

**COMMENTS/RESPONSE:
THE SAFER WATERWAYS BILL 2018 SUBMISSIONS**

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INTRODUCTION:

I appreciate the offer to provide feedback on the submissions received by the committee.

The Safer Waterways Bill 2018 has the full support of all KAP members. The State electorates held by the KAP cover over 26% of the state and are located in the majority of the regions heavily affected by crocodiles.

The Bill is a culmination of a significant consultation process including regional public forums held in Cairns, Innisfail, Mareeba and Port Douglas, Indigenous groups, local government, Federal members of Parliament, professional fishing community and other community groups. We have also consulted heavily with crocodile experts including Professor Grahame Webb, who is universally recognised as a world-wide leading expert on Crocodiles, as well as one of the architects behind the Northern Territory crocodile management plan.

The evidence available on crocodile sightings, points towards an explosion in the number of crocodiles, particularly in North Queensland, which has potential devastating consequences on the regions multi-billion dollar tourism industry, loss of human life and continual loss of valuable livestock to the grazing industry.

Due to an unchecked increase in the number of Crocodiles in the North there is evidence of crocodiles pushing further into populated waterways, affecting the everyday lives of North Queenslanders.

Crocodiles are reportedly inhabiting crop watering drains and waterways on farming properties in the tablelands, inland popular rivers and lakes and regularly within stinger swimming enclosures and along the foreshore of popular tourist beaches in North Queensland.

Water sport businesses have been affected, rowing clubs are struggling to attract numbers and one of the States valuable institutions – Surf Life Saving Queensland are reporting a significant drop of in their nippers programs – primarily because of the fear of crocodiles on Northern Beaches.

The regions \$3billion tourism industry is also under sever threat as outlined in submissions from TTNQ and TPDD.

The current crocodile management plan is simply not working and is not providing a balance between crocodile numbers and the expected level of safety for Queenslanders and visitors using our beaches and waterways in North Queensland.

The current plan is causing a backlash from the community who feel that their concerns are not being taken seriously and are largely ignored. A recent poll undertaken in the Cairns Post (3rd July 2018) showed 77% of people living in the Far North support a controlled cull of crocodiles.

The KAP Safer Waterways Bill addresses many of these concerns through a variety of initiatives, central of which is the establishment of a Queensland Crocodile Authority in Cairns. The Bill also gives rise to a potentially valuable industry, providing employment and business opportunities to indigenous communities throughout the Far North.

FEEDBACK/COMMENTS ON SUBMISSIONS:**Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) & Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD) Submissions:**

I support the submissions from TTNQ and TPDD, who are the peak tourism bodies who represent the tourism sector and operators in the region.

Their statements on the current and existing threat that mismanagement of crocodiles in North Queensland poses to the \$3billion tourism industry are fully supported by the KAP and I. Their concerns echo feedback the KAP received through our electoral offices and during our public consultation tours held in 2017, where we visited Cairns, Mareeba, Innisfail and Port Douglas.

I would like to highlight and strongly point out the following statements in both these submissions:

TTNQ:

- Tourism contributes \$3billion to the region's economy, providing 24,000 jobs.
- Domestic visitation is declining in Tropical North Queensland with the number of visitors from Sydney falling by 30% in 2017.
- Interstate visitors spend up to 63% more than other visitors.
- It is of great concern that negative publicity about crocodile sightings and attacks in the mainstream and social media influences the domestic market to look elsewhere for a tropical holiday.
- We need to manage this fallout to ensure stability and confidence for tourism in TNQ.
- Crocodiles represent a significant and increasing threat to our tourism industry. Tourism businesses in the Douglas Shire have already been severely impacted, with more than one operation ceasing permanently in the light of a shifting perception of risk.

