

## **Inquiry into Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025**

**Submission No:** 173  
**Submitted by:** FNQ Consultants  
**Publication:** Making the submission and your name public  
**Attachments:**  
**Submitter Comments:**



## **Submission to Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025**

From R W Bensted, FNQ Consultants

This bill presents as an urgently-needed control method for Far North Queensland's burgeoning crocodile population which is unable to co-exist with indigenous communities on Cape York Peninsula north of Daintree River and across to the Lower Gulf or with the expanding populations of Cairns and Townsville.

Estuarine crocodiles are out of control as witnessed by numerous, recent attacks on humans and animals and the tremendous, adverse effect upon the northern, \$3 billion tourist industry.

I have lived and worked on the Peninsula for more than 25 years as a mustering contractor and machinery trainer assessor. During this time I have lived in various communities in particular the Northern Peninsula Area where I have daily contact with its inhabitants and its numerous crocodiles.

Over the years there have been too many incidents involving crocodiles to mention and it should be noted from the onset that indigenous people of Cape York have been living with crocodiles for generations.

Almost none of these incidents involving locals or tourists have ever been officially recorded.

Crocodile attacks causing injury or death have been recorded in recent years.

Locals are aware of the ever-present crocodile menace and nearly always act accordingly, being extra-careful when near rivers, creeks or the sea, particularly at boat ramps.

The same cannot be said about tourists. The traffic counter at Musgrave in 2023 recorded more than 90,000 vehicles driving to Weipa and the Tip of Cape York.

I have quite a lot of contact with tourists on the Peninsula with whom locals interact at the Jardine Ferry and at camp grounds and tourist resorts such as Punsand Bay the last stop before the Tip.

The general consensus is that visitors like the unique scenery and to visit the Tip. Others come for the barramundi fishing or visits to Thursday Island.

Their main point of contention is that no waterway is safe. Their children have to be monitored continually when on a beach or river bank. They cannot go within five metres of any water which they say is a terrible disappointment and lessens the value of their probably once in a lifetime visit.

Fishermen are so over-cautious about crocs they say it tarnishes their once-only far northern fishing experience. Last year north west of Cooktown a large croc launched itself at a fisherman in a tinny nearly capsizing the boat leaving a large dent in its side.

Last year's loss of a southern tourist, a doctor, on the Annan River near Cooktown sent shockwaves throughout the tourist industry after he fell into the river and was eaten by a large croc. This fine family watched on while their father and husband was chewed up by a croc which was not in the least afraid of humans.

Under the Authority's management that large croc would not have been present at that location.

These children and doctor's wife have been scarred for life and their crocodile tales would deter at the very least timid tourists from visiting the north.

There have been other similar incidents.

Crocs are becoming more opportunistic and people-savvy and have shown little fear of humans in recent years, due to the explosion in numbers and anecdotally agreed to by rangers and cattlemen.

Being an apex predator they have little fear of anything. Unlike the day when hunting was active, crocs had an intrinsic fear of humans and disappeared when humans arrived. Today they swim up to humans in many instances.

Crab fishermen in the Bloomfield River south of Cooktown have for years been losing many pots to marauding crocs feasting upon baits and crabs.

Two years ago an idiot tried filming himself interacting with a crocodile on the Bloomfield River and was injured and nearly eaten alive. His notoriety still rebounds in the area.

Yet 25 years or more ago everybody swam in just about any waterway with relative safety particularly locals whose kids in recent times have not learned to swim. There is only one public swimming pool on Cape York Peninsula, at Bamaga.

Communities complained so much about unsafe rivers and beaches that the former Member for Cook, Cynthia Lui, was pressured to provide the ineptly-named \$1m 'splash pools' in numerous Aboriginal communities to placate many children who had barely had their feet wet due to the crocodile menace.





*One million dollar Aurukun splash pool for kids who are unable to swim in any water surrounding their community*

I have heard of countless crocodile ‘near misses’ with children near the water and the actual taking of dogs and even horses is legion on the Peninsula.

Tourists have seen the Facebook videos put up by kids over the years of crocs swimming around with their pet dogs in large jaws.

The Injinoo boat ramp is one more recent case incidence of crocs waiting for locals or tourists to launch their boats.

Once upon a time those unloading boats from trailers would wade in at least knee-deep water but not today, boaties don’t get their feet wet. They stand on the trailer and launch their tinnies with themselves onboard.

Local rangers have attempted to remove or dispose of the Injinoo Inlet croc danger but have only been moderately successful as other crocs take the place of any that are removed, due to the massive population.

To estimate the numbers of crocs north of Cooktown would be most unreliable because of the inaccessibility of rivers, creeks lagoons and water holes.

Cattlemen say there could be in excess of 100,000 crocs throughout the Peninsula.

One large cattle property near Weipa has 70 freshwater dams for livestock use, and the owners reported several years ago at least 20 of these dams had resident crocodiles whose main source of food is cattle.

