

Inquiry into Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

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Inquiry into Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

The very name of the bill, "Crocodile control" is wrong.

Crocodiles don't need control... they are Apex predators and self-regulate their own numbers. Before the arrival of Europeans, they coexisted with humans for some 65 000 years. And then European unregulated hunting almost made them extinct. We have a poor record of "control"! As for Conservation, there is nothing in the bill that aligns to conservation.

To quote leading crocodile expert, Professor Graham Webb.

"I don't think crocs are out of control anywhere, it's a management problem, wildlife management is about managing people"

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-31/crocodile-expert-says-cull-not-answer-cindy-waldron/7462100>

About the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to respond to calls from North Queenslanders over concerns of **increasing crocodile populations, increased sightings in populated communities, and increased crocodile attacks.** The Bill proposes to establish the Queensland Crocodile Authority to manage and administer the scheme, to be based in Cairns.

The Bill aims to eliminate crocodiles which pose a threat to human life from Queensland waterways, while continuing to protect crocodiles from becoming extinct.

Eliminate crocodiles that pose a threat to human life

Perhaps we should be asking the authors of the bill, “what crocodile does not pose a threat to human life, if humans do not act accordingly? “Is there such a thing as a non-dangerous crocodile?

By their very nature, ALL crocodiles can or will, at some stage pose a threat to human life, IF humans are not acting accordingly. The simplistic view presented in the bill is suggesting to essentially eliminate all dangerous crocodiles. Which is ultimately all adult crocodiles. And yet the bill calls it “conservation “.

Since it has been shown that the best way to remain safe in croc country is not through the elimination of crocs but the education of humans. The bill should be implementing education, but the bill proposes that the way to save human lives is through killing crocs. But this is not based on scientific evidence nor is it accepted by any of the scientific community. In fact, it has been shown that the killing of crocs will make the waters more dangerous by increasing complacency.

Crocodiles are second to none in their ambush abilities perfected over millions of years. They are virtually undetectable in the water with the ability to remain underwater for hours. To say that a waterway is clear of crocs is promising a sense of security that no one can offer.

While no one will dispute that crocs are dangerous they are certainly way down on the list of ways to die. With road fatalities, drowning, dog attacks and domestic violence all having more casualties. If we are looking at animal-based deaths then it is horses, cattle, dogs , wasps and bees that cause more deaths.

And if the bills primary concern it to ban all possible causes of human fatalities, then the logical step from here should be we stop dangerous activities such as driving of motor vehicles and swimming

for a start. The simplistic argument that killing crocs will make us safe is embarrassing.

If we are to compare drowning.

“...Queensland reported an increase in drowning deaths compared to the 10-year average. 70 drowning deaths that occurred in Queensland in 2023/24”

<https://rlssq.com.au/aquatic-industry/national-drowning-reports/>

Road fatalities

302 people lost their lives on Queensland roads in 2024 alone.

<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/101807#:~:text=Subscribe-,MEDIA%20STATEMENT%3A%20Queenslanders%20urged%20to%20drive%20safely,shocking%20road%20toll%20in%202024&text=The%20number%20of%20lives%20lost,when%20there%20is%20increased%20traffic.>

Now compare those to croc fatalities.

3 Crocodile deaths occurred in Queensland 2023/24,

<https://croccattack.org>

Increased sightings

First, we need to address the significant and rapid expansion of the of the human population. There are more people living in Queensland than ever, for example the population of Cairns in 1976 was 34 857 and now in 2025 its estimated to be 175 398, so combine that with increased access to technology. There are more mobile phones and cameras than any time of history, so the world has never been so documented this has resulted in an increased likelihood of sightings. Furthermore:

“It is important to note that a number of sightings may have been submitted for the same crocodile, and that the number of sightings does not represent the number of crocodiles in a given area.”

<https://environment.desi.qld.gov.au/wildlife/animals/living-with/crocodiles/sightings>

So, the fact is 1 crocodile can be reported 50 times, but that doesn't equate to 50 crocodiles and does not reflect actual population numbers. It reflects the increased human population, the increased screen time and how well the Croc Report app is working, that's all. Leave crocodile counting and population studies to ecology experts, not the public.

Increased population

We are seeing a recovery of a species that was critically endangered. The fact that crocodile numbers are on the rise in Queensland is not up for debate. That's what a decimated species does when it's protected, that is the aim of protection for the species to recover.