TPDD:

- The tourism industry is critical to the sustainability of the Douglas region, contributing an estimated \$489million to the local economy in 2015-2016 (direct visitor spend).
- Population base is 11,000 people who accommodated 393,000 visitors, over 2.2 million room nights with average length of stay 5.9 nights for domestic visitors and 5.4 nights for international visitors, with 53% repeat visitors.
- Research commissioned by TPDD and conducted by CQ University indicates that "beaches" and "the natural environment" are consistently amongst the top five motivators for travel to our region.
- The success of the region is intricately linked with our beach lifestyle and marine activities.
- Negative publicity surrounding crocodiles and attacks in the mainstream and social media, contribute to a perceived risk and resulting diminishing safety of our beaches.
- This poses a potentially devastating impact on our tourism industry through lost visitation and reduced length of stay.
- Tourism operators and community groups have operated SAFELY in our regions marine environment for decades, but the situation has changed significantly over the past few years that there is now widespread concern for loss of income, business and lifestyle from increased crocodile activity.
- In Cape Tribulation, frequent crocodile sightings resulted in the permanent closure of a successful and highly-esteemed kayaking business that had been operating for 29 years without incident.
- A reef operator in the same location has had to significantly alter operations to ensure the safety of crew and passengers.
- Resort operators across the region also report on the adverse effect of crocodile sightings on our beaches, some having also been forced to close beach access at times, leaving visitors confused, concerned and questioning the safety of spending time on our beaches.

The KAP supports the following recommendation made in both submissions under a newly established Queensland Crocodile Authority based in Cairns:

- Ongoing revision of appropriate zoning of beaches and waterways to ensure improved and rapid response to reported sighting and closer monitoring through local involvement.
- Investment in the development of safe swimming enclosures.
- Recognition of the tourism industry as a key stakeholder in crocodile management, with appropriate and adequate consultation, engagement and representation at all levels in the establishment of a Queensland Crocodile Authority.
- More research and investment into tagging and tracking programs
- Investment in the trial crocodile-spotting drone program for lifeguards on all patrolled beaches.

Port Douglas Surf Lifesaving Club/Surf Life Saving Queensland:

I wish to highlight the following points in the submissions:

SLS Port Douglas:

- The common sightings of crocodiles in daylight hours is unusual as from a historical point of view crocodiles are either well camouflaged or very stealthy and generally not seen in daylight hours.
- These common sightings indicate that crocodiles are becoming more comfortable interacting with humans which is going to lead to disaster.
- *In regards to recent deaths in 2016 & 2017 – In both cases there had been reported sightings of a large reptile in the respective area, and in both cases inadequate or no action was taken by the Department to capture and remove these animals.
- Specifically in the matter of the elderly woman, the Club is aware that notice had been given to the Department that the animal was sighted around the southern end of Four Mile Beach and indeed traversing Four Mile Beach but only one trap was set in Dickson Inlet (to the north) and no traps were set at the southern end of Four Mile beach. ****Had appropriate action been taken on this occasion, a death could have been avoided.***
- *With the frequency of sightings of large crocodiles and the recent deaths it is the view of the Club that a fatal crocodile attack on the very popular Four Mile Beach is ***inevitable*** unless action is taken to reduce numbers of large crocodiles.

**I would suggest the Government is placing themselves in a precarious position in relation to duty of care and negligence because of current management policies of crocodiles.*

SLSQ:

- Public safety is paramount and minimising attacks is a critical priority
- The growth of crocodile numbers at populated locations has put the public's safety at further risk through potential crocodile attacks. Whilst we understand that the Daintree area is where one would go to see a crocodile, we see the popular areas such as Four Mile Beach – Port Douglas, Cairns northern beaches and waterways, Etty Bay, Mission Beach, Forrest Beach, Townsville city beaches, Ayr, Bowen and Mackay city beaches as locations where problem crocodiles should be removed.
- The threat of crocodile attacks has affected tourism confidence, particularly those visitors wishing to swim at our popular waterways
- The presence of crocodiles is having a negative effect on surf lifesaving volunteer members and general participation in water sports and recreational activities

The KAP supports the following recommendation made in both submissions under a newly established Queensland Crocodile Authority based in Cairns:

- The management program should be conducted from Cairns rather than Brisbane.

