



INNOVATION, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr DA Pegg MP (Chair)
Ms SL Bolton MP
Mr JN Costigan MP
Mr JM Krause MP
Ms CL Lui MP
Mrs C Mullen MP

Staff present:

Ms K McGuckin (Committee Secretary)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE SAFER WATERWAYS BILL 2018

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 27 AUGUST 2018

Cairns

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The committee met at 11.30 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Safer Waterways Bill 2018. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are today. On 21 March 2018 Mr Shane Knuth MP, member for Hill, introduced the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 to the parliament and the bill has been referred to this committee, which is the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee, for examination. We have to report back to the parliament by 24 September 2018.

My name is Duncan Pegg, member for Stretton and chair of the committee. With me here today are Jon Krause MP, member for Scenic Rim and deputy chair; Cynthia Lui MP, member for Cook; Charis Mullen MP, member for Jordan; Jason Costigan MP, member for Whitsunday; and Sandy Bolton MP, member for Noosa.

The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. Media may be present and will be subject to the chair's direction at all times. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note that it is possible you might be filmed or photographed during the proceedings. I ask everyone present to turn mobile phones off or to silent mode please. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. If you do intend to appear as a witness and you are not on this witness list, could you please come and see Kate as soon as possible and we will endeavour to do what we can to try to get you on the list, if time permits.

As parliamentary proceedings, under the standing orders any person may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. The purpose of today is to assist the committee with its examination of the Safer Waterways Bill 2018. The program for today has been published on the committee's web page and there are hard copies available here in the room. To commence today's proceedings Shane Knuth MP, member for Hill, will provide a five-minute briefing on the bill.

KNUTH, Mr Shane, Member for Hill, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: Good morning, Shane. I ask you to provide your briefing, please.

Mr Knuth: I thank the committee for its presence here today to examine this bill. The Safer Waterways Bill 2018 has multiple objectives, but ultimately it is about placing greater value on human life than on the lives of crocodiles. The bill establishes a Queensland crocodile authority which will authorise persons to egg harvest, kill or relocate crocodiles and reduce the risk of crocodile attacks by eliminating crocodiles from our public waterways to protect lives and livelihoods, including North Queensland's \$3 billion tourism industry.

I want to make this very clear: the bill is not about unrestricted hunting or wiping out the crocodile population as we saw back in the 1970s. The bill ensures that sustainable crocodile numbers are a key priority. The bill instead aims to target, eliminate and remove crocodiles that pose a threat to human life from our populated waterways and beaches while maintaining an appropriate level of protection to protect crocodiles from becoming an endangered species.

The policy of prioritising human life over crocodiles is in response to community outrage at the lack of action taken to protect North Queenslanders from the risk crocodiles pose to visitors, residents and the tourism industry. Our once popular waterways are now infested with crocodiles. In 2010 there were a reported 177 crocodile sightings for the year. In 2017 a total of 700 crocodile sightings were reported. In 2018, up until 27 July, there have been 489 crocodile sightings reported. Averaged over a full year that equates to 838 crocodiles. That represents a potential 476 per cent increase in eight years. I would also argue that those numbers are vastly underestimated, as feedback from residents indicates that they no longer report sightings as nothing is done about it.

The Safer Waterways Bill provides a practical, balanced solution that will remove crocodiles from urban or public areas commonly used by people for recreation. Part 8, section 27(2)(d) of the bill states that if a crocodile is in a swimming hole, a public waterway or a beach it must be removed within 48 hours.

As well as protecting human lives, the Safer Waterways Bill aims to create a significant and sustainable crocodile industry in Queensland through controlled egg harvesting similar to the program operated successfully in the Northern Territory. Evidence suggests that egg harvesting can help sustain crocodile populations rather than diminish them. This creates a huge economic opportunity which is currently untapped in Queensland.

Significantly, the Safer Waterways Bill provides landowners with the opportunity to apply, through the Queensland crocodile authority, for authorisation to manage crocodiles on their land. Indigenous landowners have a connection to and an understanding of the land and should be empowered to manage the land as they see fit. Non-indigenous private landowners can apply for the same right. As well as empowering landowners, this bill places a value on crocodiles and creates an unprecedented economic opportunity for landowners. The bill also ensures that crocodile carcasses killed under the authority's authorisation are dealt with in such a way that, as far as practicable, no part of the carcass is wasted.

Ultimately, people who live in North Queensland are best placed to manage crocodiles, and people with experience managing crocodiles should have input into the ongoing management in Queensland. The Queensland crocodile authority will also be able to authorise landowners to kill crocodiles on their land, allow for others to kill crocodiles on their land or otherwise manage crocodile activities on the land. The bill ensures that the Queensland crocodile authority is based in Cairns and it is expected that all staff would live in the area rather than fly in and fly out.

I will just very quickly read some of the responsibilities of the crocodile authority. The authority will be able to authorise persons to farm crocodiles; harvest eggs; cull crocodiles; kill or relocate crocodiles; take measures to minimise injuries and deaths caused by crocodiles; decide the number of crocodiles that may be culled each year and the number of crocodile eggs that may be harvested; refer offences relating to crocodiles or crocodile eggs to the police; coordinate, research and survey crocodile numbers and eggs; promote farming or harvesting of crocodile eggs; investigate the viability of the use of state land to farm crocodiles or as crocodile reserves; declare and manage crocodile reserves; and make recommendations to parliament about crocodile management.

CHAIR: I will ask you to wind up.

Mr Knuth: The community wants action. They want action now. This bill approaches the challenges by protecting human life. Most importantly, the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 fulfils our duty of care to the community that elected us to represent them and demonstrates that we as a parliament are willing to make hard decisions when it comes to protecting residents and visitors in our community.

CHAIR: Thank you for that opening briefing and thank you for taking the time to join us here in Cairns today. We will now call up the first group of witnesses.

ENTSCH, Mr Warren, Member for Leichhardt, Parliament of Australia

MOLLER, Mr Brett, Councillor, Cairns Regional Council

SYDES, Mr Travis, Natural Assets and Sustainability Coordinator, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils

CHAIR: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for joining us today. We will allow you each to make a brief opening statement if you so wish and then we will open it up to questions.

Mr Entsch: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I sit here not as the member for Leichhardt but as one of the few in the room who is a former crocodile farmer and had permits to remove problem animals between Babinda and Cooktown. I sit here as one of the few who has an understanding of crocodiles and the industry associated with it.

Councillor Moller: The Cairns Regional Council's submission is part of the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils' submission—13 councils which represent 17 per cent of local councils in Queensland. We very much welcome being here today. We think it is very important going forward, in terms of this bill and any policy around crocodile management, that councils be engaged. Clearly they are able to provide the grassroots feedback and support place based policy which is important to the people affected in respect to this interface with crocodiles.

The biggest concern from a council perspective is that we do not want a devolution of responsibility from the state back to council. We have small rural and remote councils. We do not have those finances and we do not have that experience, but we are very willing to work with government to find a way through this issue to better manage what is increasingly becoming a great concern to our local communities.

Mr Sydes: I would reiterate the statements made by Councillor Moller, particularly that we are a diverse group of councils—13 local governments, all with very different communities and very different needs and often very different views on crocodiles and crocodile management. I think that is something that is reflective of this debate and this conversation. It is highly emotive. It is highly controversial at times. It seems that we have an expert at the end of every bar providing new advice.

For local governments it is a bit of a minefield, as Councillor Moller identified. Councils are very concerned around devolution, deliberate or otherwise, that comes from some of these actions put in train through changes and shifts in legislation and policy. We think the Safer Waterways Bill as it is put forward is a really good catalyst to have the conversation, but we are fairly confident, looking at it in a lot of detail, that there are a lot of concerns and triggers et cetera that it hits in terms of the issues and concerns that the community face, but by and large it certainly does not hold a lot of the solutions that we would be seeking and it does raise quite a few concerns. We welcome the dialogue.

Mr Entsch: I would like to go specifically to the bill. There is no question that there is a major issue in our region in relation to crocodiles. There was a recent report done by the state government in which the observation was made that there is not really a problem here because there is only one crocodile every kilometre—as opposed to the Northern Territory, where there are 10 crocodiles to the kilometre. That is absolutely farcical and it is a ridiculous statement to make. It may well be a statement of fact, but it really does not deal with the problem.

The reality is that the habitat for crocodiles and the population of crocodiles in the Northern Territory has been infinitely greater than anything we are ever likely to see in Queensland. The reality of the situation is that one crocodile per kilometre could mean a very large increase in population because it may well be that generally there is only one every 10 or 20 kilometres and what you are seeing now, with a serious increase in population, is that these animals are now being forced into areas where they would never normally go. We are talking about colder freshwater areas—areas where they have never been seen. Because of the dominant nature of these animals, as dominant animals push in then less dominant animals are forced to find somewhere else and you start to see them going up into swimming holes and waterholes. The fact that there is one in a kilometre says that we have a serious problem.

CHAIR: Do you support the bill, in that case?

Mr Entsch: Some elements of it make a lot of sense. You have to minimise injuries and deaths. You have to authorise people to farm crocodiles. You have to decide on the number of eggs that you authorise people to harvest. Up to section (g) it makes a lot of sense. It is when you start authorising landholders to start slaughtering these animals without any controls or giving somebody else permission to go out and kill these animals. We talk about trophy animals. The value of trophy animals

really is in international trade. It is a very small number of internationals—Americans and Germans—who will come out attracted to that, but they want the very large animals and they want them complete. They do not want them battered around. They will pay good money for them.

In the Northern Territory, for example, you have a very good crocodile management program and for the life of me I do not understand why the Queensland government has taken this and applied it to Queensland. It just does not make sense. The farms in Queensland survive on the harvest from the Northern Territory. I do not suspect there will be sufficient eggs in Queensland to do it totally but with some captive breeding. The important part about this Northern Territory one is that it is a conservation document as well inasmuch as it encourages landholders to maintain the integrity of their country so that there is a value on the animal.

Where is the value in saying to landholders, 'Okay, if you don't want to kill it you can get somebody else to kill it'—other than somebody getting their rocks off for killing a crocodile and getting a happy snap with it? There is no commercial value in that. In the Northern Territory, which I support, of the 600 animals that they allow to be culled every year—these are the bigger, problem animals—they have been trying to get 25 only of those animals to be allowed to be taken as trophy animals. The market is quite lucrative but it is very, very small. If a landholder living in Babinda or somewhere has three or four crocodiles and he rings up his mate and says, 'Here, come and give me 10 bucks and you can go and shoot this little fella,' that does nothing for conservation. You should be looking at total areas where there are large populations of people—and I suggest an area, say, from south of the Daintree River—and working those areas out. There should be zero tolerance.

CHAIR: How would you achieve that? Would you be culling the crocodiles?

Mr Entsch: You would be removing everything in there.

CHAIR: And putting them where, though? Putting them all on farms?

Mr Entsch: What you have at the moment is a situation where you take indiscriminately only larger animals. Crocodiles live for a long time. There is only a certain number of animals that you can put on public display. Other than that, you are opening up old crocodile homes, because these animals have to be kept for decades.

CHAIR: They have to be culled; is that what you are saying?

Mr Entsch: Some of them will need to be culled. However, if you have a total removal of animals in highly populated areas like here, where they take everything from the egg, suddenly there is a value for the crocodile farms to come out and remove the eggs, remove the smaller animals, which have a commercial value, and even the medium sized animals. That would then give them an incentive, as part of their service, to remove the bigger animals as well. I think that is a practical way. Of course, there are areas north of the river where it is absolutely critical that those animals remain.

CHAIR: Just to be clear, under that proposed solution, it would still involve a lot of crocodiles being shot. Notwithstanding any measures being put in place, there is still no guarantee that there would not be crocodiles getting into those areas, is there?

