Inquiry into Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

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Attachments:

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Health, Environment and Innovation Committee

Sent via email to: *heic@parliament.qld.gov.au*

Dear Committee,

Submission on Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission on the *Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill* 2025 (**Bill**).

I am writing to you oppose the above proposed bill. I have worked in conservation for the last 10 years in the UK and now in Australia since 2020. The misunderstanding between humans and apex predators is an enormous issue that has clear science to follow. The only known result will be a destruction of ecosystem as happened in Yellowstone National Park when wolves were removed (not other predators remained by the apex removal was key) only to be reintroduced years later to restore the ecosystems balance.

Having worked with apex predators as diverse as crocodiles, wolves, lions and tigers the key thing is that a little education solves most of our issues. Bills like this will not only destroy entire ecosystems including the Great Barrier Reef which relies heavily on the work of Saltwater crocodiles in estuaries, but also create further misunderstanding about the importance of these animals. Australia should be a nation that celebrates its wildlife and champions how well adjusted we are to living alongside them. However we are in a situation where bills like this are proposed using pseudoscience to support claims. The key of which is convincing people that crocodile numbers will explode, any basic understanding of carnivore numbers means their number will only ever reflect the food source available so they stay perfectly balanced themselves whilst also balancing the ecosystem for us.

Guests locally, nationally and internationally are all interested in seeing and learning about crocodiles in Australia. We need to embrace this fascination rather than push against it. Recently the Prime Minister used the example of a crocodile mother when discussing the incident with a wombat being grabbed - this is the kind of forefront promotion we need. There is pride in the crocodile being dangerous and a respect of how we can very easily navigate this.

Australians were disgusted by this incident with the wombat which raises many questions about our wildlife and how it is treated but to pass a bill as macabre, thoughtless and antiquated as this would be a huge misstep for not just crocodiles, not just Australian animals but whole ecosystems in Queensland.

I implore you not to pass this bill. Ask yourself this: if you are on safari in Africa do you want to see a pride of lions basking in the hot sun, or even more excitingly sharing a meal? What feelings does the prospect of this stoke up when you think of this? Well we have this unbelievable opportunity in Australia because the Saltwater crocodile is our lion and we should be proud to be a safe home for them to do their vital job.

We recommend that the Committee **reject** the passing of the Bill, where the Bill:

- could conflict with Australia's international obligations and existing Commonwealth legislation, particularly by supporting the creation of a crocodile trade scheme which could be in breach of international and federal law requirements;
- subverts Queensland's current legislative and regulatory framework for the management of crocodiles, and would likely authorise unsustainable levels of crocodile harvesting, culling, and farming;
- may increase the risk of dangerous human-crocodile interactions, while causing negative ecological consequences, contrary to what the Bill purports; and
- could unreasonably limit the human right of First Nations Peoples to maintain and enjoy their cultural heritage and spiritual practices, as protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).

Conflict with International and Commonwealth Law

If the Bill were to pass, it could support the creation of a crocodile trade scheme that could breach Australia's international obligations and Commonwealth legislation. We note that where there is a conflict between Commonwealth law and state law, Commonwealth law prevails. This could render parts of the Bill invalid.

The Bill could allow for the unrestricted trade of saltwater crocodiles, where the Bill does not reference any of the laws and guidelines that currently apply to crocodile management in Australia. Crocodiles are a regulated species under the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (**CITES**). Australia's obligations under CITES are implemented in our domestic law through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) **(EPBC Act).** Contrary to the EPBC Act requirements, the Bill fails to provide for a Wildlife Trade Management Plan, particularly failing to reference the existing Wildlife Trade Management Plan for saltwater crocodiles which adheres to the EPBC Act and other relevant pieces of legislation. The Bill also fails to refer to the federal government's Code of Practice on the Humane Treatment of Wild and Farmed Australian Crocodiles (**Code of Practice**). The Code of Practice lays out a set of best practice guidelines that any Wildlife Trade Management Plan must adhere to.

Conflict with State Law

The saltwater crocodile is a listed vulnerable species under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Qld) (**NCA**). It is an offence to take or kill a saltwater crocodile unless authorised by the NCA. Authorisations occur when a crocodile is identified as being a danger to humans and is named a 'problem crocodile'. The Bill subverts this by empowering a 'Director' to authorise the taking or killing of *any* crocodile.