- A pro-active crocodile management plan should be implemented to reduce numbers of crocodiles in areas that are populated by humans such as Port Douglas and the residential beach areas of Cooya, Newell and Wonga Beach, north of Port Douglas.
- The committee should examine the Northern Territory Program and adapt the useful strategies that have been implemented, in particular harvesting of eggs which would produce a win/win situation by achieving a reduction of numbers of crocodiles and employment for indigenous people.
- Permanent traps should be installed in the principle habitat locations. These traps should be permanently monitored. Trapped animals should be removed.
- State Government should consider the removal of crocodile nest eggs in high public visitation/populated areas, similar to the Northern Territory system
- Queensland Government to consider the development and opening of traditional Queensland Indigenous managed crocodile farms strategically located in North Queensland to create and enhance tourism, conservation, employment, income and public awareness.

FNQROC

FNQROC and member councils are generally supportive of the Bill in Principle. FNQROC represent a majority of councils in crocodile affected areas and include members from:

1. Cairns Regional Council
2. Carpentaria Shire Council
3. Cassowary Coast Regional Council
4. Tablelands Regional Council
5. Cook Shire Council
6. Croydon Shire Council
7. Douglas Shire Council
8. Etheridge Shire Council
9. Hinchinbrook Shire Council
10. Hopevale Aboriginal Shire Council
11. Mareeba Shire Council
12. Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council
13. Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Councils

The KAP supports consultation with FNQROC on implementation of management policies under the Queensland Crocodile Authority.

Hartleys Crocodile Adventures & Koorana Croc Farm

Harleys Crocodile Adventures are based just north of Cairns and have provided a submission through their Crocodile Farming and retail arm. They have been in operation for close to 30 years.

Koorana croc Farm are also a similar business based in Central Queensland and have been in operation for over 36 years.

Despite being in the same industry, both offer very differing views:

- Koorana supports the basic principle of the Bill and provides constructive feedback on how to improve the Bill.
- Koorana supports the formation of a Queensland Crocodile Authority.
- Hartleys does not support the Bill, but doesn't provide any specific or constructive reason why they reject the Bill other than stating current legislation protecting crocodiles and opposing section 11 of the Bill.

I would like to point out the following:

- Hartley's state it understands the community emotion behind the bill. ***I agree with this statement.***
- Hartley's state the department has mishandled crocodile management for over 30 years and community anger has reached boiling point. ***I agree with this statement.***
- Hartley's state the community has become deeply polarised and the ongoing belligerence of the current controlling authority only exacerbates the issue. ***I agree with this statement.***
- The KAP in our consultation period prior to the drafting of this Bill, met with Federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg in Canberra where he voiced his support Federally should the State Government support a cull of crocodiles.
- I do not support suggested amendments to the Bill made by Koorana Croc Farm

Environment Council of Central Queensland

I would like to point out the following to the committee:

