work in nature. You have to be responsible and have best practices to think about all aspects, not only about crocodiles but other animals and wildlife interactions so it will still be a focus of risk assessment and management. The company has already made adjustments over the years to adapt to that and will continue to do that.

Mr J KELLY: One of the adaptions that was mentioned in the submission was crocodile surveillance. Could you give us a bit more detail on how you undertake that crocodile surveillance and what that means for staff and guests?

[redacted] I would have to take that on notice. What I know from their crocodile surveillance is that they have reported it through the Q-croc app or a QWildlife app. I have been told that, with the frequency of sightings, the staff have indicated to management that they see them so often now that when they report it is, 'Yes, there's no point in reporting it to today,' or 'There's no point in reporting again unless interactions are getting more risky.' It has almost become that we see that they are there but if you keep reporting it nothing happens with the crocodile because the relocation policy stops at Port Douglas. It does not extend all the way up to the Far North, to my knowledge. For specifics on their monitoring, I would have to take that on notice and get management to provide that.

Mr J KELLY: In relation to the Q-croc app that you mentioned, when you report stuff or when staff report stuff, do you feel like you are getting good information back from the department of environment when you put something in that system?

[redacted] I can only speak to what the management and the staff have told me. The impression I get is that the responses back are less than ideal. They will get a response but it does not have action or follow-up, so less than ideal would be my read of their feedback to me to pass onto you.

Ms DOOLEY: Your submission states that there are around 100,000 crocodiles. What research and data do you have to back that up?

[redacted] I would have to speak to the owners to know where they got that data from.

Ms DOOLEY: Thank you; that is a question taken on notice. Your submission also speaks about crocodiles changing their eating habits to include feral pigs rather than the more standard, which is turtles and fish. Do you know of any programs aimed at lowering feral pig numbers to assist in redirecting crocodile feeding habits?

[redacted] I have not had feedback from the management of [redacted] that they know of that. I have personal knowledge from other interactions that there is feral pig management. Whether it is up in the cape I am not aware. I am aware of feral pig management but not specific details of that. I would have to ask the owners again if they are aware of any local feral pig management to deter crocodiles preferring that as a food source.

CHAIR: [redacted] I do not know where [redacted] is. Can you tell us a little about where the lodge is and how people get there? Can you give us a bit of context around the business itself?

[redacted] I would not be able to do that. I do know where the lodge is [redacted] The specific location I am not exactly certain of. I do know where they operate from the beaches.

Unidentified Speaker: I can answer that, if you like. [redacted]

CHAIR: I am sorry—

Unidentified Speaker: I am just answering where the lodge is. [redacted]

CHAIR: Thank you.

[redacted] I want to stress that I am here on behalf of them so I have some familiarity with the business but I do not know the full extent of the business. The owners are friends and colleagues of mine in other arenas and I am representing them. On some of the specific questions that may be difficult for me to provide an answer. That is why my opening statement is just looking at the bill and the management of crocodiles or the conservation of the crocodiles and keeping the safety of people at front of mind when looking at managing the animals.

Ms BOLTON: I want to go back to removals for a moment, and you can take this on notice. You said that the policy excludes that area. Are you able to find out where that advice came from? What response is received from the department when a crocodile sighting is lodged for removal? It would help us enormously to understand that.

[redacted] I will take that on notice.

Ms BOLTON: You spoke about a responsible framework. Can you tease out a bit what you see a responsible framework would look like?

[redacted] From speaking with them, it is possibly a range of processes. First, we have to have the research. You asked a question about where the numbers come from. It is looking at the research and continually monitoring crocodiles. You ask: is the population increasing, at what rate and is there movement of the crocodiles? Understanding the population dynamics of the animals in both the temporal and spatial contexts is No. 1 to guide how you manage the crocodiles. Is there a change in their feeding behaviour patterns? That kind of research needs to be done.

As you have already highlighted, you want to know where they got those numbers from. Personally, I would not know where, but to understand the crocodiles themselves then ecology is key. From that, you can consider different alternatives, whether that is a stronger crocodile removal process, farming or different approaches. I see that the author of the submission spoke to the Northern Territory management. I am not 100 per cent familiar with the exact model of that. It is looking at different methods of how you manage the population in the context of the ecology and conservation of the animals and keeping people safe.

Understanding the population dynamics and the ecology of the animals is critical. A crocodile is an apex predator. It is also integral in the ecosystem. You cannot just eradicate them from an area because that can have potential flow-on effects. It is just about being responsible. That is a high-level kind of quick idea.

Mr LEE: In your view or the operator's view, does the bill provide enough assurance that crocodile management will improve in Queensland?

[redacted] I have not had that feedback from the management, no.

Mr LEE: Are you aware of any consultation process undertaken with tourism operators in the development and drafting of this bill or previous bills?

[redacted] No.

CHAIR: There are no further questions from the committee. We are up against time and we have someone else scheduled for 10.10 so I thank you for joining us today. A number of questions were taken on notice. Responses will be required by 16 May, I think.

[redacted] Can I clarify: I will pass these questions on notice to the operators and the owners, but does the response have to come from me as I am representing them or should it come from them?

CHAIR: It can come from [redacted]

[redacted] Will a list come through with the exact questions?

CHAIR: We will send you that information.

[redacted] I appreciate your time and the opportunity. Thank you very much.

MARTENS, Mr Warren, Private capacity

WHITE, Mr David, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good morning and thank you for agreeing to appear today. Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask questions?

Mr White: Yes, thanks, Chair. I am here on behalf of Margaret Barstow, who could not make it today due to sorry business. Unfortunately, one of the co-authors of her submission has passed, way before his time. It is a very common occurrence with mob, unfortunately.

Margaret is a senior consultant to three different coastal tribes who have asked her to write a submission on their behalf. It was with very short notice that I was asked to speak here and I am not very familiar with cultural procedures and traditional lore, but I want to make sure they have a voice. The bottom line is that they do not agree with the proposed bill. They reject it entirely. The proposal to eliminate every crocodile in any waterways that are used by humans, which is basically every waterway, without proper consultation with the traditional owners of those areas is insulting.

Coastal people traditionally believe that when their people die their spirit would enter the large boss crocodile and it would transport them around. They call them 'travellers'. Killing a large crocodile is literally spilling the blood of the ancestors. It has been likened by one elder to someone going into a church and smashing a statue of Jesus. It is totally disrespectful. What is even more disrespectful is the proposal to allow First Nations people to profit from killing their totems. While some non-coastal First Nations people may agree with this unsustainable concept due to short-term financial incentives, they do not have the right. It is the elders from the crocodile country who remember the old ways. It is they who should be consulted.

For 65,000 years First Nations people have lived in harmony with a far greater number of crocodiles than there are today. They knew how to live with them and understood the important role they played in a balanced ecosystem. They have always hunted smaller crocodiles for food and collected eggs, but they did it sustainably. To the importance of the large crocodiles, not only culturally but also that they are the peacekeepers, they keep the younger, secretive and more aggressive crocs under control. Ask any person who lives with crocs and they will tell you it is the one you do not see that is going to get you. Beside me is Warren Martens, who is an elder of the Gunggandji mob. Crocodile is his totem. He is the one who should be consulted about anything going on in this area, this land and this sea right here.

CHAIR: Would you like to make a statement?

