

Inquiry into Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

Submission No:	81
Submitted by:	HARTLEY'S CREEK CROCODILE FARM
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Submission to the Committee of Inquiry – Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

By: Hartley's Creek Crocodile Farming Company Pty Ltd

Peter Freeman, Managing Director

THIS BILL HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DESTROY OUR EXPORT INDUSTRY AND MUST BE REJECTED BY THE PARLIAMENT.

BACKGROUND

Hartley's Creek Crocodile Farming Company Pty Ltd commenced the export of crocodile skins in 1990 and is approved by both Queensland State and Federal government to raise crocodiles for skin and meat. Hartley's is an accredited member of the International Crocodilian Farmers Association, and our crocodiles are raised to standards meeting world's best practice in relation to husbandry and welfare.

Of the 26 species of crocodilians, the Saltwater (Estuarine) Crocodile produces the leather most sought after by high end French and Italian fashion houses. The skin is recognised for its attractive symmetrical pattern of small, raised scales with 'buttons' on the outer edge and square scales towards the centre.

The first-grade skins produced on our farm are sold to European Brands with the balance exported to Japan for contract manufacturing into crocodile leathersgoods, then imported back to Australia and sold under our own Croctique brand.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Australia, along with 183 other countries, is party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The main purpose of CITES is to protect targeted species against exploitation through international trade. Permits are usually required for the international movement of items containing plants and/or animals listed for protection under CITES.

Australian Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) is listed under Appendix II of CITES. Appendix II species are not threatened with extinction now but might become so if international trade is not strictly regulated.

The population of wild saltwater crocodiles in Australia has dramatically increased since the prohibition of hunting in the mid 1970's with estimates now exceeding 200,000 and growing. The likelihood of Australian saltwater crocodiles becoming extinct is extremely low. There are some overseas populations of saltwater crocodiles that are threatened due to overexploitation and habitat destruction. The CITES permit system

helps ensure that sustainably harvested crocodile products can be traded internationally, while threatened populations are protected from international trade.

If this Bill is enacted and the Director has the power to decide the fate of wild crocodiles based on political motivations and not science-based crocodile management plans that ensure a sustainable population of wild crocodiles. CITES may return Queensland *Crocodylus porosus* to Appendix I, which will destroy the export industry. The risk is real, CITES moved Thailand back to Appendix I due to short comings in their management plan.

INTERNATIONAL SKIN MARKET

The Bill gives the Director the power to give individuals the authority to catch and/or kill wild crocodiles on the pretence that they can sell the skin to the international fashion industry.

There is no export market for wild caught crocodiles as the fashion industry demands blemish free skins. Wild skins are often scratched from fighting, have bacterial skin infections and are sometimes infected with nematodes (skin worms).

APPROVED CROCODILE MANAGEMENT PLANS

As stated above, Australia is a signatory of CITES. The federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is responsible for ensuring the export and import of crocodilian skins and products meets the requirements of CITES. The Wildlife Trade section of the Department issues export and import permits. In relation to the movement of skins, the permit must state every CITES tag number.

Every 3-5 years the States and Territories submit their Crocodile Management Plans to DCCEEW for approval against CITES requirements. Crocodile Management Plans must be science based and must be validated by population surveys.

If the DCCEEW believes a Crocodile Management Plan does not satisfy the requirements of CITES, the department may refuse the issuance of CITES skin export tags to Queensland farms.

NO CITES SKIN TAGS, NO EXPORT, DRASTICALLY REDUCED INCOME, NO VIABLE BUSINESS, NO EMPLOYMENT.

This Bill has the potential to cause the extinction of crocodiles on the east coast of Queensland and CITES will take steps to ensure those crocodiles do not enter global trade. Unless this new Authority implements a robust traceability system to distinguish the skin from a farm that accepts no eggs or crocs under this proposed Bill, CITES will treat all Queensland skins the same way.

THE PROPOSED BILL

The Bill proposes the establishment of the Queensland Crocodile Authority with the political appointment of a Director to determine where crocodiles can live in Queensland. Section 10 (2) gives the Director autonomous power, making him/her

answerable only to their own beliefs. They can take (or reject) advice from the Advisory Committee and their decisions need no science-based evidence.

The Bill often refers to relocating crocodiles to a crocodile sanctuary or crocodile farm. It is totally flawed. The National Parks like Lakefield are already stuffed with problem crocs. If a person voluntarily offers their private land as a sanctuary, what about the neighbours. You can't fence a river and verbally telling the crocs not to leave the sanctuary won't work either.

The crocodile farms (like ours) have very little capacity for wild crocodiles. If this Bill goes ahead, I suspect the numbers of caught crocs will dramatically increase. With no housing, the only option left is shoot them in the trap.

Most wild crocs caught by trapping are sub-adult males. For a farm, this is a problematic size as they are aggressive against other crocs but too young to be paired up for breeding.

Crocodile enclosures are not cheap to build, as they built from steel and concrete, they need a good water supply and wastewater treatment. Numerous times in the past, we have suggested to DESTI that if they wish to relocate problem crocs, they should give us money to build the pens. An enclosure could cost \$15-20,000 each.

No where in the bill is the word "education" about croc safety. It assumes their hunting teams will eliminate all crocs in populated waterways. It will cost a fortune in public money to create a false sense of security. Without Crocwise education and this false sense of safety, the human fatalities will continue.

I could go on for pages criticising the Bill. Like section 10 1 (j), *to authorise persons to display, interact with, keep, use crocodiles or crocodile eggs in any part of the State.* Does that mean people can keep crocs in their backyards? The human deaths will continue, but not in a public waterway, instead in their backyard pond. If people can collect fertile eggs, they won't help themselves and incubate the eggs to hatching. Baby crocs as pets until they escape into the stormwater drain.