- **Item 1 of the submission** - The KAP does not consider ***"killing anything that might pose a danger"*** as outlined in the submission as reflective of the Bill. Rather the Bill seeks better, more proactive and more responsive action towards crocodiles in populated waterways and beaches through the establishment of a local authority to immediately deal with issues on a local basis.
- **Item 1 of the submission** - It is not simply not good enough to state ***"a better way to achieve safety is to provide ongoing education to tourists and to people living near crocodiles."*** While I agree education should be a part of any strategy it should not be the overriding strategy. This will only discourage international and interstate visitors to visit, or return to North Queensland. People living in North Queensland already have good knowledge on crocodiles, however crocodiles are infiltrating areas locals are unaccustomed to encountering the animals and this creates fears for safety and negates the use of the very attractions our region promotes as part of our tourism industry. Imagine you are a tourist looking to visit North Queensland but advertising states, "Enjoy our beautiful lakes, rivers and beaches but beware of crocs and be crocwise." Or you are handed a flyer on being crocwise upon arrival and every tourism beach you visit contains a crocodile warning sign? I would suggest the chances of attracting visitors and repeat visitors would be minimal. This has already been evidenced in the drop in tourist visitations to the North in TTNQ's submission to the committee.
- **Item 2 of the submission** – The KAP contends that ANY crocodile close to populated waterways is a threat to human life. For the purposes of this Bill the definition "rogue" is used to define and describe the danger crocodiles pose to human life if in populated waterways. The submission disputes the term infestation, however Statistics on the DEP's own website show a significant increase in sightings - In 2010 there were **176** unconfirmed crocodile sightings. By 2016 this had increased by **115%** to **378** unconfirmed sightings. In 2017 a total of **509** unconfirmed crocodiles sightings were reported for the year. Already in 2018, in only 4 months up to the 3rd May, there has been **276** crocodiles reported. If averaged out over a full year that would equate to **828** crocodiles reported by the end of the year – a potential increase of **370% in 8 years**. By any rational terms this data would point to a massive increase in the crocodile population or an "infestation."
- **Item 2 of the submission** – Using road statistics in comparison to crocodile attacks and fatalities is irrelevant. It is highly unlikely that road accidents or fatalities stop or affect visitation to the region, however negative press on sightings, attacks and deaths which occur because of crocodiles do, as evidenced by the TTNQ submission and tourism operators in North Queensland.
- **Item 3 of the submission** – The submitter has obviously not read the Bill and explanation notes effectively. The Bill seeks to establish the Queensland Crocodile Authority, who will handle permits for egg collection, trapping or shooting of crocodiles. Nowhere does the Bill state being allowed to egg harvest trap or shoot crocodiles without a permit issued by the authority.
- **Item 3 of the submission** – The Bill proposes measures to ensure the survival and maintain appropriate crocodile numbers in areas not heavily populated or which rely significantly on the safe tourism

experience under the \$3billion a year industry value to the region. Simply ignoring the issue and not taking action will result in significant destruction of the industry and economy of North Queensland.

- **Item 4, 5, 6, 7 of the submission** – If the current management program is adequate we would not have regional tourism bodies warning of dangers to the industry. We would not have tourist operators shutting down. We would not see significant loss of valuable stock on farms. We would not see significant drops in life saving numbers. We would not see world leading experts (Dr Graham Webb) in crocodile management highly critical of Queensland's current policy. We would not see even those not supporting the Bill, still conceding the current management policy is not working.

Australia Zoo

I find it extremely hypocritical of Australia Zoo to oppose the intention of the KAP Safer Waterways Bill and note the following:

1. Australia Zoo essentially built their business and private family fortunes on the back of crocodiles in Australia.
2. I would argue that Australia Zoos main attraction is their crocodiles – without that attraction I would suggest the Zoo would not be as popular.
3. Australia Zoo charge admission fees for the public to their Zoo – thereby effectively making money on primarily their crocodile (and other animal) show and exhibits.
4. Australia Zoo have made substantial money on merchandise, TV programs, movies etc. – again primarily using crocodiles.

My point is the Irwin Family and Australia Zoo have profited substantially from crocodiles through these avenues.

I find it highly condescending and hypocritical to deny opportunities, particularly the creation of an entire industry for indigenous communities, who are essentially deprived of the opportunities afforded to Australia Zoo.

I also find their submission and testimony contains scaremongering tactics and point out the following:

1. Australia Zoo staff, experts and family all live and work in South East Queensland and do not live in an area heavily affected by crocodile numbers.
2. Australia Zoo through their submission have ignored the concerns of peak tourism bodies and the effect on the regions \$3billion tourism industry. I doubt Australia Zoo have actually talked to one tourist operator or tourism bodies TTNQ or TPDD.
3. The Safer Waterways Bill aims to provide more effective control of crocodiles in the region mostly affected (NORTH QUEENSLAND). This can be achieved through a locally based Queensland Crocodile Authority.
4. The Bill does not advocate for widespread culling – rather a program designed to keep the population in check and provide a zero tolerance to any crocs found or sighted in populated waterways.
5. All licencing, egg harvesting permits and shooting permits will be managed through the Authority.
6. The Bill, nor the KAP advocate or support vigilante or unmanaged or uncontrolled culling of crocodiles.

Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

The (CYLC) is the Native Title representative Body (NTRB) for the Cape York region and their submission is a significant one for heavy consideration.

This is straight from the "horse's mouth" so to speak and representative of the region most affected by crocodile numbers. Cape York would be primary benefactors from the controlled culling and preservation of crocodiles in the Cape region and the long term development of a viable industry to indigenous communities within the region.

The KAP would support the recommendations made by the CYLC to improve the Bill.

Additional Statistics of note:

- In Queensland 35% of crocodile attacks are fatal as compared to only 8% of shark attacks – you are far more likely to die from crocodiles than sharks. Crocodiles are the apex predator in Queensland, particularly in the North.
(Surf Life Saving Queensland submission No.4, Safer Waterways Bill 2017)
- *Beach closures in North Queensland are rising each year with main tourist beaches including Palm Cove (Cairns) and Four Mile Beach (Port Douglas) also suffering from closures because of croc sightings on the beach. Figures obtained from Surf Life Saving Queensland show that in three (3) years between 2012 to 2014 there were **10** Beach closures in North Queensland as compared to **34** for the three (3) years from 2015 to 2017 - an increase of over **200%**
**Note these are only lifeguard patrolled beaches and do not include no- patrolled beaches – as such the figures would be substantially higher. Statistics from Surf life-saving Queensland*
- A recent report in the Cairns Post newspaper (6th March 2018) highlighted how life-saving, rowing and skiing clubs are struggling because crocodiles are driving their members away. In the article - SLSQ have reported a 13% fall in registrations among 5-13 year olds in their regional Nippers program, with nearly 40% of parents saying they had taken their children out of the program because of concerns about crocodiles. SLSQ regional Manager Rob Davidson said the organisation was concerned and stated “We are not getting members in as juniors and training them up – at some stage in the near future, we might be short on lifesavers to keep our beaches patrolled.”
- The Northern Territories crocodile industry in 2014-2015 was valued at over \$100 million, which was more than four times the previous estimate (NT government report). It was previously estimated to be worth \$25million. It is a rapidly growing industry and Queensland is missing out.

PROFESSOR GRAHAME WEBB

I highly recommend the Committee consult with Professor Grahame Webb on their travel to Darwin to meet with the Northern Territory Government, local industry and community representatives on the 25th & 26th June based on the below:

- Is regarded by many as one of the world's leading authorities on crocodilian research and management, and on the concept of conserving wildlife through sustainable use programs.
- has over 50 years-experience in the field on crocodile research. He began researching reptiles in the late 1960s, and since the 1970s has been actively involved in the conservation and management of wildlife resources.
- As a Professional Officer in the School of Physics at the University of Sydney, Sydney (1973-77), began full-time research into the biology and ecology of the Saltwater Crocodile in northern Australia. During this period he worked closely with Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land, and became familiar with traditional management.
- formed Wildlife Management International (WMI) in 1978
- contribution to crocodilian conservation, research and management was acknowledged when he was selected as the Chairman of the [IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group](#) (CSG). With over 450 members worldwide.
- was appointed Chairman of the Northern Territory Research and Innovation Board from 2004, and is currently Chairman of the NT Environment Protection Agency (EPA).

- was awarded the prestigious Clunies Ross National Science and Technology Award in 2001 and in 2003 received an Australian Centenary Medal, for his contribution to crocodile research and to the establishment of The Essington School in Darwin.
- established Crocodylus Park, a crocodile research and education centre in Darwin in 1994 through WMI and represents a solid commitment to public education about wildlife conservation and sustainable use issues.
- At Crocodylus Park they cull and use every part of a crocodile - the meat goes to wholesalers and the skins are sold to make, amongst other things, fashion handbags that sell for thousands of dollars.
- has no patience for people who don't agree with the farming side, stating "They don't understand how I can fight for the conservation at the same time making them into handbags".
- states the only way to get people to tolerate predators is to make the benefits that come back as high as possible: "with crocodiles that's achieved through sustainable use".