Mr Martens: I would like to acknowledge all elders past and present and the emerging younger generations of Indigenous people. I also acknowledge that we have nine Indigenous people in the room here. I acknowledge their presence as well. My main concern with the bill is: when is the killing of our totem-aligned animals going to stop? We just see this constant sustained wanting to remove the species that is just coming back from extinction. We just see no logic in why we have to go out trophy hunting. It leaves me and a lot of our other brothers and sisters who are totem people very uncomfortable and unsafe with the state even talking about and even going in that direction. There is no respect. We now are in a position where we are getting crocs removed without consultation with us. We are hearing about it after it has been done. There are no processes in place to even have those basic consultations with our people.

When are we going to start engaging with traditional croc totem people? I have had meetings with some of our mob on the ground who are saying that their crocs are being taken without their knowledge. They are very key totem crocs. They have just been taken and put into captured areas where they do not see or hear of them anymore. How spiritual is that? We are in this undignified, unsafe space around our native wildlife now. That is all I have to say.

CHAIR: For clarity, I think what I am hearing you say is that you have concerns about the current legislation that is in place and crocodile management practices.

Mr Martens: Yes.

CHAIR: Is that correct?

Mr Martens: We just do not know where this bill is going to end up, even on the population size of how they are going to be decreased. There is just no Indigenous involvement in this whole process.

CHAIR: We are meeting with a group of traditional owners this morning for further consultation, which I guess is a step forward, because I think the Chief Scientist suggested that was important.

Mr Martens: Yes, I am going to be a part of that process as well. I think before any moves to put the bill back into parliament we need to see how the bill is going to pan out—how it is going to work to maintain the sustainability—and also have that cultural stuff embedded into the bill.

Mr J KELLY: Thank you very much for your presentation. I note that First Nations people have lived alongside crocodiles for thousands of years. Could you give us some insight into how this has been managed over that period of time?

Mr Martens: It has been managed to the point where we never had a problem with having to. They just naturally managed themselves around our people. Our people took what they needed. All of a sudden, we have had this massive kill post colonisation. Now that we have gotten back to where partly the numbers should be, are we going to go back into that area where we are going to be killing too many crocs? Are we going to have to sustainably manage them again to build the numbers up? How many crocs are going to be taken each year that is going to be sustainable? We should not be having these conversations. They should be allowed to be naturally free to go and coexist with us humans. It is us humans who have to manage this problem. It is not Aboriginal people or crocs; there has to be education around how colonisation has happened and how we are living with crocs. There are other examples around the world where local people coexist with crocs in major developed areas so we have to start looking at how the wider Australian mob—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people—coexist with crocodiles and wildlife in built-up areas.

Ms DOOLEY: Thank you for being here today and for your thought-provoking presentation. My question is around the Be Crocwise education program that currently exists. Apparently it is not run as well as in the Northern Territory. Do you believe that there is enough First Nations involvement with that education piece?

Mr Martens: I have not been in that space, but I guess there needs to be a lot more work put into it so that First Nations engagement is crucial. I kind of view the issue of Indigenous croc management a bit like how we are starting to unpack how burning practices are done with our people. Our people have a knowledge of how the system works around burning so let us start to develop traditional owners who are on country who are developing those ranger programs—start developing those programs with the wider community and people within government who have the ability and the resources to do all this work. I think that is the model moving forward with our mob. We need to coexist with government and the community in getting better outcomes for the mob and the crocs.

Mr White: The Be Crocwise program is world-leading in Australia, and the Northern Territory probably do it slightly better than we do. There is always room for improvement. I know in one instance they had a little song up there. They have translated it into all different languages—all different Indigenous languages, even pidgin—and it is very catchy. They should use it here in Queensland.

This world-class Crocwise program saves lives. We have very low attack numbers in Australia compared with the number of crocodiles we have. In other countries to the north of us such as Indonesia, they have the same animal. They have way more attacks with way fewer crocodiles than we have here in Australia—very small numbers—because they have been hunted very heavily. They have more attacks because of the lack of education. The way we keep people safe is through education and getting it out there in different ways. Through consultation is the way we are going to keep people safe. This proposed bill is just going to create complacency and that is what kills, because everyone thinks it is safe but it is not. There is always going to be another one. They can swim across from New Guinea. They can come from the Northern Territory. They can come from anywhere. It is the sneaky one that comes in overnight that nobody notices that is the dangerous one.

Mr Martens: There are no boundaries. They go where country tells them to go or where they can go.

Ms DOOLEY: Talking of numbers, there is quite a variance. We see from DETSI around 20,000 to 30,000. We have had some submissions that claim there are around 100,000. From a First Nations perspective, how do you track or know about the numbers? Do you have an idea or want to comment on that?

Mr Martens: I think we do not have a problem with the numbers being around the sustainable level as they were post colonisation. I think that is a story that we need to work towards and building a better Queensland. If we can get to that, we can be world leaders in saying we have achieved and maintained that level. That is something to be very proud about. I would like to see that in my lifetime. That would be good. I bet a lot of other people would. Let us go back to this stuff around our pre-colonisation level. That is the goal we have to work on.

CHAIR: Are you suggesting that you are happy with the status quo? You would be happy with the current legislation remaining as is, with no changes, or are you wanting to see other changes?

Mr Martens: I would like to see it managed a lot better than we decrease the numbers.

Ms BOLTON: I am trying to understand totems. From my understanding in previous inquiries, for some mobs the totem applies and for others it does not, including on the coast. Overall in the coastal area, what percentage down the coast would there be that it is considered a totem versus not?

Mr Martens: I have to say as Gunggandji people we strongly have totems. I think you are going to need to do some analysis around that narrative with all the mob. I think you are going to need to invest in that research. We all have our own voices and our own cultural perspectives. We like to navigate what our stories are. I would keenly support the idea that we do this massive study around where people's totems are and how they see the whole space and culture.

Ms BOLTON: In relation to the gathering of eggs, we have heard from commercial farms that they would like to be purchasing eggs. Does the totem consider that the gathering of eggs also should not be supported or is there support broadly?

Mr Martens: It may well be. With my mob, the gathering of eggs is not sustainable in our area. It has to be based around what the evidence is telling us about the numbers and the sustainability levels of crocs. We do not want to have a situation where we are depleting stocks. As the amount of crocs come in, we do not want to be overdoing it. We would need to evidence-base it around informed evidence.

Mr LEE: Earlier you touched on coexistence between Aboriginal peoples and the wider population with crocodiles. I am interested to know if you see a way forward to balance the traditional practices around respect for totemic relationship with crocodiles and improving crocodile safety on a large scale?

Mr Martens: This is one issue that we need to come together on. As Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community, let's sit down and start having these truth-telling stories about crocs and how we are going to move forward to manage it. Unless we start having those conversations, we are going to be coming back here again having these same old inquiries and same old arguments. Let's get some concrete things together for the next generation who we will leaving behind. Then we can say, 'This is what the elders said and this is where we need to go forward.' A lot of our old people who are knowledge holders around these things are leaving them for the younger generation—people like me and my mob—to manage with government. That is where the agenda has to be.

Mr LEE: To your knowledge, was there any consultation with traditional owners in the preparation or the drafting of this bill and any previous versions of the bill?

Mr Martens: David can probably answer that better than I could. What I have been hearing is that there has been very little.