It is this inaccessible breeding ground that has allowed the boost in numbers over the past 20 years. Indeed a former professional crocodile hunter originally from the Northern Territory explained to me numerous times the history of the croc skin market during the late 1970's and forward.

A close friend, the late Duncan McInnes was an indigenous man born near Darwin and was the last person in Australia to hold a valid crocodile hunting licence.

He and his family hunted crocs throughout the Territory for a decade. He said he and his father ventured across the Gulf to the western shore of Cape York Peninsula to try hunting crocs there but he said the west coast was so inaccessible by land that it was impossible to send out any skins.

Mr McInnes stressed that few crocs were hunted along the west coast by professional hunters for this reason. Even today there is almost no public road access to the western shores of the Peninsula.

This was why, in comparison to the NT, Peninsula numbers had not been impacted by hunting and would be the predisposing cause of the burgeoning population found in the Peninsula and Gulf regions today.

### **Tourists and crocs**

Last week I received reports from the proprietor of Punsand Bay Resort, Mr Rod Colquhoun, that a large female croc had nested in his small fresh water lagoon and more than 50 hatchlings were found scrambling through the caravan park and adjoining areas.

Fortunately there were no tourists camping there because of the grounded Jardine ferry.

The Resort also sent footage of several large crocs patrolling the beach in front of the resort only metres from shore, a situation that has only occurred in the past three years.

He said these crocs made beach activities quite dangerous for guests particularly when some walk along the beach particularly at night.

Punsand Bay Resort does have a small, public pool for use by guests. Weipa and Cooktown have public pools however are rarely used by tourists who have the same facility at their home towns.

They do not travel thousands of kilometres to swim in a pool.

Mr Colquhoun said he has never before seen such large numbers of 'salties' in the NPA.

Another local, Mr John Mulholland, a builder, told a similar story of hatchlings everywhere around his beachside home, which was something he had not seen previously at that location.

Over years I have had tourists, especially Europeans ask me if it is safe to swim in creeks or the sea because there were no croc warning signs present. I had to stress that it is not safe to swim anywhere north of Cairns. (or south for that matter).

I tell them, “because there is no warning sign doesn’t mean there are no crocs”. This is a terrible foible for visitors to Cape York.

This message should be carried by every sign: ‘Do not swim in any waterway, salt or fresh on Cape York Peninsula.’

Any amount of irrelevant advertising for tourists to be ‘croc wise’ is akin to advertising Emu beer on Cape York. Nobody would drink it.

### **Crocs on the Atherton Tablelands**

While the Daintree River could be excised from the proposed bill’s control because of its renowned crocodile tourism, there should be no other exclusions.

I live around the Tablelands in the wet season when Cape York is inaccessible and have close contact with farmers and graziers having had a lifetime in the industry.

There has been a long-established crocodile farm at Mareeba which breeds crocs for skins which are sold to international markets.

I know the proprietor well and have discussed the Tablelands crocodile menace at length with him.

Eight years ago a cane harvesting contractor was harvesting sugar cane 1.5 klms from the Mareeba CBD. He ran over a metre long salt water crocodile.

He was amazed and stopped his machine to pick up the young croc which had been burnt in a cane fire a few days before.

Naturally the croc latched onto his hand severely damaging his thumb area. After some considerable effort with the aid of a large shifting spanner he was able to prise open its jaws and remove his hand.

He went off to hospital to get attention. Mareeba people were stunned. How did a croc get there? How did it crawl up the 300m high Barron Falls?

The croc didn’t have to. During massive cyclone Larry which devastated parts of the Far North, Mareeba was not immune and the croc farm was inundated. An unknown number of young salties escaped in floodwaters and bred in nearby Two Mile Creek.

Prior to that a long-retired, well-known stockman was seen with four metre-long salties on the tray of his Landcruiser, which he had acquired from sources unknown and instead of killing the brood let them go in Granite Creek at the northern end of the main street of Mareeba.

These creeks eventually run into the Barron River which runs through the middle of Mareeba.

Last year local indigenous kids reported to Bob Katter’s Mareeba office that there were crocs in the Brewery hole not far from Mareeba Hospital. They no longer are able to swim in the Barron River.

On voting day, May 3, I spoke to a Biboohra farmer whose property fronts the Barron River. He said there was a croc still remaining in his stretch of the river and had seen it when attending to his irrigation pump.

He said the crocs had been present for quite a few years and had previously told me the same.

It should be noted that Mareeba farmers are quite an independent lot and managed to remove much of the croc menace from waterways where no crocodiles have been found since settlement.

They do not bother reporting croc sightings to the QPWS because rangers seemed to have little interest and usually do not come to investigate or perhaps turn up days or weeks later.

### **Relocation of nuisance crocs**

Let me say there is no such thing as a docile, estuarine crocodile. Every one is a potential man-eater contrary to what national parks rangers and the croc fraternity believe.

A croc farm manager has repeatedly told me he does not accept captured crocs from other areas any longer. He said these larger crocs over two metres in length had no commercial value and he will not accept them at his farm.