Mr Entsch: You are not going to give a cowboy a gun and tell them to go out and do it. You would do it. You would contract it through a qualified person to remove those animals that are a problem. If you take out a big animal, if you do not have a proper management plan in place then another animal will move straight in. You have areas where you say, 'There is zero tolerance in these particular areas,' and anything that pops up its head is removed. The contract could go to a local crocodile farm, because they have the incentive to take it. They keep the eggs and they keep the smaller animals that are commercially valuable but, as part of that service, the cost to them is to remove the larger animals. They can do that by culling, trapping or doing whatever is necessary to remove those animals. At least then you have it done in an orderly manner and it is not deferred to individual landholders to go out and kill whatever.

CHAIR: You said that you come here today with your extensive background in crocodile farming. We thank you for coming. You are the federal member for Leichhardt and you have been for a long time. Just for the committee members outside of Far North Queensland, could put this kind of debate in context? We hear that it is a controversial issue. How does it rank with other issues in Far North Queensland—for instance, the federal government's cuts to Indigenous housing? Where would you rank this as an issue?

Mr Entsch: From a livability point of view, it is a very serious issue. It has a massive impact on our tourism industry. Economically, it is huge. You have seen the more recent deaths. The one up at Thornton Beach had a massive negative impact. People talk about the fact that you cannot go swimming in any of our watercourses, that you cannot even go into our fresh water now right up at Cairns

Mulgrave River—places that were always safe—and almost up to Crystal Cascades. People cannot even go swimming in those areas with any reasonable sense of safety and security. You bring in the Indigenous housing issue. It is the state government that has been dragging its feet on that. Let us not go in that direction.

CHAIR: I was just asking how to rank it.

Mr Entsch: I am saying that it is very high. We have people in Port Douglas, for example, who are selling their houses facing on to Four Mile Beach because they can no longer go kayaking along the beach because they are getting followed by crocodiles. We have people north of the river who have shut down their sea kayaking business because they can no longer guarantee the security and the safety of their customers. It is a very serious business from an economic point of view and from a safety point of view.

The reality is that I still do not understand why you do not take the eggs. You say, 'You can collect 800 eggs from one area and a couple of thousand from another.' Why on earth would you not give it to the people in Pormpuraaw? They have had experience with crocodiles for years. Why not allow them to collect the eggs? Negotiate with all the different groups along the western cape, but allow the people of Pormpuraaw to collect the eggs and do what they do in the Northern Territory. Instead of setting a number, they take eggs from a certain normal wet season flood line. I tell you now, whether that be 800 or 2,000 eggs, it is never going to be a viable business, because less than half of those eggs are going to be viable. It is a major problem. If you want to do it from an Indigenous perspective, they have the capacity to do it, but they are very much constrained by the numbers they can collect. In the Northern Territory, under the current management plan, they are able to take 120,000 eggs out of the wild. I remember one year that we were collecting on my farm where we took 21,000 eggs out of the wild. You are talking here about 800 in one area and a couple of thousand and another. It is not worth it.

CHAIR: Thank you. I acknowledge Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook, who has joined us in the gallery.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you, Mr Sydes, Mr Entsch and Councillor Moller for your attendance. To everyone else here today, thank you for your attendance here as well. I have been in this role for a few years now and I think this is the biggest audience for a regional committee hearing that I have ever seen, so thank you. That certainly shows the importance of this issue for Far North Queensland.

Mr Entsch, the committee has spoken to the Northern Territory authorities about their crocodile management policy, in particular around the areas where they have a zero tolerance—I understand 22 reserves. Their policy is that if there is a crocodile there it is immediately notified and removed. I think you touched on this principle in your opening comments. As somewhat of a subject matter expert when it comes to crocodiles, as a local of the Far North for many years and a former crocodile farmer, do you think it is possible that the Queensland government could adopt a similar type of policy in relation to zero tolerance in built-up areas in the Far North?

Mr Entsch: That is what I have been begging them to do for years. Crocodile farmers who have the experience in handling and managing crocodiles would sign up immediately if they could go into an area where there is zero tolerance and they could take any eggs that are produced in that area. Hatchlings are a valuable commodity. Even animals up to around about a metre or even higher are valuable, because the animal is normally slaughtered at about 1.8 metres. With the smaller animals you can process them, and as part of their licence to do that we could also negotiate for them to take the bigger animals and relocate them, some of which would be useful for breeding. The big old males generally have to be euthanased, because you have to keep them on their own indefinitely. That could be for decades without any production from them.

Mr KRAUSE: One of the statistics that we heard from the authorities in the Northern Territory is that they remove about 300 crocodiles per year from Darwin Harbour.

Mr Entsch: That is correct.

Mr KRAUSE: There are a lot more crocodiles in the Northern Territory than there are here. I have a question for Councillor Moller. It relates to the involvement of councils at this point in crocodile management. Firstly, what role does local government have at the moment in working with the environment to deal with crocodiles? Secondly, the service standard for the removal of problem crocodiles set by the department is three months. Could I ask you to speak about the involvement of local government and also your view about a three-month time frame for dealing with problem crocodiles?

Councillor Moller: Yes. In terms of our current involvement, it is basically through participation on the Crocwise committee, or Crocwise table up here, providing our feedback as local councillors into that. By way of antecedents, my area is to the south of Cairns—the Mulgrave and Russell river system and freshwater waterways. I can honestly say that the reports of the interface and the interaction between the community and crocodiles have grown quite exponentially in my 2½-year term. I think the real issue in terms of the current management is that it is an education and targeted removal that is not really addressing the increasing numbers. The numbers are increasing exponentially. I think that is the crux of the current management issue. I think that is going to have to be addressed at some point.

Certainly from a council perspective, we forward on reports of sightings and we encourage all of our residents to report directly to DEH on the crocodile spotting number. That is being done. There is a degree of frustration in terms of the turnaround. In terms of the landowner issue, we recognise that that is quite cumbersome in how you manage that. Equally for our property owners and farmers, that is their workplace. They deserve to have a safe workplace. We need to be able to address for those landholders what rights they have to make their family, their stock and their home and their farms safe, because they are remote. If they have to go through that reporting process, that takes a lot of time. That is the challenge in finding the right balance in economic pursuits, our lifestyle recreational pursuits and our safety with the environment.

Mr KRAUSE: Would you agree, though, when it comes to the department dealing with problem crocodiles that a standard of three months does not accord with the urgency that it needs for landholders? You say it is their workplace.

Councillor Moller: Absolutely. For a general management zone, which most of my southern waterways are—and this is the frustration of the community—the crocodile has to be over a certain size, it has to be exhibiting aggressive behaviour and it has to be reported to the department. The department then has to tick off before there is any action.

Mrs MULLEN: Thank you all for being here. I want to talk about the FNQROC submission and ask you about a couple of points in it. One is your concern about the potential devolution of responsibilities. It has been proposed from the submissions that the Queensland crocodile authority would be established without any additional funding and resourcing would come from within the existing department of environment budget. I want to get a sense of what you thought that might lead to in terms of potential impacts on local government.

Mr Sydes: One of the acknowledgements that needs to be made in terms of our knowledge and our capacity to manage and respond to that three-month turnaround that we have just been speaking about is that it is quite likely that that is coming from a lack of resourcing of the department to codify its stated role at this point. There is no doubt that that also extends to research and development in terms of understanding our knowledge about the ecology of crocodiles—how they are shifting and changing over time, climate change and those sorts of triggers—and also management options that we have on the table. I think it needs to be acknowledged that a lot of things that we are seeing play out within the field of management at the moment are really the result of cuts within the resources for environmental management in general right across-the-board and specifically within the area of managing wildlife.

When it comes to concerns about the funding of the proposed crocodile management board, I think it is highly aspirational to consider that that would be run within the existing resources of the department. Essentially, there is no fat on a skeleton. If all of these proposals come in train with the Safer Waterways Bill—we have 20-plus very complex interactions with authorised landholders, egg collection and more complex management boundaries, all to be done within the current remit or budget of the aforesaid department, including the establishment of a yet another layer of administration within that—when we look at that in detail, to do that within existing resources seems very aspirational to us.

We have seen in the past with highly contentious species in this space—flying foxes, agile wallabies and other things—that councils are drawn into responding to them because they are that point of contact for the community, they are the agency that responds, they are the agency that gets back on that day usually with some feedback on what might happen out there. Our major concern is that regardless—intended or otherwise—of what might happen in these major shifts and changes in legislation, if local government is not at the table all the way through that, whether we like it or not, we will see a devolution to councils. Whether that is just through our customer service call centres diverting people to the right place, we will see that devolution, whether it is intended or otherwise. That is an impost on council, on ratepayers and on the other essential services that we provide. The main point to make is that that is not just happening in a single space; it is happening across all Cairns

arenas that local governments operate in, so it is an iterative and a cumulative responsibility. We really do not have the resources and, as Councillor Moller said, we do not have the skills nor the appetite or desire to become specialists in crocodile management.

Mrs MULLEN: Secondly, you indicated that, particularly around the issue of egg harvesting and farming, there would be an impact on local governments, particularly the remote and Indigenous councils, around planning and environmental health areas. I was hoping you could expand a bit on what that would involve.

Mr Sydes: To clarify, the point we were making there is that, firstly, the assumption is made that there is an economic driver behind egg harvesting here. As the member for Leichhardt has said, we are dealing with a very different population dynamic here within the Far North. Whether the resource is actually there to establish a sustainable industry in the first place is a big question. We are very supportive of Indigenous communities managing their land and continuing to be the custodians of the wildlife on that land, as they have forever. We are very supportive of that. I think that is where the economic opportunities exist. If we started to see more investment in crocodile farming et cetera, it would bring council into that because we start to look at water extraction, land use planning, land use changes, development of infrastructure and wastewater management. All of this would be in the lens. We have a very close eye on the region in terms of GBR health and general water quality et cetera, as well as potential impacts and flow-on effects.

We have also had inadvertent effects from other investment opportunities much like this—managed investment schemes. Forestry is a prime example of where councils were really left holding the baby: acres of deserted land, weeds et cetera running rack and ruin across the landscape. We have had examples where croc farms have failed in the past and they have released animals into the environment. How do we maintain that due diligence within the industry to actually clean up after itself? The more players you introduce, the more we monetise a wildlife commodity like this and the more we expose ourselves to risk. We really need to consider the need to go into these conversations with eyes wide open and really consider what the opportunities are. That is why we are highlighting there that we think the real opportunities in this space sit with Indigenous communities, Indigenous landholders and traditional owners to manage country as they see fit.

Mr COSTIGAN: Gentlemen, thank you for your presentations here today and your submissions. Welcome, everyone. Mr Entsch, can I go back to your remarks regarding areas south of the Daintree? Are you saying that it is in the public interest for crocodiles south of the Daintree to be fair game?

Mr Entsch: I think they should be appropriately managed. There are areas starting at Wonga Beach and moving south to Cairns that have large populations, particularly large tourism populations that move into these areas, that have absolutely no concept of crocodiles. Crocodile awareness is something that we really need to continue to build on. There are two things that as legislators you guys are not going to be able to do. First of all, you will never be able to legislate to see humans as anything but part of a food source for crocodiles; that is the reality. The second thing is that you are not going to be able to legislate common sense.

Mr COSTIGAN: Well said.

Mr Entsch: I think these are two very important things to understand. You have to take actions to make sure you minimise that risk. Where you have these large populations—Cairns has a couple of hundred thousand people living here. We get a million people coming here visiting. We have an obligation to minimise that risk.