Mr White: There has not been much locally here, otherwise Warren would know about it. I am not sure how much consultation there was with Indigenous people. In answer to your question about the numbers, there are scientists who have been working their whole lives studying crocodiles. Very respected scientists have come up with numbers that are peer reviewed. Unfortunately, in the preparation of this bill, no-one has talked to these scientists. There are all sorts of stories about how many crocodiles there are out there, but you have to look at the science. When you are looking at any legislation changes, you respect the scientific community, and I do not think enough of that has been done, either. I think the numbers are closer to 30,000 than 100,000 in Queensland—I think that is the general feeling—and the population, of course, has increased since they were hunted very heavily, but it is levelling out now. If we can learn to live with them at the current numbers, that is the best outcome for everybody—the animals and the humans and keeping them safe. I do not know much about the consultation, but I know not much has been done locally.

Mr LEE: When you say the 'science', is there a specific scientist we on this committee should be aware of?

Mr White: Laurence Taplin has been studying crocodiles since he was 19. He is in his 80s now. He is supposed to be retired, but he has been helping the department here with counts—doing the same counts using the same methodology over many years.

Mr LEE: I understand he is a statistician.

Mr White: Yes. Not a lot of studies have been done on crocodiles. There is a lot more research that needs to be done, but he is the man.

Mr Martens: If I can make one final point, I am concerned about when we get reports of crocs in areas and the department goes in and takes them without any consultation about what that actually means to the wellbeing of our people. I do not see anything there to support the elders and the communities around when crocs are taken, because sometimes the wrong people are consulted about these things—people who are not totem people. Then that causes all sorts of arguments in our communities. I think we really need to spend some time investing in what that does as well.

CHAIR: Thanks for that comment. We can probably thrash that out a little bit more in the next session. We are out of time. We are going to take a short break and we will recommence in about 15 minutes, at 10.45 am. I note there are quite a few people in the public gallery today who perhaps are feeling a bit frustrated and have other views or similar views that they would like to express. I point out that this inquiry will be running for some time. I do not think we are due to report back to parliament until August, so we have several months to run. The committee is more than happy to receive correspondence from any members of the public who have other views they would like to express or perhaps missed the timeframes that were set for submissions. You are more than welcome to write to us or contact us with any other views.

Unidentified Speaker: Are you going to open up for further submissions?

CHAIR: It is really just a procedural issue. We can accept correspondence or submissions from members of the public and we simply resolve to either accept or reject them. In the interests of obtaining as much information and as broad a view as we can, I think you will find the committee will be very open to accepting further correspondence from submitters. There are also some further public hearings to be conducted over the course of the next few months. Thanks for your attendance. We will take a break now.

Proceedings suspended from 10.35 am to 10.46 am.

Mr Marc Harbrow then gave a welcome to country—

CHAIR: We will now have a roundtable session facilitated by Peter Yagmoor, the First Peoples Liaison Officer with the Queensland parliament. Peter, would you like to introduce yourself?

Mr Yagmoor: Hi, everyone. My name is Peter Yagmoor. I am a Guugu Yimithirr man from Hope Vale, Cape York, currently based in Brisbane. I am the First Peoples Liaison Officer with the Queensland Parliamentary Service. I have been in the role for three months now. It is good to hang around it. It is good to see some familiar faces here, being a Cairns local as well. It is a discussion that I am most passionate about. We will get started, to keep on track.

Obviously, this is a bit of a traditional roundtable yarn. From the Queensland Parliamentary Service end, we have reached out and done a lot of consultation with traditional owners through connections we have—thankfully through Marc and other government connections—throughout Cairns, Far North Queensland, Cape York and all the way down to Rockhampton as well. What we will do is have a bit of a yarn with the traditional owners about the ways, the processes and everything with regard to crocodile management—what they go through in everyday life. It would be good to hear from a traditional owner's point of view. Obviously with this we do have clashes—some agree and some do not agree on things—but that is what the committee here today wants to hear. Do not be afraid to have those conversations about that, because what we might disagree on is actually great data and great research for people to take away to put in their notes to form their report. I invite all the traditional owners I have spoken to this morning and who are here to have a discussion to come up the front here and make yourselves comfortable.

AH-KEE, Mr Dennis, Private capacity

AMBRUM, Mr Robert, Private capacity

HARBROW, Mr Marc, Private capacity

MUNBRARY, Ms Errin, Private capacity

MARTENS, Mr Warren, Private capacity

REYS, Mr Nevin, Private capacity

SINGLETON, Mr Tarquin, Private capacity

Mr Yagmoor: I will hand over to the chair and the committee to have awesome discussions and questions around traditional owner control management.

CHAIR: I will invite each of the elders to make a statement, to start things off, so everyone gets a fair go, and then we can enter into some discussion after that. Marc, would you like to kick off with some comments?

Mr Harbrow: I guess more of an understanding that we are not all elders. You have traditional owner groups and their bloodlines, and representing their bloodline as well. I think if you guys pose questions, and certainly you have a wealth of experience here, and I will make clear the experiences here. It is a bloodline group.

CHAIR: I invite you to start, Warren, with a few comments.

Mr Martens: I think I basically covered a lot of what I wanted to say, but I am quite happy to engage with my fellow brothers and any sisters here. I am quite happy to be part of the discussion as well, thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Ah-Kee, would you like to make a few comments to kick things off?

Mr Ah-Kee: Thank you. I am quite happy with things. I am an elder—probably one of them. Our country is around the Russell River. That is our traditional country. We spend a lot of time doing most of our work out of the Russell River. Robert can tell you a little more about the amount of time we spend on the Russell River because he is our head ranger. We see a lot of crocs in the Russell River as well. I would like to also acknowledge the Yirrganydji people, being on their country. It is great to be here. It is always a difficult place here because it is hard to get a park, even at the best of times. You have to get here pretty early in the morning. I am pleased to see this and I will take on any questions that you may ask or any queries.

CHAIR: Mr Singleton?

Mr Singleton: My name is Tarquin Singleton. I am Yirrganydji as well. Marc and I are cousins. We have connection to this area, from Cairns to Port Douglas. We have our neighbouring groups—Djabugay, Buluwai, Ngakali—and our north neighbour, Gulunydji, and then you have Yidinji, Gungganydji, so there are quite a few groups in this area alone.

My background is that I used to do land and sea management as a Yirrganydji ranger. One of the things we did at the start was help out the croc team as well that managed between Chelmer Creek out to Ellis Beach with the public tender where they capture crocs and move them to farms or zoos because it takes out the culling aspects of it. The reason they cannot relocate them in the wild is that they are like homing pigeons; they swim their way back to where they were caught. On top of that, for some of our families, crocodile holds a cultural significance, especially as totems for some people. It is a part of the environment here.

CHAIR: We will go to Mr Ambrum.

Mr Ambrum: I am Robert Ambrum. I am Yidinji lower coastal man from down in the lower part of the Mulgrave River. I work for Jaragun Ecoservices. The elder here is my uncle. I have been doing that for six years now. I am in the river almost every week, with work and play. I live on the Mulgrave River, one of my traditional lands down there. That is basically what I am here for.

CHAIR: Mr Reys?

Mr Reys: Good morning, everyone. My name is Nevin Reys. I am a Gimuy Walubara Yidinji young upcoming student of my elders. They send their love to everyone here and to the traditional owners here. They could not make it. They had lot of stuff they had to attend to. We are quite busy at the moment with a lot of movement happening. I am very thankful to be here and speak on behalf of our old people in the past, present and future. I have Torres Strait and I have Filipino, and I speak on their behalf as well, as those countries that I come from have crocodiles as well, and we have the same knowledge as they all live in the water; they live in certain environments.