The standard response from QPWS rangers when catching a croc in a populated area is that it had been relocated to a farm.

I ask the rangers, which one? As a result of my previous inquiries none of the few northern farms want captured crocs. The Mareeba farm is over-populated and can produce enough of its own progeny for skins. He said the only skins of value are from crocs two metres and under.

He carefully manages his young population because it is easy to damage the skin.

Any longer ones have no commercial value. There is no substantial croc meat trade in the north.

When rangers relocate a crocodile it removes a local problem and gives another community a new problem. Crocodiles eventually return to their place of birth. Relocation is of no use.

### **Egg harvesting**

Female crocs lay around 50 eggs a year and when extrapolated across the entire northern region it amounts to tens of thousands of hatchlings entering the ecosystem every year.

Albeit wild pigs account for removing a portion of eggs the number is substantial.

In the NPA two years ago a contractor engaged several locals to collect eggs in the wild and they were offered \$30 per viable egg recovered.

The locals managed to collect some until a near miss took the shine off harvesting operations. It is yet unknown if harvesting eggs will continue this year.

If managed properly by the proposed Authority egg harvesting could prove another source of income for struggling indigenous communities.

### **Crocodile tourism**

Considering the large croc population on Cape York, indigenous-managed crocodile safaris could also be a large income source for these communities.

Various prescribed body corporations across the Peninsula and Gulf regions could easily establish such a venture which requires almost no planning or infrastructure.

I know the proprietors of one of the substantial pig-hunting safari operations on the Peninsula which has now closed down due to a loss of venue.

Several years ago this manager told me he was booked out for two years in advance by interstate, intrastate and international hunters coming to the remote property to hunt pigs.

He said he was often asked if they were able to hunt crocs to which he replied “no”.

However he asked the hunters how much they would pay to bag a trophy croc. He said the answer was generally in the many thousands. One hunter had been to Africa to shoot a croc and said he paid \$10,000 USD for one.

The Authority makes provision for such activities and could be easily managed as a worthwhile venture. Indigenous communities I have spoken to over recent years have all welcomed croc hunting.

### **Crocodile tourism operators, Cairns district indigenous groups and QPWS**

Having attended most crocodile management forums and meetings over the past 10 years I have always noticed the few selfish, self-acclaimed experts who can think of every known malady known to man should crocodile safaris or large-scale removals from inhabited areas occur.

The latest claim is that interfering with crocs would somehow enhance elusive ‘climate change’.

The Greens feature prominently to much of the anti-crocodile management hysteria which seems to again have surfaced at Palm Cove recently.

Indigenous groups claiming deep spiritual connections to crocs are at best imaginative, however a few tribes according to my research do have an affinity with crocs but not to the extent of making their presence dangerous to humans.

One senior Peninsula PBC chairman told me several times they do not want to wipe out crocs but when there are too many and are dangerous to humans they must be “thinned out.”

There is no doubt the present control methods used by QPWS are manifestly inadequate to deal with such large numbers of crocs living in inhabited areas or outside of civilization.

I have seen croc-bitten station horses, chewed up cattle and working dogs disappear across Cape York over 25 years.

In 2007 at a Lower Gulf cattle property, manager Jack Fraser recounted how a large croc which had been living in a lagoon and proving a menace to station workers had its stomach contents examined. He said 63 plastic cattle ear tags were found. That amounted to \$30,000 value of cattle eaten by one croc.

In 2025 the croc menace has reached dangerous levels and more humans will continue to be taken soon on a monthly basis in the Far North unless this Crocodile Management Authority is established to deal with the problem.



In deference to the selfish and incorrigible tourism operators who profit from crocodiles, these saurians do not take precedence over humans. Humans have always taken precedence over nature. The Holy Bible says so.

### Summary

- There is no dispute that there are far too many crocs in the Far North
- Present management of crocs by QPWS is inadequate
- Tourism is being harmed by inaccessibility to any water
- The Crocodile Control and Conversation bill could adequately manage the huge numbers and provide a safety level for local inhabitants and tourists
- Its staff would be conversant with crocodile behaviour and habitats, have knowledge of proper land and cattle management and be able to work alongside indigenous groups
- The new control methods would not have an immediate effect on numbers and sightings however over several years crocodiles would soon learn to keep away from populated areas when humans appear just as they did fifty years ago when hunters were active
- In that period there were no crocodile warning signs at popular swimming places and there were almost no unprovoked attacks
- The management authority based in Cairns is central to Cape York and Townsville environs with air access to Cape York and Torres Strait
- It should have a branch office at Weipa where there is a large population of crocs and central to numerous Aboriginal and Islander communities
- The Authority could educate the public by holding crocodile forums and management sessions for landowners and the public
- The Authority's independent management board must be autonomous of government of the day and its decisions are to be binding and final
- The authority must be allocated an annual budget sufficient to carry out its functions without governmental budgetary interference

Yurs faithfully,

R W Bensted

Secretary, Cape York Cattle Growers,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]