When you are talking about how we manage that, again, the value of crocodile farms really stands on our CITES certification, because if we cannot export the skin then the crocodile farms are not worth a cupful of cold water. When I look at this bill, particularly in relation to giving people indiscriminate rights to kill, you are going to destroy any CITES certification. That is why you should be looking at the Northern Territory model, because it is recognised as the best crocodile management program in the world. People come from all over the world to conferences to look at this, to learn how to do this in managing their own crocodilian species. When we are talking about trophy hunting, you should realise that you could not send a single trophy out of this country unless you have CITES certification. That is why it is important. Quite frankly, I do not think there are sufficient animals here in Queensland to justify CITES certification based on trophies—Northern Territory, yes, but not here. Before we do anything or make any changes it has to go to CITES, otherwise you are shutting down the industry completely.

In the western cape there is an Indigenous community. There is no reason they could not harvest the entire western cape right down into the lower gulf, with agreement from their neighbours. It would be viable for the numbers of eggs that are available there. Anything over here would be okay
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for smaller farms. It could be purchased through traditional owner groups on any of the lands or from farmers, as they do in the Northern Territory, to put those eggs in. I keep saying look back to what these guys have done; do not reinvent the wheel.

Mr COSTIGAN: Councillor Moller, from recollection you are generation No. 4.

Councillor Moller: Yes.

Mr COSTIGAN: You have seen a lot of urban sprawl in your patch in that southern growth corridor. Coming back to livability, what do you remember doing as a kid that kids cannot do today? What is your response to how bad the problem is, as you see it, in the context of what we have heard anecdotally about a requirement or expectation to partner with state government to build water parks et cetera if you cannot go and swim in your favourite waterhole, particularly in your division in the southern part of the city?

Councillor Moller: I am fourth generation on the banks of the Mulgrave River. I grew up swimming, fishing and spearing. I would say towards the late nineties or 2000s we started to see this increase in crocodile numbers and it has grown exponentially from there. Yes, that way of life is not there now.

As I have said, the challenge is to find that balance between environment and lifestyle. My concern around the current management is where we talk about the interface between communities and the pursuits that interface with crocodiles. Recently we had a crocodile in Babinda Creek next to an RV park where kids were jumping off the bridge. Kids have done for years—generations. There was a large crocodile there. The submission has now gone in and that will be a targeted removal. As Mr Entsch has pointed out and as you probably know in your area, they are in upstream reaches where they have never been before. People talk about a natural croc habitat; however, neither my generation nor my father's generation has ever seen this.

My concern also is around recreational fishing and the boat ramps. They say that, because it is a river system and crocodiles go up and down, they cannot do anything about that. On the show holiday at Deeral boat ramp south of Cairns there were 130 vehicles. If there are, say, three or four people in a boat, that is 360 to 400 people accessing a ramp where we know there are crocodiles. Again, as the local representative and as you are the state representatives, first and foremost what keeps us awake at night is the safety of our residents. This is not an emotional outcry; it is just a fact of life that changing circumstances are bringing in a new and increased risk. It is our responsibility to manage that and to look at legislation that will, first and foremost, provide that our residents are safe.

Ms LUI: Mr Entsch, thank you for your remarks this morning. You gave a really balanced overview on crocodile management and looking at sustainable practices for Far North Queensland. At the same time, I want to hear your views—and when we are looking at sustainable practices it is about having that balanced overview for everyone involved; it is about the public, industry and communities that will have an economic gain from it, if you like. I have read everyone's submission. The concern here is that crocodile numbers are increasing. That is the key message I am getting from the three panel members. I am interested to know your views around population numbers. How is that going to be sustainable and, at the same time, how do we find a balanced practice across-the-board that will also take into consideration industries that will benefit from crocodile numbers, tourism businesses as well as Indigenous communities?

Mr Entsch: You have actually made a good point, because the crocodile industry is not just about putting crocodiles into farms and sending skins off to Hermes in Paris. There are a lot of small businesses that have established themselves that take people out on crocodile-spotting tours, which I think are very important. We saw that unfortunate incident in Thornton Beach that almost shut down a family business that had been operating for about 30-odd years because they killed the major attraction as part of the process. There were only two or three animals in that system that were reliable for being spotted.

That is why I say that you have to be targeted in where you do have zero tolerance—like in the territory, where you have zero tolerance. People who go to Four Mile Beach do not go there to see crocodiles; they go there to swim. The same goes for any of our beaches here: people go there to swim. The problem is that when you get these animals in such numbers that they have been forced into areas that are totally alien to the animal such as where we were swimming as kids—a lot of these animals are in unhealthy environments. Do you understand that in order for a crocodile to digest its food it has to be 21 degrees? The cold waterways are not the best place for them to be, anyway. They are there because of overpopulation.

This is why I say to you that there has to be zero tolerance where there are large populations, particularly of transient people coming in that do not have any understanding of crocodiles other than what they have seen in a movie. When you get into areas like you do north of the river and others where there are businesses—for example, in Cooktown there are businesses that run crocodile tours along the Endeavour River and the Annan—that is fine. However, when they start hanging around boat ramps, of course they have to be removed. You would have zero tolerance there. You would remove those animals, as they do in the NPA and places like that where they are a risk.

Remember, though, that there are other things you can do. You mentioned boat ramps. There need to be laws in place so that people are penalised if they are caught cleaning fish or dropping fish frames around boat ramps because they are guaranteeing to get an audience with crocodiles. I see it time and time again when people come back with a good catch from the reef. They sit there and they drop all the guts and the frames over the side. They are bringing them in; there is no question about that. There need to be penalties to prevent—not to prevent it because it again comes back to the stupidity argument. People need to be held accountable for that because they are bringing in animals that would not normally hang around in those areas. You have to have the balance.

In the western cape area, for example, most people are aware of crocodiles and they are very, very cautious of them. You apply it according to the area, as they do—and again I go back to this—in the Northern Territory. It is not rocket science. There should be zero tolerance in areas where there are large populations.

Ms BOLTON: My question is to the three of you. Everything you have spoken about and everything I have read in your submission can actually be achieved without the establishment of another authority—

Mr Entsch: Absolutely.

Ms BOLTON:—but does require more resources. Everything we are hearing is that not only do we need it to be place based but it needs the resources to do so, and that can be achieved through the current management and framework.

Mr Entsch: Absolutely. If you bring in other players—for example, we have Indigenous rangers here who are doing a good job but they are constrained in what they can do by what the department tells them they are able to do. In the western cape, Pormpuraaw are busting their guts to get out there and collect more eggs, but they are constrained. The whole capacity of that business to grow hinges on the constraints they have in relation to the number of eggs they can collect. That could benefit every single community up the western seaboard, right across to Doomadgee and across to the Northern Territory border.

You could have one collection there that does it in consultation and paying a fee for an egg, as they do in the territory. The fee was \$5 when I started. It is now \$26 for an egg. Whether the egg is viable or not, every egg you collect is \$26 so there is an income for the local communities as well. There are things that can be done. For the crocodile farmers on the eastern seaboard, it would be worth their while to be part of the process of collecting if they know they can take hatchlings, eggs and animals that they can make a dollar out of by growing them out, as well as removing the bigger ones. You would get a bigger pool of people who know what they are doing, working to a common practice.

Councillor Moller: I think the appropriate resourcing and appropriate finance will come with recognition of the potential of the problem up here in terms of the increasing numbers and the current management plan. We would welcome additional resources. The current management plan has zonings. Can you explain to me why Cairns in the northern beaches is a proactive removal zone, while the communities and river systems to the south are not proactive? Aren't we differentiating here between the value of a human life? I understand the geography, the water systems and all of that but, quite simply, if you live in the northern beaches under the current management there is a proactive removal, while if you live to the south of Cairns it is a general management zone.

Mr Sydes: The other element I would add to that is: it does certainly come down to the resourcing but it also comes down to the way the department has conducted its business. I think they are reaching out to councils and to communities a lot more now because they have to, not necessarily because they want to I guess. There is certainly a trust issue with the community, particularly in regard to getting a handle on the population dynamics and some consensus around the size of the population. The current processes are in place. I know that we have these more detailed surveys in place, but we have certainly recommended to the department that they look at ways to facilitate to build community champions into those processes so we have a much more authoritative and accepted handle on what the population is.

That is the point of contest whenever we begin these conversations—that is, to say, ‘The department doesn’t know what they’re doing. They’re not reporting the numbers we’re seeing.’ It has changed so much since I first witnessed the landscape and experienced the waterways, so there is a real trust issue there in terms of that authoritative source and to say, ‘This is actually what the population is. This is what the population is doing. These are the sizes and the distribution of the animals.’ It comes down to the research, development and communication. All of those factors really need to be brought together, and that can only come with further resources.

CHAIR: Mr Sydes, in your submission at the bottom of page 4 you talk about some of the risks in relation to this legislation and you have four risks. You have talked about No. 3 a lot in terms of some of the issues with the Queensland crocodile management authority. Could you expand on the other ones you have identified there—how the requirements of international, national and state legislation agreements will be addressed; the restriction on foreign investment; and issues about public versus private benefit?

Mr Sydes: In terms of the first one, which the member for Leichhardt has touched on, as we say in there, it is ambiguous how those recommendations are managed within the proposal as it is being put forward. It is really not addressed at all. It is addressed in the policy speak in the front. It is almost dismissed. It is probably one of the biggest hurdles or obstacles in there. It is incredibly complex and, as has already been outlined in the hearing today, we have so much reputation riding on that. The ongoing viability of the industry is really stitched to that.

I would say that we also have our reputation as a sustainable tourism destination. There is considerable reputational risk for the region in terms of how we behave and respond to these—that is very real and that is what we face—as custodian of the reef. Our custody of the reef is a good example of that. They are the broad things. I think they are really skipped over within the current proposal. They do not go into the detail that is required. There is not a regulatory impact statement or other provided that looks at those flow-on effects to other industries.

The second point we make is that there is a rather peculiar recommendation in there that only Australian entities have the authority to farm crocodiles, so we immediately exclude foreign investment. Our population in Australia is not big. We are not huge consumers of crocodile products. All of those products are going offshore. The fact that that has even been included in the legislation seems quite peculiar. We make that—

Mr Entsch: Can I say: you already have foreign entities that own crocodile farms in the Northern Territory and Queensland, so what do you do? Are you going to shut them down? They are some of the major players.

Mr Sydes: That is where the market is. When we look in the industry’s own advice, which I looked at for the background of this, it is a high-risk investment which involves a lot of infrastructure, a lot of planning, lots of permitting, lots of licensing, and then you have to wait. There is a long tail, no pun intended, on the return on investment, before you get that return back. It is a high-risk investment, so it is very peculiar that that is included in the legislation. I really have not come across something like that before.

The fourth one is this challenge with private versus public benefit when we start to look at monetising crocodiles out there, particularly if we look at these considerations of authorised landholders. Consider a catchment where you have five landholders—two want to preserve crocodiles, one is indifferent and the other two want to sell the rights for other people to hunt those crocodiles. We end up with all of these perverse elements on top of what is really a complex ecological, social and economic issue, and we lose oversight of that entirely. Placing the commercial value on wild crocodiles, particularly if it is decentralised and put out to individuals to manage, as is proposed in components of this legislation, is fraught. It really is a minefield and we cannot see how that could possibly make the waterways safer or help conserve crocodiles in the long term.

Mr Entsch: Can I add a final comment, because it is important. A business-as-usual approach is going to be a disaster. I think there needs to be an acknowledgement that we have a major issue with a proliferation of crocodiles in our regions, and they need to be dealt with in a sensible way. We have got to a situation where we have honest, law-abiding citizens feeling compelled, because of no support from within the authorities, to take the law into their own hands for their own safety and the safety of their families. We have seen examples of this recently, where they have gone out there to get rid of an animal because they feel serious threats to themselves, and rightfully so. Suddenly, they now have a criminal record and they have been charged for it. We need to be able to remove that feeling of helplessness of these people—that they have to go down this road in order to protect themselves and their families. That in itself will highlight the fact that business-as-usual is not accepted.