Crocodylus Park Website: <https://www.crocodyluspark.com.au/professor-grahame-webb.html>

CROCODILE REPORTING – A SNAPSHOT:

The below are media reports (print media only) on crocodiles recently, highlighting how poor management has negatively promoted the North Queensland region.

11 th May 2018	Townsville Bulletin – 4m croc stalking anglers at popular fishing spot
6 th March 2018	Cairns Post – Crocs put bite on Nippers
20 th Feb 2018	Cairns Post – Yorkeys Knob croc just cruising by
16 th Feb 2018	Cairns Post – Croc creates a big stink
1 st Feb 2018	Townsville Bulletin – Case of Priorities
30 th Jan 2018	Cairns Post – Net snares stingrays but cant stop baby croc
22 nd Jan 2018	Cairns Post – Frenzy as crocodile hits street
19 th Jan 2018	Cairns Post – Officers kill croc after an attack
18 th Jan 2018	Cairns Post – Beach empty as Croc Sighted
16 th Jan 2018	Townsville Bulletin – Alert as croc calls grow
15 th Jan 2018	Cairns Post – Cardwells Croc video goes viral
8 th Jan 2018	Daily Mercury Mackay – Croc stops in for snack/Croc spotted eating a turtle
3 rd Jan 2018	Townsville Bulletin – Cruising croc spells trouble at strand
11 th Dec 2017	Townsville Bulletin – Crocodile snapped in water off strand

24 th Nov 2017	Rural Weekly – Living with crocs
16 th Nov 2017	Cairns Post – Beaches lost to the croc invasion
16 th Nov 2017	Cairns Post – Why Nippers are leaving
15 th Nov 2017	Townsville Bulletin – Croc in Port spurs debate
8 th Nov 2017	Cairns Post – Farmer fears croc menace after attacks on cattle and dogs
8 th Nov 2017	Cairns Post – Crocodile overload pains Tully farmer
6 th Nov 2017	Cairns Post – Croc chased from shore
31 Oct 2017	Cairns Post – Croc too close for comfort
26 July 2017	Courier Mail – Report confirms that QLD’s saltwater crocodile populations are rising
4 th June 2017	ABC News – Crocodile caught and killed in Cindy Waldron search found to have human remains inside
4 th April 2017	Courier Mail – Crocodile kills and eat family dog on property near Innisfail
22 nd March 2017	ABC News – Crocodile captured that killed spear fisherman Warren Hughes in Far North Queensland
9 th March 2017	Cairns Post - Hungry Crocodile stops swimmers at far north beach
24 th Jan 2017	Cairns Post – Biggest rise in beach closures due to crocodiles in Far North in five years

CONCLUSION

The objective of the Bill is to prioritise human life before crocodiles.

The Bills objective is not to wipe out the crocodile population, rather to provide a balance, where people can feel protected and the potential for attacks and/or deaths are drastically reduced, thereby protecting our most valuable industry – tourism. Constant media attention on crocodile sightings, attacks, deaths and beach closures is without question a threat to the region’s economy and livelihoods of entire communities.

While we recognise some views were expressed during the submission process that no crocodiles should be killed or relocated, this does not align with the objective of the Bill, nor the majority of people living in crocodile affected areas.

Other views were expressed that the objective of protecting human life could be achieved by relocating any problem crocodiles to other locations. Consultation with experts suggested that crocodiles may become more dangerous once they have been relocated, therefore, crocodiles should only be relocated to farms or properly managed reserves.

Consultation also revealed that because there are so many crocodiles that require removal to keep people safe, it is very unlikely there would be the desire from existing crocodile farms to house all of these crocodiles.

Based on this consultation, it became clear that a combination of killing and relocation to farms is the best way to achieve the desired outcome for an effective crocodile management plan.

As representatives of our communities, we are expected to fight for issues that affect their every-day lives. It is not only our responsibility but the state government's responsibility to manage those issues effectively and decisively.

We strongly believe the Safer Waterway Bill is pro-active policy, which will provide a level of security and comfort for those living in crocodile affected regions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S Knuth', written in a cursive style.

Shane Knuth MP
Member for Hill