The one thing I got taught by all my elders is that you have people welcome to country. It is the same thing. We need to be welcomed by crocodiles. They have their identity and their purpose for a reason. They were created by the Creator for a reason. This is the one thing that needs to be educated more, and this is why there are a lot of people who do not know how to deal with the situation. I can tell you right now: it is sad to see this creation being put as dangerous, because they do not kill as much as—sorry if that is offensive to some people, but they do not take as much life as a lot of other things do, like food, alcohol, cigarettes. All these other things take more lives than crocodiles do.

This is why it is a very emotional topic to speak about when we see crocodiles not just being removed from their home. There might be some scientists here in this room. They know that when you move a crocodile—and they could take them across the world—he will come back. He will find his way home because he has a purpose and an identity in that area. He has a purpose and a meaning. If we do not go back to the correct way where we have to get woken by that crocodile, we are not going to have a relationship where they are going to be safe and we are going to be safe. I just want to share the opportunity while I have it to speak a little about how important it is, especially from all my human, clay-and-dust elders. Thank you.

CHAIR: I want to acknowledge Errin Munbrary. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Ms Munbrary: Good morning. I am Errin Munbrary. I am part of the Mandingalbay Yidinji clan group. We are here for exactly the same reason as these guys. It is all about that connection. We are here as well.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to questions from the committee. Does anyone have a question they are itching to ask?

Mr LEE: Just broadly to the group, I am really interested to understand more about the spiritual and totem significance of the crocodile to your mobs.

Mr Ah-Kee: We have always seen the crocodile as an important part of the ecosystem. In fact, we are in the process of developing a catchment management plan. Very much a part of that will be looking at crocodile management and control. Our organisation is called Ganyarra, which is 'crocodile' in our language, so it is very important to us.

The other thing is that I am only one elder amongst many, so I can speak from my own experience from within the Russell River itself. I mentioned before that crocodiles are a part of us. We spend a lot of time up in the river—not me personally but the rangers do. We run into crocodiles all the time. Our biggest concern is that, when crocodiles are removed from the area, we do not normally get told about it. That is probably our concern. We want to co-manage what happens within

our river system, not only the main part of the Russell River itself but across the whole catchment. There are a large number of crocodiles, we would say, within the catchment. I do not think the numbers have been fully explored. They worry about the Russell River itself and they go up there and count the crocodiles, but there are more crocodiles that do not stay in the Russell River. They are in Eubenangee Swamp. When flood time comes, of course those crocodiles just walk. They cover a lot of territory.

There is always a concern about people when they go swimming now because no place is safe, particularly in our country. We have a short run through the Russell heads out to the Great Barrier Reef, so crocodiles are likely to be present anywhere at any time. A big concern is Babinda Creek itself because that is a great recreation area and people do a lot of swimming there as well, right up to the Babinda Boulders, which is my grandmother's traditional country. It is only a matter of time before they get up there.

From a spiritual sense, yes, it is an important part of the ecosystem. While you have crocodiles in there, you have a healthy system. They help maintain the health of the waterways. Without crocodiles, the waterways get sick. That is what we are trying to avoid.

Mr Martens: I 100 per cent endorse what my brother is saying here.

CHAIR: One of the main purposes of this committee travelling and meeting with stakeholders across this state is to understand, in the first instance, whether there is support for the legislation as proposed but also to look at current management practices. On the one hand, I think I am hearing you say—I am not trying to lead you, either—that it is important that we protect the crocodiles. On the other hand, it seems that it is acceptable to do some culling of crocodiles and to remove crocodiles but you want to be better informed. Do I have that right?

Mr Martens: Yes. That is part of it. I think the panel would probably agree that we need to have a better look at how it is all managed. Indigenous people need to be involved in that process. At the moment we are left out of it. There needs to be more of an engagement process with our people so that the species can be managed far better than it is now. While we are out of the game, we are always going to be having this to-and-fro with each other. I would say that we need to all sit down and have a proper Indigenous management plan for the species across the state.

Mr Harbrow: I will try to structure this right. Just to add to what has already been said, it is the how. It is the consultation part which is what today is about. I think what is obvious is that local traditional owner groups, yes, have been left out. The answer to the question is that the crocodile as an animal is very significant and important to Aboriginal Australia.

I think we can all agree that we do not want to affect and impact our ecosystem. Whatever management method does that is the right method. In order to achieve the right method, you have to connect with traditional owner groups. You have to connect with non-Indigenous families that are local to the area for some 30-plus years. They are going to have some information about movements and which crocs are problems compared to ones that are not. I think it is about greater consultation from our leads in government which today is about and involving everyone in the process and not leaving anyone who holds that information out of the consultations.

In my personal opinion, where a crocodile does pose a threat, particularly to kids and families, we have to have a plan for that. We have to have management skills for that. If you are not involving people who hold the knowledge of who that crocodile is—there are some traditional owner groups who have names for every single croc within two river systems. They know their movements. They know their eating patterns. They know when they are not hungry. I think that, at a government level, not involving traditional owner groups is detrimental to the management of this. It is only a greater inclusion to include traditional owner groups. I would go so far as to say that it is not only traditional owner groups who hold that knowledge but also there are generations of families who have lived in the area for 50-plus years. They are also going to hold some key information for government leads that would have impact on the management of the crocodiles.

As far as culling is concerned or going out and killing a crocodile because one pops up and they shoot it, I do not think that is smart because you impact the ecosystem. If that crocodile you shot has a significance to a leading elder within that community then that is going to be pose some community issues. That is what I wanted to add.

Mr Reys: Did you get your answer before about the spirituality aspect and why it is important to us?

Mr LEE: I was going to come back to that. You touched on the importance of the ecosystem and if you take a crocodile out of the ecosystem the waterways get sick. I was going to explore that further.

Mr Reys: The importance of them is that they are part of us and we are part of them. They have purpose and identity. If we do not have a sharing relationship with them—it is their home and it is our home—we are going to be fighting. There are elders in the crocodile world that people do not understand—how long the crocodiles have been living for and how long they do live for. Scientists know how long they live for. They have a lot of knowledge too about us. They do watch us and they live with us.

One thing that I really wanted to share is that crocodiles are a being just as much as any other creation out there. If the younger ones are not taught, it is expected that they will not know how to live, and they are going to come and attack and eat what they think is right for them. It is the same as us. That is why it is important that it is not just the crocodile; it is every creation that we are talking about as Indigenous people.

There are certain groups out there that do certain things with them. Some people have them as totems. They have their purpose in that community to do what they have to do with that crocodile. Culling is a ceremony. We do not just kill and then we celebrate a death. When you kill something it breaks their heart. Knowing that there has to be that in place to keep the balance—that is why there are cycles. We all know the cycles. There are cycles to all creation, even us.

This is why for me, as a young ranger, like I said, I am here to represent Gimuy Walubara Yidinji. In Cairns we do not have opportunities to go out there at the moment. As a young ranger coming up, I have never been around crocodiles in Cairns—not one. That is my question. Maybe some of the other elders in my group have answers to this. I do not have answers. My dad does not have answers. He is part of the board of the elders corporation. He has not spoken to me about any of this. They said there might be opportunities because they are going to make it. They know what they are going to do and how they are going to do it because we have been doing it since time began. I will leave it at that.

Mr Singleton: To touch on what you are curious about with the culling and all of that, you cannot have blanket management all across Queensland and all across Australia. You have to do what Marc was saying—get that local knowledge, even if it is non-Indigenous as well. Local knowledge is what is going to give you the best outcome of what you are aiming for.