CHAIR: I will extend that opportunity for the other gentlemen to make a final comment if they wish. Before that, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the member for Cairns, Michael Healy, who is with us today. Councillor Moller, is there anything further you would like to add before we close this section?

Councillor Moller: I just want to reiterate that at FNQROC we remain very willing to work with government to get this policy right, to get this management right. Yes, there are downstream consequences in terms of land use change and infrastructure, depending on if we go down a commercial route. To your point, we do not want to be building water parks and we do not want to be building fenced sea pools. We want to enjoy our natural environment.

I want to thank the committee for taking the time to come up here. In regional Queensland we generally have a bit to say. You can see in the room today that we have a bit to say. We do appreciate you taking the time to come here. This is where the rubber hits the road in terms of this issue. This is where you will get the feedback because we have to live with it. You will have to legislate to provide for the safety of residents and all Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Thank you. I grew up in regional Queensland so I know that everyone loves to have a say. Mr Sydes, would you like to add a final comment?

Mr Sydes: I would also like to thank the committee for their time. It is valuable to provide input into this, and we really see this proposed legislation as an opportunity to provide more leverage to have these conversations, and they are really valuable.

What really became apparent to us looking at this in more detail is that we have a broader safer swimming issue here in the Far North, and it is not just about crocodiles. We have issues with tourists drowning in our fast-flowing rainforest streams. We have multiple incidents a year. We have incidents with more people coming to the reef and different demographics visiting the reef. We have increasing issues with marine stingers, the southern distribution of Irukandji, other things expanding, things being driven by factors outside of our control, with climate change, warming waters et cetera. There are a lot of shifts and changes happening in our natural systems, and species are moving around and changing in there. Nature abhors a vacuum, and it will fill those spaces that are provided by those opportunities in that disturbance.

We cannot look at the crocodile management issue in isolation and say, 'It's just about crocodiles.' It is really about this whole thing of safer swimming, how we recreate around water and those things. We simply will not be able to do some of the things that we did in the past. Crocodiles will not be the only cause of that, so we need to have a holistic and very wide spectrum picture around that.

CHAIR: I thank you all for taking the time to join us today.

BROWN, Mr Donald, Private capacity

BURNS, Mr Shannon, Policy Officer, Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

DEAKIN, Ms Janey, Pormpuraaw Traditional Owner, Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

McGREEN, Mr Tim, Hope Vale Traditional Owner, Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

MORRIS, Ms Wendy, Chair, Tourism Tropical North Queensland

CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. We will follow the same format as with the last group. We will give everyone an opportunity to make an opening statement and then we will open it up to committee members for questions. We will start with the Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

Ms Deakin: I am a traditional owner of Pormpuraaw. We have a croc farm in Pormpuraaw, and the rangers have done harvesting with wild eggs before but I think that was only just a trial. The problem we have at the moment is that we would like to see the croc farm go back to the traditional owners in running it and doing our business with it—collecting eggs, culling the crocs, using the skins and the meat. This would provide employment for the community because there is a low employment rate at Pormpuraaw. It is very hard for everyone to have a job there. Having that business run by the traditional owners would provide income for those people.

In our waterways, there are crocodiles going up into our camping areas. We have never seen them before, but they are going right up into the fresh water and following the rivers all the way up. We have rogue crocs at the beach that we would like to see taken away, removed. We need to remove some of the crocs and put them into the croc farm. Some do a business in safari but have consent to do it within the traditional land, on someone else's traditional land. We would like to get consent when we go into someone else's land. With some crocodiles, because of their spiritual aspects with connection with each other, we cannot cull them. We actually leave them alone.

CHAIR: Would anyone from the Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation like to add anything?

Mr S Burns: Thanks for your time this morning. My name is Shannon Burns. I am a policy officer with the Cape York Land Council. We represent the interests of the Aboriginal communities that are north of the Daintree River all the way up the east coast of the cape and back down the west coast down to Staaten River. There are about nine townships in that area—about 15,000 people. That is prime crocodile country on both the east coast and the west coast of Cape York.

Crocodiles are certainly an issue which are of interest to the Aboriginal people of Cape York. We see this bill as being a fairly positive advancement. We see both the community safety issues, which we see this bill as having the potential to improve, and the economic development opportunity that Janey was just referring to. There are opportunities for Aboriginal people to farm crocodiles, to run businesses to do safari hunting and also to be service providers—to remove crocodiles from other people's country.

We think there are some native title aspects to this legislation that should be considered, because the taking of crocodiles will affect native title rights to hunt and collect the eggs of crocodiles. We think there should be consent for any crocodile hunting or egg collecting that occurs. There should be a process built into the bill to ensure that consent of traditional owners for that country is received.

We also think that on Aboriginal land and on state leasehold land the business of managing crocodiles should be an Indigenous specific business. On Aboriginal land, because Aboriginal people own that land, they should do the management on that country, but also where it is state land under a lease—most likely a pastoral lease—the conditions of the lease will not give pastoralists the powers or the rights to use the land to collect eggs or hunt crocodiles. Under the conditions of their pastoral lease they can only really graze cattle. We think any business to do with managing crocodiles should be given to traditional owners from those areas. That provides an opportunity for people to set up small businesses and to gain economic development from the provisions of this proposed legislation.

We also think there should be greater representation on the board which is proposed to be formed. At the moment it is a seven-person board with only one Indigenous seat that is assured. Because of the high population of Aboriginal people in the same areas where there are high

populations of crocodiles, we think there should be at least a second seat on the board to ensure that the interests of Aboriginal people are heard on the management. As we have said, it is both an economic and a community safety issue, but there are also cultural issues which need to be taken into consideration when management is proposed.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Burns. Ms Morris, thank you for joining us this afternoon. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Morris: Thank you. Mr Chair and the committee, a big welcome to tropical North Queensland. We are delighted to have you here. I am the chair of Tourism Tropical North Queensland. I think the sheer number of people in this room, let alone the people who are very interested in what is going on outside the room, is an indication of how important this subject is. I think the time has come to put in place a realistic, considered plan for management. Heated media and the online debate of the unlawful killing of crocodiles is divisive, and business as usual will not be the way that we can continue into the future.

Tourism contributes about \$3.3 billion to this region's economy. It is the engine room for our growth, and our attraction is that we have the world's most inspiring nature based destinations. We have Great Barrier Reef beaches, wet tropics and rainforest as the centre of this focus, and our population swells by up to 40,000 a night as they explore this environment. We are a sustainable destination. Anything that we do as far as management must be sustainable as well.

We very much recognise that within the tourism industry we are strong supporters of wildlife viewing of crocodiles, particularly in the north. It is a very important attraction for our visitors. However, a downturn in tourism will affect these operators as much as anyone. A single significant incident will have ramifications not just in the tropical north but across Queensland and is likely to result in a call for an extreme response as well as having an effect on our reputation—particularly brand Queensland, not just the brand of the north.

Those who were present during the pilots strike will well and truly remember what the effect up here in this region is when we lose our tourism industry for a period of time. Our great challenge is that many visitors do not realise how large and geographically diverse Queensland is. When we have an event, whether it is a cyclone or an incident with a crocodile, all of us are affected. Reports that crocodiles are now being apparently found as far south as the Mary River, only 150 kilometres north of Noosa, underscores that this is a Queensland-wide issue. Where nodes of high human use overlap, we are concerned at the current and future impacts to tourism.

We encourage place based management. That has been discussed before. We are very keen that the government works swiftly to work towards a plan for best practice management. Perhaps that is in the form of a crocodile authority for the state. Perhaps it is within the current environment department.

It has been noted that the Northern Territory has an interesting strategic plan that is based on incentive based conservation. I think that has a huge amount of merit. One point that we would make in looking at the Northern Territory plan is that when there is a problem crocodile it is noted that included in that are the economic ramifications. Where the activity of the crocodile is affecting the productivity of industry or commercial enterprises, action is taken. There is no such plan in the current Queensland plan. With that as a start, thanks very much for having us here.

CHAIR: Thanks very much for joining us, Ms Morris. Mr Brown, thank you for your submission and for joining us this afternoon. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Brown: Yes, I will. I do not have much to tell you because I am here as a local. I have lived here for 50-odd years. I have been here all my life, 78 years. I am aware of what is going on. I do not have all the knowledge that the previous speakers have, but I do have general knowledge and that is what I would like to cover.

Crocodiles are going up the Mulgrave River, travelling 25 to 30 kilometres past the brackish water and rising at least a kilometre to the headwaters on Carneys flat. That is, as far as I know, the furthest a crocodile has gone. Another crocodile was seen by a local fisherman in from the Little Mulgrave pub, which is not far from the Mulgrave. He saw it on the other bank and his description of the crocodile was 'as big as my Toyota truck'. That is not a small crocodile and it has gone up a long way. I am here as a local just to say what I will say. I do not have to refer to my submission. I can speak on other matters, can't I?

CHAIR: Of course.

Mr Brown: You have the submission. You know what it says.

CHAIR: As long as you keep it concise.

Mr Brown: That is all I need to say.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Mr Brown, for joining us. As a local, of course you have an entitlement to make your submission and come along to have your say, and we thank you for doing so.

Mr Brown: I am interested.

CHAIR: We will now move on to questions. Ms Morris, this issue has been the subject of a lot of debate. You talked about the impact on tourism and the need to look at strategies. It is the job of this committee to analyse this bill and report to the parliament. Although some people may skirt around the issue, the reality is, in my view, that this bill would undoubtedly lead to the killing of a lot more crocodiles than currently is the case. I want to get your view on what kind of impact you think that would have if there was large-scale killing of crocodiles in Far North Queensland in terms of the potential tourism impacts. I am thinking about measures that were introduced a few years ago in the Northern Territory to try to control the camel population—camels are an introduced species obviously; saltwater crocodiles are native to Australia—and the international attention that garnered. I am wondering what impacts and what kind of commentary the large-scale killing of crocodiles could cause.

Ms Morris: It is very clear that we are a sustainable, environmentally focused region and we must maintain that in any action that we take. As the bill currently stands, I think the wording is not right. There are a whole bunch of sections that have been referred to previously by Mr Entsch and others that are not appropriate within the current bill. The large-scale killing of crocodiles, particularly by people who are not qualified, to me is completely inappropriate. That is the last thing that this region would want from a brand perspective, as well as what is happening on the ground.

We think there is a great opportunity, as has already been mentioned, for traditional owners to be involved in the management and particularly the economic benefits from harvesting crocodiles in one form or another. As far as large-scale culling is concerned, we are completely against that.

CHAIR: Mr Brown, you are very lucky to spend a lot of time at Trinity Beach, which is a beautiful part of the world.

Mr Brown: It is.

CHAIR: I have not been to Trinity Beach as many times as you have, unfortunately, but when I go there people do go swimming there.

Mr Brown: Yes, but the numbers have dropped off considerably.

CHAIR: But you do accept that people still go swimming at Trinity Beach and, in fact, if we went there today there would be people swimming, more likely than not?

Mr Brown: They would be there but there would not be many. When the crocodile sign goes up, the lifeguard puts a ban on it for about 24 hours so no-one goes in the water if they see a crocodile. For us, it is really about what we had and what we do not have. What we had we do not have anymore so we have to readdress what we are doing.