The state's Department of Environment and Science estimates the population is recovering at a rate of about 2 per cent per year from a historic low in the mid-1970s, when they were declared a protected species after being hunted close to extinction. A three-year monitoring program that finished in 2019 estimated there were between 20,000 and 30,000 individual animals in Queensland. Of

those, 80 per cent were on Cape York Peninsula and in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Queensland still has a low population and is unlikely to fully recover to pre, unregulated hunting times due to habitat loss and other anthropogenic factors.

Increased attacks

As the human population and crocodile population increases there has been an increase in attacks, there has also been an increase in road fatalities and drownings. As more and more people frequent, settle or visit remote places due to increased access there are more chances of interaction leading to the possibility of more attacks. The majority of these are non-fatal. The bill proposes to "take measures to minimise death caused by crocodile in the state of QLD by killing crocs," but this is not founded in a scientific sense.

In an interview with the ABC, leading crocodile expert, emeritus Professor, Gordon Grigg says.

"There is 'no obligate need for any culling' of Queensland's crocodile population, particularly as attacks are so infrequent".

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-06/rising-crocodile-population-queensland-culling-debate-crocwise/102308668>

And traditional owner Warren Marten reiterates the need for education to prevent croc attacks.

"I don't see Indigenous people asking for culls because crocodiles are very sacred to our people and I just wonder whose agenda is being pushed and for what reasons," Mr Martens says.

"I'd be looking more at the reasons why humans are being taken by crocodiles, rather than taking the crocodile."

And again, in yet another interview with the guardian.

Professor Grahame Webb says 'there is little evidence to suggest "widespread culls" would achieve any substantial reduction in the number of attacks at all'.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jun/16/north-queenslanders->

The QLD government already mitigate human fatalities with the removal of problem crocs and through education, the distribution of the croc wise program that is second to none and more recently with changes to the legislation to prevent interactions.

https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/plants-animals/animals/living-with/crocodiles/becrocwise?utm_source=shortURL&utm_medium=shortURL&utm_campaign=becrocwise

Many of these attacks could have been avoided with basic precautionary measures. The DESTI, to alleviate this and minimise further attacks has introduced new legislation, such as fines for illegal feeding of crocs especially at boat ramps and deliberate intentional activity ignoring crocodile warning signs.

Furthermore, in the most comprehensive study to date done last year again shows the ineffectiveness and expense of killing crocs is not an effective solution in saving human lives. Again, it is education. Presented in this paper, **The influence of crocodile density on the prevalence of human attacks.** The study looks at highly dense populations of crocs in the Northern Territory. Which has 10 times the biomass of QLD. The study outlined why culling the reptiles to reduce density was not a cost-effective, or efficient solution, in reducing crocodile attacks.

“The rates of attacks stabilized from 2009 despite crocodile density and human population continuing to rise, with a 10% decrease in the frequency of attacks over the following decade.”

Lead author Dr. Cameron Baker, said the

” Decrease in attacks corresponds to NT residents and tourists changing their behaviour around waterways as crocodile numbers increased, and government education strategies and programs to removing problem crocodiles.”

<https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pan3.10693>

In a podcast Brandon Sideau, founder of Croc attack website and data base explains how human behaviour plays the major role in croc attacks. His worldwide research shows that ***“croc population density is not correlated with croc attack frequencies.”*** In countries with far less crocs than we have, they suffer more attacks. And this is attributed to human behaviour. He reiterates that a false sense of security follows every croc removal. The power vacuum that results in the croc population by removing the large obvious male can mean more young crocs will come in. Young crocs can still be dangerous. Essentially when we kill one, more come.

So, if all the scientists and scientific evidence says killing crocodiles is not effective in preventing human fatalities, what is the point of this kill bill? If it is as they say, to minimise deaths, then education is what they should promote, not killing.

One of the major issues seeking public opinion on conservation matters currently is that misinformation is rampant. Much of the public have little or no understanding of ecology and population dynamics. Allowing the public to make decisions on subjects that are emotive, and they are ill informed about, is a mistake and when it involves an apex predator, it is dangerous.

A prime example of this is the Brumby issue where one in five Australians believed foxes and horses were native. Public opposition is often at odds with scientists and conservationists.

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/02/11/when-introduced-species-are-cute-cuddly-culling-them-becomes-tricky.html>

With widespread misinformation, misleading content, together with scare tactics in the media regarding crocodiles, the public is often ill-informed. This is not just about conservation, but when it's about Apex predators it's also about safety. The dangers to public safety can then be heightened with misinformation, as the public falsely believe that killing crocs makes it safe. It is this increased complacency that the bill will encourage, and complacency is the killer. Many members of the public do not understand the incredible ability for an ambush predator to remain undetected, and how long they can remain submerged. Many of the public are not aware how far crocodiles can travel and that DNA studies show that they can

easily swim from nearby countries such as Papua New Guinea. In fact, the recent fatality in the Torres straits may have been a crocodile from New Guinea. So, when you are asking the public on matters that concern public safety, this is a dangerous activity. You may as well ask the public on speed limits “do we really need lower speeds around schools?” or “is it really that bad to drink and drive, text and drive “? These matters are determined by experts, not the public. When it comes to human wildlife conflict and remaining safe in croc country this is a matter of safety, not up to a misinformed public. And ALL the experts say the same thing, culling/killing crocs doesn’t make it safer, but increases human complacency.