With the culling aspect, a lot of people are complacent because there was a big cull before and then crocodiles were protected. The species has grown back from being critically endangered. Their population is coming back to where it is. People just need to be more understanding that murky water is not a good place to be swimming. Where fresh water and salt water touch each other, it is another indicator that there is the possibility of crocs in the water.

When it comes to management, you really have to go to the group. You cannot make a blanket claim of yes or no across the state. In some areas they do kill crocs for ceremonial purpose. For some it is a food source. For some it is a protected species, so we care for it like it is a family member. It is really up to the group that you are engaging with. You cannot make a blanket claim: 'Let's do culling,' or 'Let's not do culling.' You really have to think about it that way.

What it really comes down to is sustainability. If you are going to go down the path where you are removing crocodiles, it has to be sustainable. If you take a crocodile away then you are going to affect that ecosystem. Crocodiles do a lot of population management within the ecosystem. They also keep that riverway alive.

Mr Ah Kee: You wanted to talk about spirituality. Why do you think our organisation is called Ganyarra, meaning 'crocodile'? It is because it is a belief system. We respect the crocodile. That is why we call our organisation Ganyarra, after the crocodile. We have stories which I am not going to talk about here because some are quite lengthy and we do not have the time.

We now have a crocodile farm on the East Russell. What disappoints us is that we have seen in the past where crocs are removed and they are taken somewhere else. We do not want to see any crocs removed from the Russell River and taken anywhere but placed near their home. That is why it is very important that any removal of crocodiles or any control should be through the local Aboriginal people. We should be partners in that, of course with the general public as well.

I am going back a couple of years now when a crocodile trap was set in one of our agricultural drains and they caught the wrong crocodile. It was White Nose. White Nose was known by everybody in Babinda. They took that crocodile away. There was uproar not only from our mob but from the

general population as well: 'You have to bring White Nose back,' but once they capture the crocodile they cannot put it back, even though it was done by mistake. It ended up dying because there was some sort of problem with it. That is just a typical example.

We have a crocodile called Clyde. Everybody has seen Clyde on TV and social media where people are feeding it et cetera. Of course, that crocodile is probably going to end up getting into trouble, like attacking people et cetera, because people feed it. People do not understand and they never will understand because they keep on feeding it. They want to take photographs of it et cetera. I have seen a photograph of some guy standing next to a crocodile near the Clyde Road bridge. They said, 'Look at it—that's Clyde.' That was not Clyde, mate. Clyde is much, much bigger than that. You do not know what is in the water looking at you. This is how stupid people are. That was not Clyde. Clyde is over four metres. He is a big croc.

It is lucky that we have somebody we work with now in Jesse Crampton from Croc Country Australia. He has the farm of the East Russell. We want to work with Jesse to do a croc management plan. It is going to be inclusive. It will include everybody from Babinda itself and particularly government organisations as well. That is what we have to do to try to protect those crocodiles as best we can.

Yes, some have to be removed. It is insane to say that none have to be removed. They will have to be removed, but it is how we remove them and where we place them. We want those crocodiles that are going to be removed to be placed close to home so at least we can go over and visit that crocodile. Of course, we still yarn up crocodiles. We talk to them, the same as Jesse does. When you talk about spirituality, it is more than just the name of spirituality; it is a belief system. When you look at it, we look at a system where everything is connected, from the mountains to the reef. Everything is connected, and part of that connection is the crocodile and everything that the whole system supports. It is not just one thing. You have to look much broader than that. When we manage we manage the whole system. It is not just about managing crocodiles.

Mr LEE: Thanks, Dennis. That was very helpful.

CHAIR: We have scheduled a break and we have some morning tea organised. I think we will take that break. It is nice to be able to have some informal chat during the break as well. We will reconvene at 11.40 am.

Proceedings suspended from 11.19 am to 11.46 am.

CHAIR: The hearing will now resume with questions from the deputy chair.

Mr J KELLY: Thank you very much for sharing your insights and your culture with us today. I want to ask a couple of questions about the bill as proposed specifically, particularly the bits that deal with or relate to people who are Indigenous or First Nations. Before I do that—and I think you have kind of done this in a broad sense—I want to really try to nail down what you might say to people who say that we should cull crocodiles or get rid of them because they are a danger to human beings. Before you answer that, I will just put it into some context.

I grew up in Charters Towers and Townsville. Pretty much all of the places where we swam and fished when I was younger you would probably be a bit more cautious around now, I would say, than you were back then. When I engage with friends in Townsville they will often say to me, 'We should just get rid of them. We should cull them. We should shoot them.' I have been talking to people in a range of different environments this week and some people do say that to me—that we should get rid of them, that we should cull them. I am sure you would hear that in your travels because you live in this community and you are part of this community. What do you say to people who say, 'They're a danger to human beings. We should get rid of them. We should cull them'? What are your thoughts and what would you say in that situation?

Mr Reys: We would say to them, 'You need to be educated first as to why you think they need to be culled.' That area needs to be educated as to the purpose they have in that area. Usually when crocodiles are in certain areas there is a lot of food there. It is like us: if you find a good place, you get comfortable. It is the same with us in that we would go through what we would like to happen to us if we were in that place. We need to find a way where we are not going to kill and destroy them; we need to find a solution. We need to ask them, 'Why is it so important to you to cull them?' They might say, 'My kids go swimming there.' If that is the case, you can have a community agreement to say that that is a very common swimming spot and that we might have to remove it. There would then need to be a talk with the elders and the people in the region and then you have a meeting—it is as simple as that—and you have a vote. If people have a passion for equal rights and balance, it is going to show and they are going to see a safer environment with the crocodile relationship with us. There is more we can talk about, but I am just trying to keep it short.

Mr Harbrow: My response to that is: I would assume someone asking you that question directly has much less connection to that area or connection to that crocodile, so it is very easy for someone to ask that question. In terms of a response, that would be, 'Why? Why do we have to cull this crocodile or those crocodiles in that area?' There might be a poor experience as to the why or simply there is no connection to that specific crocodile or crocodiles within that area.

I think a common theme here is that inclusion with traditional owner groups within each region is something we are progressing forward to in terms of consultation and working with traditional owner groups and land and sea rangers. I think we are going to see less of those questions—that is, 'Just go and shoot the crocs.' Moving more to consultation and working in with traditional owner groups is the part that is highly missing which will add to a solution to each individual area. The reason this is so complex is that it is complex. What works in Cairns is not going to work in Bamaga and what works in Cairns is not going to work in the Babinda rivers. That is why it is complex and that is why an actual solution is very hard to achieve. If a person has to ask that question, they probably do not have a connection to that crocodile or to that area in the first place.

Mr Reys: There was a story up in the cape when I was growing up. There was a crocodile whose name was Sergeant. His name was given to him because they caught him in one of the swimming areas and they had to lock him up in the jail cell, so they called him 'Sergeant'. They sent him to the zoo in Canberra and he became a really big crocodile, and I guess he became an education system as well. As Marc was saying, it is so complex because you get different people who travel in that some people do eat them and some people do not. There is always a season for things and ceremonial seasons, but the most important thing is that some people actually protect them with their life, like aunty and some of these uncles were saying. That is where it becomes complex. Like what brother Marc was saying, in certain places they do different things, but, again, it needs that sit-down. We have things called corroboree. It is a big meeting. Everyone comes and they sort it out. It is always going to work out when you have communication. There is always a solution.