For me to go for a swim in Cairns, I have to go to the pool. I do not want to go to the pool but I have to. For me to go for a swim in the summertime, where once I would go to the Mulgrave I now go to the tableland and swim in the lake. That takes a full day. It is a day out and you have a good swim. I do not want to get in and paddle; I want to swim. I want to swim a kilometre or two. I want to do it for exercise because it is what I enjoy, but that is all gone. We have lost all of that. At the beaches my wife and I would swim year round. The cold water did not really worry us. Wear a thermal shirt and you are okay. Now it hangs up on the coat hanger; it does not get used. We have to do other things.

CHAIR: To close off on that, how often have there been crocodile incidents at Trinity Beach or surrounding beaches?

Mr Brown: How often?

CHAIR: How frequently do they occur?

Mr Brown: I can recall an instance where the crocodile was in the net and it was about a 10- to 12-footer. I did not see it, but my son-in-law had gone out and told us not to come. We were going to Palm Cove. People go early in the morning and this woman was swimming. She was one of the early swimmers. She thought it was a log in the water and swum up against it, and when she brushed it she realised it was a crocodile and got out of there as quickly as she could. The crocodile was let go—they just let the air out of the nets—and it swum by. They have been there on and off for the last decade, I would say.

CHAIR: I have a question for the Cape York Land Council. We have heard from various submitters that the numbers have increased. I do not think anybody disputes that. Some people argue that they have increased more dramatically than others. Indigenous communities have been interacting with crocodiles for thousands of years. We are talking about an increase perhaps from the seventies, so we are looking at about 40 years or so. I want to find out if there has been any change for Indigenous communities in terms of the way that you have historically interacted with crocodiles and had crocodiles as part of your communities up there.

Mr McGreen: I have a map which I will show you. In this area here of Princess Charlotte Bay there have been a number of deaths from crocodiles, not taking traditional owners but taking tourists. My memory is about three, I think. We also got a small business down on the beach—just a tourist camp. Some of these tourists come back and have a talk to me. They say, ‘About this problem of crocodiles, what can we do with them? We like the place, but we can’t be going camping there with all of these crocodiles hanging around the camp. You can’t walk out from your camp and everything.’ I am telling tourists, ‘You’re doing the right thing not cleaning the fish on the beach.’ Yes, they are doing the right thing, but that is the problem. It has increased. The crocodiles are getting focused on humans now. There is an easier chance of getting a human than chasing a kangaroo or a pig. In those areas I would like to see, with the tourists, a bit of a business with culling and collecting eggs or whatever and from there they might be able to go over to Pormpuraaw to the farm over there—working together with other communities.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you, and good afternoon. Thanks for attending. I particularly acknowledge the traditional owners from Pormpuraaw and Hope Vale. Thank you for attending. Ms Morris, I appreciate your input. Certainly in the past couple of years I have had concerns raised with me, as have other members, about crocodiles in this part of the world and around Port Douglas in particular. Particular businesses have raised it consistently in the media. You are the representative of all of those. How widespread among the tourism businesses in the tropical North Queensland area is the concern about crocodiles and their growth in numbers?

Ms Morris: I think it is absolutely widespread. I will say that on both sides—from the perspective of our western communities and the fact that we are seeing them now on the tablelands as well as in places where they have never been seen before. I have lived up here for 45 years and I have certainly seen them in places where they have never been seen before. It has been raised by some operators. I believe there was a research paper on potential change in the population architecture because of the increase in some of our feral animals. That includes cattle as well as pigs and other animals. Perhaps, with a higher density, they are moving into newer areas.

Certainly in my lifetime I have seen a dramatic change, but I very much acknowledge that we have very short lives and what we see is only just a snapshot of history. Having said that, so is the human race and so is tourism. There was no tourism in the north 30 or 40 years ago—not to speak of. It is now the major economic driver, particularly in beach places. Certainly, when you look at the branding of Queensland, it is very clear from research that water activities are a key part of the way that visitors want to experience our region, whether that is on the reef or on our beaches. It is absolutely vital that that tourism industry, which is currently the driver of our economy, is retained and maintained in all of its forms.

Mr KRAUSE: One of the questions that was asked before I believe related to what impact the commencement of widespread culling might have on the tourism industry. Would you be able to estimate the cost of a crocodile related fatality, or a number of fatalities, on the tourism industry—both for TTNQ and, if you can, in relation to the broader state?

Ms Morris: As I have said before, I think it is the most significant single incident that this region could have in the natural environment. The economic effect is something that would be extremely difficult to get over from a brand reputation point of view. It will affect the whole of the state. Currently we are talking about employing 225,000 people in tourism in the state of Queensland. To my mind, it is a major issue, not just for this region but for the whole of coastal Queensland.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you, Ms Morris. Mr Brown, thank you for attending. I think the contribution from local residents—the average man on the street, so to speak—is invaluable. One of the concerns you raised was about Trinity Beach. That is similar to what has been expressed to me in the past about the Ellis Beach Surf Life Saving Club.

Mr Brown: Yes, it is everywhere.

Mr KRAUSE: There is a report of a decrease in the participation of surf life saving. You have been at Trinity Beach since 2000.

Mr Brown: I have been going long before that.

Mr KRAUSE: Okay.

Mr Brown: I retired in 2000.

Mr KRAUSE: You have lived there since—

Mr Brown: My wife was still working. You plan to have a spare hour. I would scoot out, do a half-an-hour swim and come back. If my wife was not working, I would have the work at home done and we would both go.

Mr KRAUSE: Back then—

Mr Brown: There were no crocodiles then—not on the beaches.

Mr KRAUSE: It has really gone from an issue of zero concerns—

Mr Brown: I do not even want my wife to go into the water. I do not want to lose her.

Mr KRAUSE: That is just in 17 years.

Mr Brown: Yes. We went to Port Douglas two years ago. Our son came up from Brisbane and went to a seminar. We drove him up on Wednesday afternoon, took him to the place where they had a meet-and-greet and at five o'clock we went down for a swim. We were there by a quarter past five. My wife is walking ahead of me. I am just leaving the car. As we get to the beach, she is starting to go in the water. I called her back. She asked, 'What's wrong?' I said, 'Look around. What can you see?' She said, 'A lot of people walking on the beach.' I said, 'Yes, but who is in the water?' She said, 'No-one.' I said, 'There's a bloody crocodile here, that's why. There has been a crocodile here today.' We did not go for a swim.

That night we had our meal at the barbecue at the resort we stayed at. There was a young couple there on their honeymoon and they were there for their last night. We talked to them. The next day, we went down to the beach at 10 o'clock and we were there for a good half an hour and then went back up to town, had a coffee and then we went back to the unit. Our son came home from the seminar. He had walked home. I asked, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'I've got my jeans and they're too bloody hot. I'm going to wear some shorts,' so I took him straight back. When I came through the gate—because in the resort there are gates everywhere—a hand rises up and these young people are in the pool. He asked, 'Have you been for a swim?' I said, 'Yes, early on.' He asked, 'Did you go after 11.30?' I said, 'No, 10 o'clock.' He said, 'At 11.30 they closed the beach. Two bloody crocodiles were on the beach.'

The thing about it is that it is going to happen. Someone is going to be taken, and this lady will be right in it because of her situation. It may not be a local, because we have some knowledge, but I feel sorry for the people. As far as the waters go, the worst of it, I think, is the fresh water. To have them in the freshwater creeks when the summers get so hot and long—the summers seem to be getting hotter and hotter—we have an advantage with houses because of air conditioning, but everybody likes to go to fresh water. I would not put my big toe in the Mulgrave. I know the bottom of it and I know the top of it. I would not go there because of what I know. I could say words, words, words, and thoughts and prayers and all the things that you might wish, but if somebody does not have the fortitude to say, 'Let's do something about it, make it right from wrong,' things are going to be the same. It is not going to change.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you, Mr Brown. I appreciate your input.

Mr Brown: I did not want to prattle on, but that is really how it goes.

Mr KRAUSE: No, you have done very well.

Ms LUI: Ms Morris, thank you for being here today. In your submission you said 'review current crocodile management and put in place a sustainable, balanced plan'. It is inevitable that crocodiles will swim wherever. I also would like to make mention that you have a statement here that says—

Regardless of average population density statistics, distribution of crocodiles is likely to be aggregated according to habitat and food availability.

In terms of the whole ecosystem—crocodiles being in their natural environment as well as feral pigs and others—if we were to put in a balanced management plan, would that include looking at areas where there is dense population of feral pigs or whatever that would attract crocodiles to a certain areas? If we are looking at managing crocodile numbers, we are looking at all the other factors that come into play as well. What are your views on that?

Ms Morris: I do not profess to be an expert on crocodiles, by any means. From just having looked at the Northern Territory plan, it is very clear that it is a place based plan. It is also very much based around incentive driven strategies for conservation. The way that I would see an overall plan being put in place is something that is going to be very different from the way the Northern Territory

manages it. We do not necessarily have the same pig issues, for example, in some of our rivers as they may have in the Northern Territory, but we may have more issues to do with cattle. I am not an expert on how that might sit. To me, we need the experts to look at what parallels and what good points could be pulled from the Northern Territory plan and have the appropriate resources to be able to put in place a Queensland place based plan that can be proactive as opposed to being reactive, because that is essentially what I see at the moment. We react to issues, for example a problem crocodile; we are not being proactive in the way that we drive the opportunities as much as mitigate the problems.

Ms LUI: My second question is to the Cape York Land Council. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners here today. In your opening statement, Ms Deakin, you mentioned the cultural significance of crocodiles. You then went on to talk about egg harvesting and the culling of crocodiles and turning that into economic opportunities for people living in the region. How would you manage the cultural significance of crocodiles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as managing sustainable crocodile numbers?

Ms Deakin: TOs would know the spiritual side of things and the cultural things of crocodiles and how they are a spiritually connected. Is that what you are saying?

Ms LUI: Yes

Ms Deakin: Every person within that community who is a traditional owner or elder knows the cultural and spiritual significance of a crocodile. If someone had killed that crocodile, that person would get sick. They would definitely know which crocodile is which and where they are. The people know where they are. Within the rivers, they say that they have a certain area. At the Chapman, there is a crocodile there that always stays in the one area. People know that, so they do not go near that area. Even on the north and south side, there are two different rivers. There is always a crocodile that belongs to a traditional owner spiritually. There are different colours to these crocodiles. Is that what you were asking?

Ms LUI: Yes.

Ms Deakin: My brother was a crocodile hunter. That was a very long time ago. Their numbers were culled to a certain number. There were hardly any crocodiles in the rivers, so you could go swimming. As a child, we would go swimming. Now, in these past 15 or 10 years, you cannot go swimming. It is full of crocodiles. My grandfather was one of the guys who formed the first crocodile farm. From there it has grown.

That is what the traditional owners would like to see—the lowering of the numbers of crocodiles so that people can go fishing and can drag their nets on the front beach. You cannot do that, because there are crocodiles up and down. After the mating season, you see these crocodiles up and down the rivers. Along the front beach, you cannot go dragging or anything. Dogs are taken. You cannot go fishing. Indigenous people, when they go fishing, like to stand waist deep in the water. You cannot do it. You cannot go upriver and go swimming, because you are scared of crocodiles.

Mr COSTIGAN: Good morning everybody. Thank you again for your submissions and your input today as witnesses. Ms Deakin, given what we have already heard today and what you have said, is the current management framework for crocodiles in Queensland holding back the economic development of your community?

Ms Deakin: Yes, I would say that it is. At present there are too many crocs so we cannot do anything, especially with the harvesting of the wild eggs.

Mr COSTIGAN: I was just going to come back to what Mr Entsch said in his submission this morning, that at Pormpuraaw you are crying out for more eggs. Do you concur with that?

Ms Deakin: Yes. If that was something we could do, it would be an economic development for our community and it would lower the numbers of crocs that are in the waterways. At least as traditional owners we can manage it and say that you can go to a certain number and then leave it as is. It is a safety thing.