The current crocodile management plan with its croc wise education is proven by the low number of attacks, to work.

The bill talks of establishing zero tolerance zones in all populated water ways. Since areas such as Daintree, Weipa and Cooktown are all “populated” where does this end? The eradication of all crocodiles in a large part of their natural range would be certainly in no way align with any conservation measures. And of course, unless we kill them all, you only need one to ruin your day, and history has shown us that.

We go back to 1975 following the biggest Australia wide cull this country has ever seen, where the population of saltwater crocs was decimated to its lowest point in history. Three decades of unregulated hunting could not save the life [REDACTED] because he failed to follow one simple croc wise message which is to stay away from the water in croc country. Because he falsely believed killing crocs made it safe.

The bill then talks about allowing FNP to hunt on their own land, but they already can do that, rightly so, and do not need to seek approval from the bill’s directors. For many first nations people, crocodiles are totems, again the bill can only see the value of dead crocs. Ignoring the totemic value of crocodiles may conflict with our human rights obligations. Indigenous nature-based tourism is growing with people paying to see wildlife not wild death. Perhaps the authors of the bill should show some support to non-consumptive wildlife use. Also, wild crocodile egg collection provides employment for FNP in remote locations. This bill will jeopardise all these opportunities.

Since it takes at least 50 years to grow to a large size and people paying want to kill the big ones, this is not very sustainable. Perhaps if the authors of the bill are concerned with indigenous jobs, then they could support them in non-consumable wildlife tourism or in the fishing industry, which is a lot more sustainable than hunting a long-lived apex predator. Perhaps the authors of the bill are also going to suggest people pay to shoot dugongs and sea turtles next ? Of all the job opportunities that exist for FNP in remote areas one questions why the authors of the bill can only find a short lived, not sustainable and dangerous activity of killing Apex predators? Perhaps the authors of the bill can support training of FNP in their own communities so they can be independent and stop the industry of fly in fly out community workers. There are so many opportunities and jobs that could be supported for FNP, but killing their totem for money, where's the pride in that?

The bill then goes on to say “**Allow other persons to kill crocodiles for a payment of a fee**” this is thinly disguised trophy hunting which is not sustainable, and the Australian public are generally against it.

So, in summary, the bill wants to kill all crocs in populated waterways, kill crocs on state land, kill crocs on private land and kill for a fee in remote areas on aboriginal land. This is nothing but a Kill Bill, nothing to do with conservation and nothing to do with improving human safety. Currently under the Nature Conservation framework, DESTI are responsible for the removal of problem crocs, to change this framework would require amendments to the Nature Act and the states Wildlife Management Plan.

The bill suggests that they **coordinate research into surveying crocodile numbers and distribution.**

This research is already being conducted by experts in the field.

https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/244613/qld-estuarine-croc-monitoring-program-2016-19-report.pdf

Background

My name is David White, I am owner operator of Solar Whisper wildlife cruises on the Daintree River, Far North Queensland, Australia. I am also a member of the DESTI crocodile roundtable and IUCN crocodile specialist group. I have a strong interest in crocodiles and conservation.

For the past 28 years I have been conducting tours on the Daintree River. The primary focus is on crocodiles. Literally thousands of people come to this area to see our crocodiles every year bringing much needed tourist dollars to the region. I am one of 7 wildlife cruises in the immediate area. Then there is Proserpine, Russel River and Weipa wildlife tours all focusing on crocodiles. We achieve, in our tours, not only showcasing with such pride our incredible wildlife to the world but also providing rural jobs in a shire where the sugar industry has died. In addition, education to the public and communities regarding how to coexist in croc country.

The bill does not talk of non-consumptive wildlife tourism, and the monetary value of live crocodiles, only the value of dead ones. What about the revenue to local communities though nature-based tourism and the monetary value of those crocs? Countries throughout the world such as Africa or Costa Rica generate billions of dollars though non consumptive wildlife tourism.