Mr Martens: I think a lot of this stuff wanting to cull crocs is intergenerational with the founding fathers that did the hunting, so how do we get to change that view that we have to coexist? What I also see is a lot of non-Indigenous people who are very supportive of the work that Indigenous people are doing around this stuff. From my knowledge and experience, there are some Indigenous people who want to cull crocs. I am finding that those people do not have totemic relationships with them, so that is why they share that view.

Mr Ah-Kee: I do not like the word 'cull'; I would rather see 'control'. There are other ways to do it. I think you get some itchy fingers on triggers and so forth, and my particular concern is when they take out the big crocs. Do not forget that the big crocs help control the croc population as well because they themselves will see threats where other crocodiles come into their country—their territory—and they will kill them and they will eat them. That is the sort of thing that happens. I would like to see it more along the lines of control rather than culling, and control can be done quite easily—like trapping them and taking them out, particularly those nuisance crocs. Every canefarmer who owns property or farms property beside the Russell River knows their crocs. When we talk about crocodile management, it has to be inclusive and has to include everybody because that is the only way that you are going to come up with a real solution. We want to get to a point where if anybody is having problems with crocodiles they come and see us and go through the proper channels and say, 'Okay, let's try and negotiate our way out of this before we start pulling triggers.' We would rather see traps getting set and those crocodiles taken out that way and put in farms or something like that.

Mr J KELLY: Thanks very much. Going to some specific parts of this bill that refer to Indigenous communities, one of those anticipates egg harvesting and providing incentives for Indigenous communities to set up egg-harvesting enterprises. Could any of you give your views on egg harvesting and whether this is a business or an operation that Indigenous communities would welcome and want to participate in, accepting the limitations that you only speak for your own particular group?

Mr Harbrow: Again, if it is sustainable, I guess I would like to ask if the business is already being done and the answer is yes. I think it is a great opportunity for First Nations ventures to see that as a sustainable venture for a business. If there are businesses already existing, the inclusion of traditional owner groups will add business value to that venture and then inspire First Nations people to go, 'Okay, I can make a connection to this and be part of the solution.' I think it is a great idea and a great concept but, again, some clan groups might say, 'Definitely not.' Some clan groups will say, 'Absolutely. We'd like to explore those venture ideas.' If it is there already and there are proven methods of a business in that space working and First Nations groups can be included and value-add to it, I think it is a brilliant idea.

Mr Singleton: To expand on what Marc said, as long as it is presented to TOs on business incentives and as long as it is sustainable, it has to be put to the group. You also have to give enough time allocated for that decision to be made. It cannot be just in two weeks; there has to be a lead-up and you have to bring TOs while you are doing the proposal before any action is done and planning or management. Once the idea is brought up, that is when you have to bring in traditional owners. It is just like any other community group. Being left out in the dark and having other people have a say on what you think is happening in your area is where you are going to get most of the conflict in that you are starting a project without even involving the right people. Getting back to that, there needs to be early engagement, early consultation and giving them a correct amount of time—a real good amount of time—for people to make decisions.

Mr Ah-Kee: Talking about the Russell River catchment, we have been talking to Jesse about the same thing—about harvesting crocodile eggs. When you talk about sustainability, which is what it is all about, you still have to maintain a certain amount of nests within a system. I do not know what the percentage is, but maybe one or two per cent of the crocodiles grow to adulthood so you have to worry about that as well. You have to rely on those natural populations. What needs to be done is really good research and surveys on crocodile nests to make sure that when you start doing these things it is going to be done in a sustainable way and does not interfere too much with the natural recruitment of crocodiles in the areas. I think that is a key thing. It all depends on the biomass and the number of nests within that area to make it viable.

Mr J KELLY: This might be quite a difficult question, but I have been looking at the statistics around fatal crocodile attacks since 1985. Basically, there has been one every two years in that time. If you compare that to how many people would have been killed on the roads in crocodile areas and perhaps how many Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people have died from treatable diseases like diabetes in a similar sort of timeframe, how do your people feel about us spending a lot of time on this issue compared to trying to solve some of those issues that have significant impacts?

Mr Reys: At the start we were talking about how crocodiles are not just crocodiles. Everything comes into play with us as First Nations, where we get our way of living, our culture. Going back to your first question, it has to be more than just the eggs and whatnot. There has to be everyone in different departments coming as one body because the habitat needs to be surveyed to see if that area is suitable for the crocodiles and for people such as the farmers and where they have their cattle. I am talking about everybody in the community who usually has troubles. Not just the people but the farmers go through a lot of stuff with crocodiles as well. It is trying to narrow it down.

In our culture we have ceremonies, as I said, such as initiations. In the education system, you have to go through all the different tribes and ask them, 'What is the importance of this crocodile nesting area to you guys?' It may be a lesson for young people to go through their initiation to learn how to use respect. If they can respect themselves then they are going to be able to respect the land and their body and their way of living and they will be healthy because they will be more natural and they will be balanced. That is why it is very important for them to have that early learning. That is why I said it goes back to education. It has to be from the very beginning.

We have women business areas. Crocodiles are going up that far now where women are meant to be doing women things. For yourself—I am not being personal—it is about professions and health and all that sort of thing; with us, it is more than just a place or a title. There has to be a balance and it has to be what it was created for so we can have the natural outcome. Our kids are being unhealthy with the food they are eating. When you come to men and women business areas, they both have certain things they can and cannot eat. That is to do with what the food gives us not just physically but spiritually as well—the outcome. They say you become what you eat. I will leave it at that.

Mr Ah-Kee: When you talk about people who actually get taken by crocodiles or get attacked by crocodiles, I do not know if there is any simpler way to sensitise the public about that. I have no idea. It is always going to happen with any wild animal. Once a wild animal takes a human victim, all hell breaks loose. It is a great story. It sells. How do you say to people, 'Maybe it wasn't the crocodile's fault'—or it wasn't the shark's fault? I do not know how to explain that because a lot of times people are in the wrong place at the wrong time. That is all I can say. You have heard a lot of stories about people doing quite silly things and, unfortunately, the price is paid. I do not know. All we can do is try to sensitise people that you have to be careful when you go beside any waterway, particularly on the coast here, as there is a chance that you may run into a crocodile and you may run into the wrong one that will not run away but will lay in the water and wait for a victim to come along. That is the way it is.

Mr J KELLY: I should add that I do not think any death is anything but a tragedy, whether it is one person or 50 people. It is all sad and we should be working hard to minimise that in whatever circumstance. The bill proposes to manage approvals and permits to allow traditional owners to hunt or remove crocodiles on private land with the private landholder's consent. What are your views on that section of the bill in terms of hunting or removing crocodiles from private landholdings?

Mr Singleton: It is up to the group, really. That is all it is coming down to. We cannot speak for anyone else's group. If you are talking about traditional hunting, it is up to the lore and custom of that group. We cannot speak for other people's groups.

Ms BOLTON: Correct me if I am a wrong, but from what I have been hearing so far there has been a fairly consistent message that there is not support for the bill. Am I correct there?

Mr Martens: Yes.

Ms BOLTON: You spoke of inclusion. There is a current review of the Crocodile Management Plan. Has there been consultation with your groups on that?

Mr Reys: Not from us. We have had nothing to do with crocodiles.

Mr Singleton: I got an email about a week ago about this.

Ms BOLTON: I meant the Crocodile Management Plan. The current one is being reviewed at the moment.

Mr Singleton: I follow Wildman on Instagram. That is probably the only time I have seen it mentioned.