Mr COSTIGAN: You have said that your grandfather was instrumental in the establishment of a croc farm.

Ms Deakin: Establishment of the first croc farm, yes. It was only a little densely stocked area when they had their first croc.

Mr COSTIGAN: How many years does that go back?

Ms Deakin: I am 50, so it was maybe 45 years back. It was a very long time ago.

Mr COSTIGAN: Mr McGreen, have you worked in the cattle industry for much of your life?

Mr McGreen: Yes, I worked for Mr Entsch when he owned a cattle property up near Laura. In saying that, I just want to go back to the culling of crocodiles. Back there where I pointed out on the map, in those caves there are paintings that my ancestors did drawing crocodiles with a spear in their head, so they were culling crocodiles back then. You can see it in the cave paintings, so they had them controlled back then. That was long before crocodile shooters came in.

Mr COSTIGAN: Before the arrival of the white man?

Mr McGreen: Before the arrival of white men. There are paintings in those caves. My ancestors had them under control then.

Mr COSTIGAN: The reason I ask about your possible involvement in the cattle industry is in relation to workplace health and safety. From talking to people like Indigenous and non-Indigenous ringers, how concerning it is to go out to work now with more crocodiles seemingly in rivers and streams? Is that a problem for people in the cattle industry?

Mr McGreen: We have a problem on the property now. Some of the horses have been taken from the property. Crocodiles have taken them and a few head of cattle that we had. They never used to be there before, but they are gradually coming up into the rivers and streams and taking hold of the place.

Mr COSTIGAN: Can I just go to the tourism industry, Ms Morris, as it relates to your contribution here today. Has there been any modelling done in terms of the collateral damage to brand TTNQ? I note your comments about this being a whole-of-Queensland problem, as you see it. You have made that very clear to the committee today. Has there been any quantification in terms of how much damage there would be if there was a fatal attack on Four Mile Beach, for example?

Ms Morris: There has not been any formal modelling. We have it within Tourism Tropical North Queensland as one of our major risk factors. How we manage that is completely out of our control. This is why we are very pleased that we are having this conversation. It is a challenging conversation to have, but business-as-usual will not be the way that we can continue. What I will say is that we have a \$3.3 billion industry here and the headlines would be around the world. Many of us all throughout this region work incredibly hard. We tread the leather all around the world encouraging people to come through the gateway here of Cairns Airport or to drive through. There are over three million people who come here every year, and the effects of that will go beyond just visitation; it will also affect the service stations, the newsagents, the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker. Everybody will be affected.

Mr COSTIGAN: We heard earlier about businesses like Sea Kayaking having to close up because of crocodiles. Can you expand on that and maybe give us some other examples of how this has played out with mum-and-dad small operators who play a role in tourism here?

Ms Morris: There was a business up near Cape Tribulation that had an issue with crocodiles and was forced to close. At the same time, I will say that there are opportunities, if we have more assistance—for example, with the way the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority applies permits and allows for changing permits—for more innovative uses of the resources and places that people visit when there are crocodiles there. Port Douglas is an example that I know quite well. It is now becoming one of the most frequent questions asked by visitors when they are on the beaches there. Unfortunately, we are all for awareness and creating much better education for our visitors and locals, but when you get to the point where the official advice is to not walk along the edge of the beach, that becomes a pretty major issue for a place like Port Douglas. It is not only Port Douglas. There are other instances, but that is one that I am very familiar with.

Mr COSTIGAN: You obviously have a vast and strong member based organisation. It has been recently revealed that the department has three months as the KPI in terms of removing problem crocodiles. If you were to poll or quiz your members with the question, 'Do you find that acceptable?' what would be the consensus or general feeling of tourism operators across Far North Queensland or under the TTNQ umbrella?

Ms Morris: In most of those areas it is obviously way, way too long. It is hugely challenging when you know there is a croc in an area people are visiting frequently that is hanging around where it has not been hanging around before, but at the same time we very much acknowledge that place based management is going to be vital. Places like Daintree are absolutely essential to the north and we want to encourage and allow the continuation of croc viewing there—it is a huge part of experiencing unique nature—however, there are places where it is completely inappropriate and three months is too long to wait.

Mrs MULLEN: Ms Deakin, I want to ask you about the wild egg harvesting trial in Pormpuraaw. In your opinion, what lessons have been learned from that in terms of any improvements that you could see happening to support this sustainable industry for Indigenous communities?

Ms Deakin: It was only a trial thing. I was not actually involved with that; it was the rangers. We knew the rangers were collecting the harvested wild eggs and sending them to the Northern Territory. It was a trial thing. I think it is something that would really probably work. Other communities have spoken to me about the same thing. If we did get the croc farm up and running again, they said they would talk to us about sending crocodiles to our croc farm and trying to build up a business in that way and work together. I think that would work.

Mrs MULLEN: Ms Morris, Mr Sydes earlier spoke about safe swimming. That extends beyond crocodile management, particularly up in this region. Safe swimming is a bit of an issue. In terms of the education message, particularly to international tourists coming here, how do you think that is going? Are there ways we can look at improving the education message around safe swimming by working with industry and government?

Ms Morris: The industry is very aware and very involved with the awareness campaign, and that is a very good thing. The nuancing of the messaging as well is really important. We are a remarkable, wonderful island of environmental attractions between World Heritage, the Great Barrier Reef and the rainforest, but we are isolated. Putting up more barriers to travel is something that is very challenging for the tourism industry. We have to be careful with the way we spread those messages to make sure they are accurate, relevant and appropriate for the place. As we progress I think we are constantly working towards how we can improve that messaging with the department. Generally I think it is going quite well, but the fact that we still have people swimming in places that are inappropriate means that we have a long way to go.

Mrs MULLEN: In your submission you noted that in the Northern Territory there is consideration given to where the activity of the crocodile is affecting the productivity of industry or commercial enterprises. I wonder how you measure something like that. Given the volatility of tourism as an industry and the many factors that go into what is a successful commercial enterprise, how would you see that working in reality?

Ms Morris: I think probably on multiple scales because, as I have said before, we have a \$3.3 billion industry; however, one example is the Cape Tribulation business that I mentioned before. The fact is that that business employed several people, and it provided a really important attraction that may have potentially allowed people to stay for an extra day up in the Cape Tribulation area. When you add all of that up, there is fairly clear economic modelling to show the ramifications on the economics side of things. I think there are multiple scales, from large-scale through to the smaller scale, but at the end of the day this is about creating a multi-nuanced plan. It is not horses for courses. It is not 'one size fits all'. At the end of the day, I think it is not going to be about common sense. We cannot regulate it because at the same time we cannot assume common sense. I think that managing those two aspects is going to be a challenge.

Ms BOLTON: Ms Deakin, with the spiritual connection to the crocodile—for example, with the crocodile farm—if in the future there was a contract with Indigenous rangers to cull a crocodile in a designated safe zone, would there be an issue or would it be fine culturally and in the spiritual connotation to cull those crocodiles?

Ms Deakin: It should be fine, yes, but what we would like to see is the traditional owners going within that area and doing all of this sort of stuff. One of the things that we as traditional owners would like to see is building a business from a croc farm and harvesting the eggs and doing safaris. As a traditional owner, I am not allowed to go onto another person's land unless I have their consent, and that is the respect that everyone has to have. I would not get someone else from outside to come in. We do not want the rangers to come in there, but we do have people there who know how to harvest wild eggs. People know each other so—

Ms BOLTON: There could be a problem?

Ms Deakin: We would like the community plus traditional owners to work together.

Ms BOLTON: If the council rang and told the Indigenous rangers to cull a crocodile from Trinity Beach, there could be a problem there?

Ms Deakin: Yes.

Ms BOLTON: Mr Brown, just to clarify, you said something about a crocodile being caught in a net?

Mr Brown: The swimming net. It was not caught in it; it was swimming around in it.

Ms BOLTON: Obviously that was a detractor.

Mr Brown: I was told second-hand that the woman swam beside the crocodile, realised there was a crocodile and of course she was on her skates then getting out of the water and they left the crocodile. No-one else went in. This was when the lifeguard arrived, apparently, and they let the net down and let the croc out. I have actually seen sea turtles in the net at Trinity Beach. Sea turtles' shells are seven or eight feet long plus their head and tail. How they get in I do not know, but to let them out they have to drop the net and the sea turtle swims out.

Ms BOLTON: Ms Morris, when I lived in the territory there were certain times of the year we could not swim because of the stingers, so obviously within tourism in North Queensland you have stingers, sharks and a variety of things. How do you manage those?

Ms Morris: It is about education. That is why, for example, all of our reef boats now offer lycra suits—to protect from the sun as well as anything out there, because there are no fences in the ocean. We very much recognise that that applies to anything—from sharks in Western Australia, through to the stingers that we have here, through to crocodiles. I think the great challenge with the crocs, though, is the unpredictability. We must acknowledge that our tourism industry has evolved and grown dramatically over the last 30 years and it is now a major economic driver for this region. It would be easy if you could say that there was a very simple solution. This is about a compromise and smart compromising. It is about collaborating across a range of different groups. It is not about alienating, whether it is the environment. We recognise the importance of crocodiles to tourism, but we also recognise the importance of the responsibility that we have, and I will say for TTNQ, to the tourism industry as a whole but also to our visitors. It is about managing the education, but it is about managing the management as well and being strategic in how we approach that in a proactive way.

CHAIR: We have reached the end of the time allocated for this panel. I thank all of our witnesses for joining us today. It was much appreciated by the committee.

BURNS, Mr Mick, Managing Director, Porosus Pty Ltd

FOURMILE, Mr Gudju Gudju, Private capacity

MATHEWS, Mr Brynn, Private capacity

MARKER, Ms Ingrid, Private capacity

SANTOSO-MILLER, Mr Naim, Law Graduate, Environmental Defenders Office of Northern Queensland Inc.

CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses for our final panel of the afternoon. I thank you all for waiting so patiently. We will afford you the same opportunity as all witnesses who have appeared. I will ask you to make a brief opening statement, if you wish, and then we will open it up to questions from members. Mr Burns, would you like to start?

Mr M Burns: Firstly, I apologise for not being available when the committee visited Darwin. I am a crocodile farmer based in Darwin. I represent the Crocodile Farmers Association of the Northern Territory as chair. I also am a member of the International Crocodilian Society. I thought I would start with a few facts—facts that are stating the obvious. There are more crocodiles. The crocodiles are bigger. There is more agricultural activity in remote areas which is close to where the crocodile habitat is. There is better access to these remote areas, with better roads and road improvement, recreational fishing and the like. Therefore, human-crocodile conflict is the single biggest risk—for not only the people who reside in the northern areas of Queensland but also the industry itself. Conservation outcomes will not be achieved if this issue is not addressed. That is very clear and it is a very well known fact. It is the best experience we have from managing crocodiles in the Northern Territory.

Crocodiles need to be identified. Problem crocodiles need to be identified and removed. It is important that we do this in a smart way. We need better data. We need to be very conscious, as one of the earlier presenters mentioned, about the indiscriminate killing of crocodiles. That is going to do Queensland damage on a range of fronts, and we have to be very careful that that is not one of the outcomes. Crocodile farming exists in Australia. It is an industry worth over \$100 million in the Northern Territory. It is an industry that will be a great contributor to the Queensland economy but, very importantly, it is an industry that will be a great contributor to the remote and regional areas of Queensland through farming activities.

My personal experience is with farming crocodiles in the remote community of Ramingining and Maningrida and we are exploring it now with Tiwi Islands. It is going to provide a great opportunity for capacity building, for economic returns and for employment outcomes. This is something we have to remain very mindful of—that all of this is only achieved if we have a good, sustainable industry in Australia. To maintain a good, sustainable industry in Australia, we have to maintain our Appendix II listing, which means we have to have a robust, healthy wild population in our regional and remote areas.