The systemic management of crocodiles in Queensland is currently provided through the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan (**QCMP**), which splits up regions of the state into 6 'zones', and outlines how crocodiles are to be managed according to each zone. The Bill aims to override this framework without sufficient explanation or scientific justification. For example, it provides for the creation of 'crocodile sanctuaries' but fails to explain what a 'crocodile sanctuary' would be.

Licensing for the harvesting of crocodile eggs is currently regulated by the Nature Conservation (Estuarine Crocodiles) Conservation Plan 2018 (**Conservation Plan**). The conditions required to grant a licence are stringent and require consideration of the ecological impact of any harvesting activity. The Bill grants the power to issue these licenses to the 'Director', with the simple requirement that persons undertaking harvesting activities complete an unspecified 'egg harvesting safety course'. It therefore runs the risk of permitting a level of egg harvesting that is both

unsustainable and potentially dangerous, given the high risk of attacks by nesting mothers. These risks are not outweighed by the economic benefits of large-scale egg harvesting – which the Bill relies on – because egg harvesting in Queensland is unlikely to be commercially viable at any substantial level.

Finally, crocodile culling was outlawed in Queensland in 1974, and since then crocodile populations have rebounded substantially. The Bill proposes the reintroduction of culling practices but lacks a legitimate explanation as to why such a drastic policy reversal would be in the interests of Queenslanders.

Conflict with the Human Rights Act

Crocodiles are culturally significant to First Nations groups. They are totems that exist in songlines and are part of a broader spiritual connection to Country. Both in its consultation process and in the administrative powers it grants, the Bill has failed to adequately consider the significant cultural impact it would have.

The unrestricted killing or taking of crocodiles will adversely affect the ability of First Nations groups to carry out cultural practices and maintain connections to land. When a dominant male crocodile is removed from a waterway, other male crocodiles from elsewhere will often move to the area to establish it as their territory. This sudden influx of territorial and aggressive crocodiles makes the waterway *more* dangerous to swim and fish in. First Nations groups have advised that this prevents them from collecting food and carrying out cultural practices on Country. This is an unacceptable and unreasonable contravention of a human right, along with being counterproductive to the purported aim of the Bill in creating a safer environment.

General Policy Concerns

Beyond its inconsistencies with the existing legislative regime, the Bill raises a number of general ecological and social concerns:

- The large-scale killing of crocodiles may have negative ecological consequences, due to their roles as ecosystem engineers and indicators of ecosystem health.
- The Bill is not informed by existing codes of practice on crocodile management. There is a significant risk that it would allow for unqualified people to carry out the killing or removal of crocodiles, or the harvesting of their eggs, and therefore put lives in danger. Once again, this plainly contradicts the Bill's objective of reducing crocodile attacks.
- Commercial egg harvesting on a large scale is not viable in Queensland because of a variety of factors, including low nest density and transport difficulties. This is why only 2,700 eggs have been permitted for harvesting in Queensland since 2018.
- The Bill consolidates all crocodile management powers to a sole 'Director' of the proposed 'Queensland Crocodile Authority'. The Director would have the ability to issue licences, decide if a crocodile should be killed or taken, and authorise the establishment of farms. What, then, would become of the existing schemes and institutions which are presently empowered to make these decisions?
- The Bill rests on the false premise that the best way to reduce crocodile attacks is to remove crocodiles from their natural habitat. This position is not informed by science and research. In fact, the best way to reduce the incidence of such attacks is by ensuring Queenslanders are 'Crocwise' when in crocodile territory.

Conclusion

This Bill proposes a scheme of crocodile management that fails to consider the relevant science, underdelivers on its promise of economic benefit, and undermines international, Commonwealth, and state law. Furthermore, it unreasonably infringes on the rights of First Nations peoples, and may counterproductively increase the risk of crocodile attacks. Ultimately, it advances a dangerous narrative that the mass killing and harvesting of crocodiles will make the communities of Far North Queensland safer when it may in fact create more danger.

We recommend the Committee reject the Bill in whole.

Yours sincerely

Dan Kemp