Ms BOLTON: Sticking with the theme of inclusion or consultation, I suppose this has emanated from the need for certain zones. In the management plan, there are zones for coexistence or activities such as swimming in populated areas so that people can feel relatively safe. In those zones, when there is a sighting the department organises for the removal. You are saying that before that removal there should be consultation with the TOs in those areas; is that correct?

Mr Martens: Yes.

Ms BOLTON: I am going to go to practicalities: one of the difficulties is timings and timelines. I understand that often going through the consultation process with TOs takes time. If a crocodile is behaving in a manner that is dangerous, time is of the essence. Practically speaking, how do you see there could be a process that could include TOs but would not lengthen the timeframe for removal?

Mr Singleton: Probably you talk to the ranger groups. Indigenous ranger groups have a huge network throughout Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, so they can fill in that gap of communication. They can also fill in the gap where, if you train rangers into whatever it is—if

there is a problem crocodile or if it has anything to do with that waterway—ranger groups can be your guide to not only networking but also communicating. Especially if you are talking legislation, you need to break that down basically into simple English. Everyone likes simple English.

Ms BOLTON: I am sorry to interrupt, but I am mindful of time. It is the permission aspect. At the moment, literally that request goes through and it is signed off.

Mr Singleton: Your ranger groups will help with that and you have to talk to your native title groups and all that. With those things, you are actually going to need time to flesh it out. You might have to allocate a week or something just for people to get to know what you are trying to talk about.

Mr Harbrow: That is a really good question. There are two answers. One is that we are talking about inclusion and infusion of First Nations people, traditional owner groups. I am happy to publicly say that we have to get that part better, too—the traditional owner groups—so that there is better advice to process. I would go so far as to say that we have to also come to the party and be better at the consultation—who's who and who to go to—because there are entities out there that want to say, 'Okay, I want to go to the right person, I want to go to the right group and I want to go to the right process.' That is also about our involvement.

I think it is a mindset thing that we are talking about 'them/they' instead of 'our/us'. I think that mindset has to change. First Nations people also have to get things right in order to have better processes. I think it is a very important question and a really good question at the end of this consultation. There are two areas: maximising that inclusion and infusion of First Nations people; and our people having better processes in our own departments as well.

Mr Reys: I want to say pretty much what the two brothers were saying. You include the traditional owners even before you get to the ranger group or the governing body. You still have people living in that area and they are still living with the seasons. We know when crocodiles are most likely going to attack. We know, especially when they start moving. There is always a season for things to happen. When we see a flower blooming, we know that the crocodile is going to be in a certain way of aggression. It is going to be more protective. It comes to the season when they are about to mate and when they are about to nest. It is just a natural education.

We need to educate our kids and then the government bodies, because you have to remember that this is our everyday living. We do not just go swimming because we are hot; we have work we have to do outside of work. That is the one thing that we have to understand. You talked about the timeframes, but you would not even have to worry about the timeframes. Things would be with the click of a finger. There are always watchmen everywhere. That is not this government, but it is what the brothers were saying: if you can put us into government and out of government as well, we teach the community and they have authority as well.

Ms BOLTON: As an example, because we want to get to solutions, say there is a sighting down here where nippers and everyone is swimming. With the example you have just given, how would you see that working?

Mr Reys: Do not swim when it is flooded and you cannot see. We stay away from flooded water; that is when they are moving and there is more food. The indicator is the land. When you see certain trees giving a certain flower or a certain animal doing certain things, that is the indicator. We warn people, 'Don't go to that beach.' We actually respect them. We let them do what they have to do. 'You cannot just lock us up forever.' That is what the crocodiles are saying to you guys: 'You can't lock us up forever. We've been living here since time began.' That is what they are saying. They are even saying that to our people as well. Obviously with all the confusion of what is going on, sometimes people are running around like headless chickens trying to solve a simple problem, but it comes down to the solution that they need to be given authority as well. Again, crocodiles welcome us to their home as well.

Mr Singleton: Are you asking, 'How do you respond to something urgent?'

Ms BOLTON: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Singleton: That is probably the same as how people train for fire; you just get regular training and regular engagement.

Ms BOLTON: Are you saying for the land and sea rangers?

Mr Singleton: Yes, make sure that communication line is open. Frequent engagement is probably the best way of doing it, even if it is informal. Just keep the people communicating amongst each other; that is probably the best way of doing it.

Mr Reys: And have community events, too, to educate people but we train the people so they know these things as well.

Mr Ah-Kee: I think we have to be seen as part of the solution. The only way to be part of the solution is to be inclusive and be seen as having co-management of crocodiles and control of it. The only way to do that is to get it out there in the public that we have ranger groups here, and they themselves should be part of the solution. Make it in such a way that we are fully recognised and people come and approach us and tell us if there are crocodiles that are problems within the area. That is the only way you are going to get a quick response. They go through the croc management team in Cairns or wherever the croc management team is and they also include us. That is the only way. If you want a quick response, that is the only way to do it. Then we sit around the table, we talk to the people where the problem crocs are and that is where we come up with a solution, and we can solve it pretty quickly.

Ms BOLTON: You mentioned that if the crocodiles are to be removed they are to be relocated in that same area, and we have heard how expensive it is to set up facilities to do that. Based on solutions, have you put forward anything as to how that could occur given the cost to set up facilities to do that?

Mr Ah-Kee: Sorry, to set up facilities insofar as—

Ms BOLTON: To constrain a problem crocodile. You said that at the moment they are being taken away from their area. How would you—

Mr Ah-Kee: I think the council and the croc management people have traps. That is where they have to start working with the ranger groups. The ranger groups themselves should also be furnished with traps.

Ms BOLTON: I do not mean traps where they are then taken to be held long term.

Mr Ah-Kee: So you are saying getting released—getting transferred?

Ms BOLTON: At the moment they are taking them to farms.

Mr Ah-Kee: We would really like to know if anybody is putting crocs in our river system.

Mr Reys: Are they killing them and using them as bags? What has been happening is sometimes they remove the crocs and then they send them to the farms and they would be used as a handbag. If that is the case, we like to do it the traditional way. If that is the alternative, what you are doing—you are killing the crocodiles and then they are being used for money or something—we would like to do it the traditional way. Is that what you are looking for when you ask for a solution of how we do it?

Ms BOLTON: No, I am asking regarding crocodiles—because at the moment they are removed and taken to a farm somewhere else. Earlier you said you wanted them in the same area, to stay there. How do they stay there if there is a problematic crocodile and they have to be constrained? How would you do that?

Mr Reys: We will have to listen to the crocodile. If he is coming and attacking us, I guess you are just going to have to stay away from the area until he moves on.

Mr Ah-Kee: I was only talking about the Russell River. We have a croc farm there.

Ms BOLTON: My apologies.

Mr Ah-Kee: I was only talking about the Russell River. If any crocs get trapped or are nuisance crocs, they should be taken, trapped and also put at the croc farm in the Russell River. That is where I am coming from. I cannot speak for any other parts of other people's country, whether they have croc farms there or they have some arrangements with some croc farms which are outside of their area. I cannot speak to that. I can only speak to what is happening in the Russell.

Ms BOLTON: Thank you. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: To come a little bit closer to home, I heard earlier today from someone that in the past you very rarely saw a crocodile here at Palm Cove and it was a very safe place to swim—and I think the surf club has a 40- or 50-year history—but now it is quite common to see crocodiles here in Palm Cove in spite of the swimming enclosure, and that is managed. How would the club, DETSI or whoever does the work better manage an issue like that where it is affecting tourist numbers and people's ability to swim? Who would they consult with? What would you suggest as a way to better manage something like an issue here at Palm Cove?