I have to make comment about one of the issues somebody raised earlier about the Australian entity issues in the bill. That would be a major error. International brands already own farms in Queensland. I think they own the two biggest farms in Queensland. The international involvement has helped underwrite the industry in Australia. There is absolutely no question about that. We are an international industry. We are probably under five per cent of the world market. We are probably under 15 per cent of the premium skin market. For this to be maintained, we have to continue to try to attract the support that only the big brands can offer.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Fourmile, would you like to make a statement?

Mr Fourmile: I have not put in any submissions, but I thank you for the opportunity to speak. My group, Yidinji, is my traditional country here. Our people have been looking after crocodiles for many, many years. Similar to previous speakers from the cape, our story goes back to us giving the crocodiles teeth before they had teeth, so that is some millions of years ago. We have a mountain over here that we call Bunda Gunyarra, which is the crocodile story and about the crocodile story. Our relationship with the crocodile has been here for thousands of years. I would like to make a statement that we do not have a crocodile problem. We have a lack of snake and goanna problem, and also Indigenous people in regard to taking of crocodile eggs.

I would like to bring up a couple of issues in regard to the industry. Australia is a signatory to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and saltwater crocodiles are critically endangered as listed in the CITES convention on trade in endangered species. Would it not destroy the existing Queensland industry just for the sake of a cull of these endangered species? That is something to keep in mind.

The other one is: has the government of the Commonwealth of Australia and the state of Queensland successfully included a formal agreement or treaty with the tribal nations whose lands and seas are home to these endangered animals? The other question is: has the sovereign Yidinji government been officially invited to these talks as well? I say that because these animals are protected under our law as well, not just under the Australian government law. Because of that, in regard to any harm coming to any of these animals, it actually takes us to go back to what CITES says in regards to endangered species.

We feel that we have not been able to manage our country and we do have the capacity and experience to manage our country. I heard previously that people are having issues with crocodiles up along the beaches, even up to Four Mile Beach that carries our family's name. The thing is with these beaches and the crocodile is we get people removing crocodile off country and bringing them to my country. I know that any crocodile that is a problem crocodile will be put down at Russell River, which is part of Yidinji country. Also, here in Admiralty Island, my dad spoke to the old fellow who was helping with the crocodile farm up at Edward River up at Pormpuraaw. They had talks because removal of crocodile from one place, because they have that spiritual connection to the crocodiles up there, to bring them down here to the Edward River crocodile farm that is sitting over the other side of Redbank, they need to have a discussion because that crocodile is taken from that country to our people's country here. We then have a custodial right over that crocodile. No-one has spoken to us about that at all. I think Ms Deakin actually spoke about that—that spiritual connection that one has with the crocodile.

When we are talking about the crocs that are currently in some of our major rivers, it is not because they choose to be there. They are hunted to be there. They are not silly animals. We have stories about it that when we actually go hunting we light fires in three different places to confuse the crocodile. The reason we do that is that crocodiles are smart. They are not silly. You do not go fishing and hunting at the same spot all the time. They already know that the tourists are going to be at Ellis Beach. They already know that the tourists are going to be at Four Mile Beach. They do not see you as tourists; they see you as food. They have the God-given right to be there and to eat you if you are going to go into their territory.

The thing is that people are not silly. We read signs that say you should not swim here because of crocodiles. If you go in and get bitten by a crocodile, is it the crocodile's fault? I do not think so. It is the human who cannot read the sign who has the problem. When we look at how we should manage the crocodile, it is not that we should cull it in a way that the current system is talking about, as shooting them and then culling them. The only people who gain from that are not Indigenous people. The industry gains from that. The tourism industry gains because they are happy—'We're happy. We get rich if more people come to our beaches and come to Australia.' The other industry is Versace and the shoe industry and people like Mr Hinch in regards to getting another crocodile shoe for next year.

The thing is that these people who are in those industries who make money out of it will gain. Our people will not gain. Yes, we can collect the eggs for you and manage it through that way. Then you would not have to cull the crocodiles. We have been left off country. Even though in Cairns here non-Indigenous people have been here for only 140 years, they have not managed this land properly. That is why we have a problem with crocodiles. We also have a reef problem, but I will not talk about that here. It is crocodiles that we are talking about.

If we are going to manage those crocodiles, we would like to be involved in how you manage it, not as a bystander watching on while other people, because of their industry, make money out of it. We are not making money out of this industry. The only people who seem to be wanting to make a big deal about it and say 'cull it' are in the industry that is going to gain economically.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Mathews: I want to take a bigger picture look at this. Essentially, we are all becoming more aware of the impact of us as a species on the planet with global warming, collapses of ecosystems in various other places and so forth. That means that, if we want to survive as a species and have the ecosystems and services that we rely on for fresh water, fresh air, good soil or our agricultural production, we need to start looking at what is sustainable and how to live within the environment and

the ecosystems that we have around us. This is what has to underlie any legislation that we are looking at. This is what is, I find, totally wrong with this bill. It is still pushing the old Judaeo-Christian, Garden of Eden, ruler of nature line, in effect. It is saying, 'We are the dominant species. We will do what we want with everything else.'

I support Gudju Gudju's point of view absolutely in that they have been living with crocodiles for tens of thousands of years. We whitefellas have turned up here only in the last 140 years and we have gone, 'My God, they have big teeth. They are dangerous. They are going to eat us.' They have been around on this planet for 10 times as long as humans. Of course, they see us as food—and only a fairly recent addition to their diet at that. The responsibility of managing the interactions between us and them is really on us, because we are the ones with the bigger brains, supposedly. Crocodiles are smart. They are cunning. They are very efficient hunters. To survive for 10 million years, they have to be. We need to be thinking in terms of how we manage our interactions with crocodiles.

The egg gathering is a good idea but, in some ways, that is not going to greatly create safe areas, because the survival rate from egg to a mature crocodile is pretty low anyway in the wild. You really have to come back to areas where you manage the crocodiles and areas where you manage the humans. In distinct areas like Trinity Inlet, for instance, there are boat ramps and there are places where people go fishing up and down and around the back of Edmonton, where crocodiles are just there all the time. You have to allow for that.

The figures for crocodile attacks in Queensland since 1975 are that there have been 38—12 of them fatal. Nine of those were people who were drunk or behaving recklessly after dark. How many people have slipped on the rocks at Josephine Falls or the other falls further up the cape and fallen on their heads and killed themselves? How many people have been killed by irukandjis in the same period? Just as another animal species for comparison, just in the last financial year there were 720 reported dog attacks in Cairns and 240 of those were on humans. Why are we talking about crocodiles? As the tourism person said, tourists have to be aware of jellyfish—the box jellyfish, the Portuguese man o'war, the irukandji—as well as the sharks, crocodiles and these other things in our habitat. If I were going on a cycling tour of Canada, I would certainly be worried about grizzly bears, because they have pulled people off bicycles and killed them and eaten them. You have to be aware of where you are, what the hazards are and how you manage them. People say, 'I remember when I was a kid I could do this.' When I was a kid, we could set up a cricket pitch in the middle of the street. It was not a problem. Cars slowed down and drove around you. I would not try that anywhere in Cairns nowadays.

We have to manage things to try to minimise our impact on the environment so that we have an environment left to support us and other things, too. I have just some other things that came up really early on—

CHAIR: I will get you to wind up because we have two more people to speak and questions.

Mr Mathews: One more statement. Crocodile reports: according to DES, the numbers are inflated by multiple reports of the same animal. There are more crocodile reports because there are more people on the riverbank or the beach. They may not be individual animals. They could be the same animal—10 times, 20 times, 50 times even. You cannot take those numbers as proof of increased crocodile numbers.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr Santoso-Miller: I represent the Environmental Defenders Office of North Queensland and I will be tailoring my evidence to the legal issues inherent in the bill as it currently stands. First and foremost, EDONQ recommends that the committee rejects the Safer Waterways Bill in its entirety. In particular, we make this recommendation on two main grounds. One is that the bill is in conflict with overarching federal and international law and current state laws, codes and plans regarding the management of crocodiles. The second is: where it is not in conflict, it merely re-establishes the system that we already have for managing them. I take my submission as already read?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Santoso-Miller: I want to expand on that to discuss the specific concerns that we have about the bill.

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Santoso-Miller: I note that our current crocodile management system exists as part of an integrated framework with international and federal law. That framework has certain requirements that includes that crocodiles are killed or otherwise managed in a humane way by people who are properly trained and authorised. The bill proposes to replace the current crocodile management

scheme by establishing a new management authority, the Queensland crocodile authority. The new authority generally aligns with the current framework but, where it does depart, the departures are significant.

We are particularly concerned about three aspects of the authority. The first is the removal of a distinction between authorised persons and prescribed officers, thus removing the requirement of certain qualifications for the greater powers of prescribed officers in the current scheme, which is inconsistent with our federal requirements. The second is the power of the director to authorise landowners to kill, harvest eggs from and otherwise manage crocodiles on their land and authorise landowners to allow other persons to kill crocodiles on their land. That is introducing trophy hunting in Queensland. Thirdly, the power of the director to do all things necessary or convenient to be done to perform the director's duties is a concerning broad, unbounded power.

There are also additional drafting issues that we would like to bring to the committee's attention. Firstly, the bill and the current conservation plan each have fairly similar definitions of dangerous crocodiles, termed 'rogue' crocodiles and 'problem' crocodiles respectively, but the definition in the bill removes any reference to the identity of the decision-maker who determines whether a crocodile is rogue or otherwise. The conservation plan provides for the discretion of the chief executive in this determination while the bill only supplies a direct definition. This is a cause of concern as it would potentially offer unfettered discretion to persons authorised to kill crocodiles to determine for themselves whether a crocodile is rogue.

Secondly, section 4 of the bill gives the bill priority over inconsistent legislation, meaning that crocodiles managed under the bill will not be afforded basic protection from cruelty under the Animal Care and Protection Act. Likewise, it is inconsistent with our Nature Conservation Act and the two plans for crocodile management made under that act, which further makes it inconsistent with our federal legislation and plans, as well as CITES, which has been mentioned earlier.

Thirdly, the bill requires persons authorised to deal with rogue crocodiles to have the skills and training to kill crocodiles. This requirement does not extend to authorised landowners and the persons they allow to kill crocodiles on their land. Without this requirement, untrained landowners and their paying guests may not be using best practice to humanely kill crocodiles. Combined with the overriding section 4 of the bill, paying trophy hunters may give them unrestrained authority to kill crocodiles in inhumane ways without being accountable under the Animal Care and Protection Act.

Finally, the purpose of this bill could be achieved already through the current crocodile management scheme. The bill is not necessary to achieve its own aim. Further, the current crocodile management scheme is fully integrated with international, federal and state law. Although the bill makes some provision for subordinate legislation to that effect, it makes little reference to the standards of practice or the qualifications and experience required by federal law. If we want to improve the way that we manage crocodiles in Queensland, we should improve the current integrated framework rather than create a new system.

In the introductory speech, in the explanatory notes, as well as here today, reference has been made to the crocodile management system of the Northern Territory. If it is of interest to the committee and time permitting, I would like to explain key aspects of the Northern Territory scheme that are not incorporated in the bill.

CHAIR: We are probably up against time, and it might assist you to know that we have obtained a briefing from the Northern Territory government representatives as to how their management schemes takes place. If you are willing to table what you would like to read out, we will accept it as a tabled document. Are you happy with that?

Mr Santoso-Miller: Yes.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted. Thank you very much for your contribution.