In remote areas such as the Daintree, tourism is our main form of income and yet there is no value at all to our crocodiles. In fact, many of our crocodile's frequent private land due to the proximity of private land to the river, and the bill wants to allow "***State leasehold land or private land authorise person to kill crocodiles on that land***".

Imagine the very crocodiles that provide an income to this very community can be shot and since it takes decades to grow to a large sized croc this would have a considerable impact on tourism and of course our reputation not to mention the crocodile population. This bill has no understanding of croc social behaviour such as the likely implications of removing large crocs and the population sink that will result, population ecology and movement and the ability of crocs to remain undetected.

The Daintree after European colonisation was once like much of croc country, due to unregulated hunting almost making the species extinct, a place where people water skied and swam. Nowadays, it's showcased around the world as a place of immense beauty, culture and wildlife diversity, crocodiles are very much an essential part of this. Australia has a shocking rate of species extinction, and the recovery of the crocodile has been a success story. Something that we should be very proud of. Something that the rest of the world sees us as very successful in and leading the way. The recovery of the species together with the best croc wise education program in the world is an incredible achievement. And people come from around the world because of this, to celebrate this. Australia is world renowned for its wild life not its wild death!

To showcase coexistence, conservation and education is an honour and we do so daily. But to tell the world, the way we approach wildlife conflict is with a GUN, is nothing short of humiliating. A reputation of touting our wildlife to the world will be irreparably damaged. Queensland, with our breathtaking beauty and incredible wildlife, provides experiences second to none. And as Queenslanders we are proud to show our connection to the land, culture and the thriving life that exists here. What this bill does is jepodises all of that and it's un-Australian, as we as a culture, love our wildlife. We have an obligation to uphold our environmental commitment to our children and grandchildren, and our proud reputation worldwide.

I oppose this bill and reject it in its entirety and reiterate.

From an economic perspective, we already have non consumable crocodile tourism which not only provides jobs to those that work in the industry directly, but indirectly from the tourists that come to see crocs, such as restaurants, accommodation, cleaning, car hire, mechanics the list goes on and on. Many people locally, nationally and internationally come here to see crocodiles in the wild. It takes 50 years or so to grow a large crocodile in the wild. And one minute to shoot it. For example, on the Daintree River our boss croc has been viewed for more than 2 and half decades by tens of thousands of people, bringing much needed income to the area. What is his value

alive? Yet he regularly lays on private land and according to this can be shot. And it's very easy to shoot old man sleeping crocodile.

Australia is a leader in crocodile tourism and one of the few places people can come to see wild crocodiles. However other countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia are rapidly embracing crocodile tourism as they see the immense economic benefits that it brings. And yet the author of the Bill seems to totally dismiss this! From the perspective of the wildlife tourism industry this is appalling and the bill with its aggressive removal policy is going to jeopardise our name and people will travel elsewhere to view this charismatic mega fauna.

From a conservation perspective, our understanding of these animals' social systems is still in its infancy. But what we believe happens is the large crocs keep the smaller ones in check, keep them calm so to speak. We don't know what happens when this apex predator is removed from the system, we do know it has drastic effects in other Apex predators. But when they are long lived and we don't even know how long crocodiles live for, the effects may take a long time to occur. As a country we have a dismal extinction record and it's our duty to preserve our native wildlife and learn to coexist.

From a safety perspective which the Bill maintains is its' primary concern. Like the previous bill but with a different name "Safer waterways bill" is a misnomer in name and intent. Rather than reducing the risk of croc attacks it will put more people at risk by increasing complacency and undoing the croc wise education program. This should not be up for public debate. It should be left to the experts in the field and all of them agree that culling doesn't make it safer but instead increases complacency. We do not leave other social safety issues up for public debate, we do not ask the public "Should speed limits really be reduced around schools? Is it ok to drink and drive, why can't we smoke in the car with our children? Why can't we swim in some areas that are closed off for swimming due to drowning? For other safety issues we ask experts in the field, yet the authors of the bill ignore the experts and the one reoccurring message that education is the key tool in minimizing crocodile attacks

Is this really the legacy we want to pass on? This, Bill wants Queensland alone to step back into the past, a time when we didn't have to wear seatbelts, could smoke in the car with our children, easily access semi-automatic weapons and yes almost add another native species to our shocking list of extinctions. But we as Queenslanders grow and move forward, step away and learn from some of the dark mistakes of the past and we use education and science to take us into the future. The same education campaigns that changed the way society looked at smoking can and are used to continuing our journey of living alongside wildlife and not persecuting it. But more than often the media and politicians do not use these safety campaigns when it comes to crocodile safety, they instead use scare tactics and misinformation with a promise of safety brought by a gun, a promise that they simply cannot guarantee.

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