Mr Harbrow: You have to remember that infrastructure pushes out crocodiles into other areas, too. If we are cutting off a creek where there have been crocodiles historically and scientifically—it was their ecosystem and now they are being pushed out—that has some effects on seeing crocodiles

out the front here. Again, as Nevin has touched on, you have to work with the crocodile, and we are in crocodile country. We are on land; they are in the water. They can come on land and they are better than us in the water. We have to work with the crocodile. I do not think we all know the science behind them from before my time and then when my time is gone as to how that looks and how that changes. It is about education. It is lifeguards saying, 'Hey, not a good day to be in the water, tourist,' and having signs everywhere and all those sorts of things. Again, to find a solution or an answer to that question is very complex because there are so many different factors at play in that role. I think seeing more crocodiles out there is a natural thing that is happening in this day and age. We live with crocodiles up here.

Another question is about the fact that more are moving south. Why? Is that because the waters are heating up? We are finding them more to the south as far as we go. They are complex questions with complex answers. There are multiple reasons, but the best part is education for the tourist. How much is a life worth? I could not care about tourists having their fun and safety here. I care about a single human's life. How do we avoid that? It is with better education and working in with your traditional owner groups, the locals and the lifeguards who have 50-plus years of experience. It is education and inclusion and infusion.

Mr Singleton: They also do risk assessments here. They actually go dragging for jellyfish just in case any Irukandji or box jellyfish get through the net. It is just that risk assessment. Like Marc is saying, we are also impacting with coastal development and development around the waterways. What was the statistic, one per two years?

CHAIR: Fatalities? It was one every two years.

Mr Singleton: One person every two years? That probably should be showing people that education works. If people are aware of what is happening in the water then we keep that number as low as possible. Education is one of the big things and you just have to understand that this is croc country.

Mr Ah-Kee: I think it comes down to common sense. You mentioned the fatalities on the roads. How do you tell somebody not to speed? How do you tell somebody not to jump in the water? How do you tell somebody not to feed crocs? Once you put a sign up saying, 'Do not feed the crocodiles,' they will say, 'There's crocodiles here, so let's throw something in the water and see where they are.' This is a fact. This is what happens. It comes down to common sense. You can put up all the signs you want, but they are still going to do it. They are still going to jump in the water. They are still going to feed the crocodiles. That is what is going to happen all the time. There are no two ways about it.

Mr Martens: On that data of one every two years, that is probably the best you will ever get globally in places that have crocs. You could follow that up. That is pretty good.

Mr Singleton: That just shows that education is working—and being croc wise.

Mr Reys: Even if the crocodiles are coming to where the homes are, I just wanted to share something simple. We have dogs. Crocodiles are the same. If you feed them, they are going to come back. If we respect them, they are going to give you respect and they are going to protect you. I am not talking wise out of my mouth. Crocodiles protected us in the cape when I lived there. We had a dragnet to catch food in chest-deep or net-deep water, and just after we set the net these crocodiles were lying right beside us on the beach and they were protecting us. They showed themselves to us. They just walked up to us like pups. On YouTube there is a guy in Asia. He calls out to the crocodile, the crocodile comes to him and he feeds and pats it. I look at some of the crocodiles Steve Irwin taught, and we have the same thing. That is why they are part of us. In most areas they are now totem. That means our spirit goes into them, so if we are going to turn into crocodiles we do not want our grandkids coming and trying to cull us or hurt us. You cannot talk in crocodile language that relates to English, but in our language we can understand. They are speaking to us and they are protecting us.

Ms DOOLEY: Firstly, I want to thank each of you for what you have brought this morning. It has been invaluable to have your voices, your stories and your culture shared with us. Thank you, it has been really wonderful. It is really great for us to find the common ground, and what I think I hear you say is that there is a win-win that we can respect culture and traditional owners whilst, obviously, as government our role is public safety. So public safety is No. 1 and, whilst we hear of one death every two years, one death is too many. For us here in Queensland, how do we respect traditional owners but also give DETSI and our Indigenous park rangers the regulation they need to follow up when behaviour has been reported of an aggressive crocodile? In the closing moments, are there any final thoughts you want to say as to how we find that win-win? I will ask Errin first; I would like to hear from the sister here.

Ms Munbrary: I think it is important to recognise there are two different views coming into this. We are speaking for the crocodile; you guys are not. You are speaking for the safety of the people, the economics behind it—all of that. We are not speaking for that; we are speaking for the crocs.

In saying that, I feel that education is needed. Listening to the First Nations people, you are going to get a better understanding of the crocodile and its behaviour—what is causing these issues and what has led to this bill to cull the crocodiles, like Uncle said. It is about finding that common ground and understanding where we are coming from, as the carers of this land—the animals, the plants and everything. We are going to look at it from the crocodile's view; you are not. In saying that, it is more about that open communication, like these guys said, and a lot of consultation. We will stand strong to make sure it is done the right way for the crocs, not anything else.

Mr Reys: There are some people who do tournaments. They do a traditional thing where they go shooting crocs and they hang them up. We do not do that. I do not know how you want to envision this, but for us it is scary. If we found the crocodile dead already, we might educate what the crocodile did for that country and how he kept us safe. To hold them up as a trophy is a big disrespect not just to the crocodiles but also to us, because we feel like we are being hunted as well. It is the same with our artefacts and everything to do with culture—we see it as a big disrespect. It is not educating people, which is what we want.

There needs to be more understanding as to why it is important to us. Actually start teaching the younger generation, like myself and the others who have been misled, with the information to change their mindset. If they believe in a different culture, you have everyone disagreeing. Once upon a time, all nations and Indigenous tribes spoke with one voice and they all spoke with the animals and the land and the sea. I just wanted to see if there is an opportunity to come into the ranger group. For a lot of the ranger groups, we bring our communities. Some people do not get a certificate to say they can do this but they are taught to be croc smart or to be land and sea smart, and then they really do grow a different love for the crocodile because they know the crocodile. They do not want to put it up in the house anymore as a statue. I will just leave it at that. Thank you for today.

Mr Singleton: Probably a practical approach is compliance of eyes and ears and training—basically giving organisations, traditional owners and anyone in the general public basic note-taking skills. If they are concerned about crocs, when they see a croc they can monitor it. If it is a problem croc, you sort of develop a plan on how to deal with that problem croc. They are practical skills—like eyes and ears—like what the rangers do at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. They have done the compliance training with ranger groups, so there is nothing wrong with utilising that for crocodile management.

Mr Ah-Kee: We need serious training and fair dinkum training, you know, from the people who have experience with handling crocs, whether they be our mob or some of the people who have some experience from farming crocs. If you really want solutions, you guys have to come and sit at our table. We are at your table; you are not at our table. Our business operates from our table on our country. If any future plans are to take place, they have to be place-based. When we talk about place-based, Russell is different from any other catchment, any other area. If we are looking at place-based solutions as part of a holistic management strategy, that is what has to be done. You have to come and sit at our table with our people, with the community as a whole—that is blackfellas and whitefellas. Come and sit and talk to us about croc management.

Mr Reys: And the crocodiles.

CHAIR: I think we will take the opportunity to close there. Thanks for your contributions and for your time today. Thanks to our Hansard reporter. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I do not think we have any questions on notice, so I declare this public hearing closed. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 12.35 pm.