Ms Marker: Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk. Unfortunately, it was at very late notice for me. I am wearing two hats here today. One hat is as a campaigner for Friends of the Earth. We have a campaign for public safety regarding attacks from animals. The second hat I am wearing is as the manager of the Garners Beach Cassowary Hospital, which is where they bring all the crocodiles. Under that hat, my boss is in partnership with DES.

What I can advise you about DES's policy, outside of what you possibly already know, is that they offer a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week hotline for any incidence of crocodiles. The guys on the ground will often say that they have had 100 reports of a crocodile and they get there and it is the same crocodile. The incidence and reports of crocodiles is that everybody has a smart phone. On top of that, there is a very good, effective croc safe education campaign that they roll out right across the

state. Many people are now being upskilled. The Katter party ran a very effective scaremongering campaign leading into the last election where a lot of people became very alarmed and there was a great increase and spike in reports of crocodile numbers around the whole region. That was of concern to the department but not based on fact.

Whenever we get a large crocodile into the centre where I care for it, it has to go through a lot of due process with the traditional owners of the land it came from. It cannot be disposed of willy-nilly or go into any other holding facility after it goes through the centre. It has to be put into consultation with the traditional owners. If it were passed that the man on the land could shoot it, they could be shooting traditional animals. Currently, under the practice that they operate on, that is only animals over a certain size. For any animal smaller than that, they do not necessarily have to go through that consultation process.

I wanted to also repeat the number of people who are on our beaches and who are swimming off our beaches. For nearly 30 years I ran a sea kayaking company in Hinchinbrook. I saw many crocodiles. Many people see crocodiles all the time. As Brynn said, since 1975, across the entire state, there have been 38 attacks by crocodiles on people and only 12 fatal. How many reports of crocodiles do we get on a daily basis? My campaign is public safety. There have been 720 dog attacks in the Cairns region alone in the last 12 months. The age demographic of those being attacked by a dog is under four years old. The people being attacked by crocodiles are locals. They are men aged between the ages of 24 and 45. It is at night. Alcohol may be involved. There were only two other people and one was, unfortunately, a woman intoxicated and another one was a dementia patient. The statistics are not adding up.

There is no danger from crocodiles; it is fear of the sighting of crocodiles that is the biggest concern. The biggest danger to the public, which nobody is addressing and nobody is paying any attention to, is roaming and stray dogs, domesticated dogs and dogs purpose bred and taught to hunt and kill that are roaming. There has been an 800 per cent increase in roaming dogs across the whole region, so it is public safety.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Ingrid. We will now move on to questions. I have a question, which I will open up to all panel members, about how this bill would work in practice. We have heard from experts that if you relocate crocodiles, given the homing instinct that they have, often they will return to the place they came from originally. Obviously, in terms of moving crocodiles to crocodile farms, there are capacity constraints at the farms and there are also commercial considerations that the farmers have. This bill will allow for a lot more croc culling than could currently take place lawfully here in Queensland, because private landowners would have that ability and would also be able to contract outside parties, which conjures up visions of Crocodile Dundee wannabes running around Cairns, Far North Queensland, North Queensland and Central Queensland—wherever it is that people think there may or may not be crocodiles that are a threat to humans. What do panel members think about that? Do you think that would be positive thing?

Mr M Burns: Brynn mentioned earlier about his bike-riding escapades through Canada and that the threat of grizzly bear attacks is evident, but it has to be managed. I think the threat of crocodile attacks has to be managed. The concept of having people licensed and authorised to kill crocs without the proper research and data would not be a good one.

Mr Fourmile: I have a problem with people removing crocodiles off their country and bringing them down here without asking permission. That is one thing. In regards to crocodile management, I think you can do it by collecting the eggs. If rogue crocodiles are a problem, there needs to be something sought to do that. We have to keep in mind that if we remove rogue crocs out of the waterways we will end up with more sharks and we will have a shark problem. Crocodiles keep shark numbers down. You are going to have bull sharks coming up into the fresh water.

In the ecosystem, sharks and crocodiles are there for a reason. If we are going to be the apex predator in the area by shooting these animals, we have to respect them as well. The numbers may be up only because the management of them previously has not been set in place. There needs to be a lot more talking with traditional owners about the management of crocodiles, rather than people who are there to gain an economic benefit, and they will say that. The people who are there to gain an economic benefit out of the culling of crocodiles seem to gain a bigger and larger voice than people who are wanting to properly sustain and manage the crocodile issue.

CHAIR: Brynn, do you have anything on that point?

Mr Mathews: Yes. I have an anecdote about the whole concept of managing crocodiles and how challenging it can be. At the crocodile farm on the other side of the inlet, I have a friend who runs a tour company. That was one of the sites he visited regularly. There was a crocodile over there on

the farm and every now and again it would break out. It would just grab the cyclone fence, deathroll it, tear a hole in it and go out chasing girls in the wild in the inlet. He was there one day with a busload of tourists and it was coming back to break back into the farm, because the food is easy pickings. We talk about managing those things, but we are just playing around the edges. All we can manage is the human interaction. We can make humans manage the risk of exposure to them. Our best approach is through education and information. You can put up a sign, but the croc does not read the sign. It is ridiculous, the whole concept of managing an animal like that that has been on the planet for 10 times as long as us.

Mr Santoso-Miller: Firstly, if we are going to implement a new crocodile management system, it has to be informed by research to ensure that it is in fact achieving its aim. At the moment, we do not have that level of research available to us. Secondly, going to your point about having Crocodile Dundee wannabes running around outback Queensland and Far North Queensland, it is very difficult to ensure that we meet our legal obligations internationally and locally that crocodiles are being managed in a humane manner when we are giving authority to people in those areas where it is difficult to actually enforce and ensure that the actions that they are taking are appropriate.

Ms Marker: Once again, if you refer back to Four Mile Beach, where everybody goes swimming, it is next to a mangrove. There is more chance of being attacked by a dog than a crocodile, but if there are crocodiles in the ecosystem and they are saying that it is safe waterways, it gives the public a false and deluded sense of safety. People are going to go, 'Oh, there's no more crocs here,' and go swimming. You are never going to keep it croc safe.

From talking to all the staff on the ground, which I do because I live onsite in the ranger station and I talk to them on a daily basis, they will tell you that it is not the big fellow sitting on the bank that is the worry; it is the 10 other little fellows that are all hiding and fighting to take over and dominate that site and are fast, feisty and aggressive. The big guy sitting on the bank does not have anything to prove, much like a large dog. They do not eat a lot. They are not eating people. They scare people because they smile at them and show them their teeth. It is the fear of crocodiles; it is not the actual event of a crocodile attack.

Can I add one more thing? I want to repeat: DES operates 24/7. Local councils operate Monday to Friday, 9 am to 4 pm on dog threats. People are walking along the beach and kids are playing on the beach on weekends and after hours, and this is not being addressed. I know I am polluting the waters here by introducing these two things, but the bill is about public safety.

CHAIR: It is a valid issue, but it is a bit separate.

Mr COSTIGAN: Particularly for the Cairns Regional Council, Mr Chairman.

Mr KRAUSE: Mr Burns, you made two points. One was about getting better data, and I want to ask what you mean by that. Also, you made a statement to the effect that conservation will not be achieved unless you deal with this issue. Could you elaborate on both points?

Mr M Burns: The data that I referred to, as a couple of the panel members have mentioned, is that one croc seen 50 times can somewhat constitute a crocodile problem when it is not evident that there is a crocodile problem. We need proper, well-researched, consistent data, year on year, such that better informed decisions can be made about the reality of an issue. The mobile phones and the advancement in technology mean that we can see the same crocodile from different angles and it can appear different in many senses. It is about collating the right data, and data around numbers was what I was referring to.

Conservation outcomes will only ultimately be achieved if—the incentive driven model that the Northern Territory has developed and put in place is very well respected internationally. The number of crocodiles up there is back to carrying capacity. The conservation model is probably one of the most successful for any species anywhere in the world in the past 50 years. We have done that and we have done that by also managing the risk, and human-crocodile conflicts are now the single biggest risk around crocodile management going forward. There have been issues where people have been taken in remote locations and there has been a large number of crocodiles culled in response.

CHAIR: Member for Whitsunday, do you have any questions?

Mr COSTIGAN: Not at this point, Mr Chair.

Ms BOLTON: Ingrid, you made reference to dogs. In that same period where there were deaths from crocodile attacks in the 1970s, how many deaths were there from dogs?

Ms Marker: I am sorry, I do not have the statistics on that. I only know that last year there were 720 dog attacks.

Ms BOLTON: There are no statistics on deaths from dogs?

Ms Marker: I do not have that, sorry.

Ms BOLTON: You said that DES is on hand 24/7, yet one of the common issues we have heard is the response time it takes to actually deal with a report about a crocodile.

Ms Marker: I cannot speak in depth about that. I can say that the hotline is observed. They do an incident report, which will then go to the director. That is my understanding. A lot of these things are just sightings, so they have sighted a crocodile but it does not mean that it is dangerous. If it is an imminent threat to public safety, they do respond and call out their officers, who are available 24/7. They get lots of reports where it is just vocalisation, a sighting, eye shine or a slide on the bank. They do not call their officers if a couple of drunk guys make a report at three o'clock in the morning: 'I saw a crocodile slide.' They do not get their officers to respond, much like council would not.

Ms BOLTON: Gudju Gudju, twice you said that the traditional owners would properly manage crocodiles. Could you please explain how that management would be, especially in areas where we probably need designated safe zones? How would you do that?

Mr Fourmile: Currently, I suppose it is about whether it has been seen. Sightings in certain areas could be one and the same croc, but because people do not know the identification of a croc they are saying that they have seen 10 crocs up and down the coast, but it could be the same croc just going for a swim; it may be a young one that wants to take over territory.

In regards to safer places, people are removing crocs—what they deem to be a rogue croc or a large croc—and transporting them to a location but no-one manages the croc once it has been relocated. The issue is that it is kept at a location, and mostly it is down the Russell River or here, depending on the size of the croc, around the Smiths Creek area. They do have a homing instinct; they will go back.

By saying that a beach is safe, the management that we would look at is: if there are crocs in an area, is that area stocked with food? What are the food resources in that particular area? Once a croc has filled its stomach, it will not eat again for another six or sometimes 12 months, so you will not see it around at all. If you are looking at management, you would have to look at the wholesale management of what people are doing in that area. You have to manage people who are catching fish. Are they cleaning the fish on the beach and leaving the carcasses or the remains of the fish that they took in that particular area which will attract a croc or other animals, such as sharks? If you put up a sign to say 'This beach is safe', I cannot—just as much as the Queensland government cannot—say that this is a safe beach. On managing it properly, as was said previously by the speaker from the cape, we could manage it through egg control and egg management.

Ms BOLTON: I think he also said 'and culling'.

Mr Fourmile: Yes, they did say culling, but I am not talking about culling.

Ms BOLTON: We have had two very different opinions on that.

Mr Fourmile: That is fine. We have a whole group of non-Indigenous people here with a number of different positions. You cannot expect us, as Indigenous people, to have the same opinion. If you are looking for that, you are not going to get it. The thing is that management and control are through egg management. Previously when I spoke, I said that we do not have a crocodile problem. We have a problem with the lack of snakes and goannas. Why? Because they kept their population down. Because we are building on their habitat, we have chased the snakes and goannas away from where they would normally hunt and feed.

CHAIR: Thank you. The time for the hearing has expired. Thank you very much to the witnesses who participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter. A transcript of these proceedings will be forwarded to each witness and will also be made available on the committee's parliamentary web page.

Finally, I point out that the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee is holding a public hearing in this room at 3 pm for its inquiry into wage theft in Queensland. The chair of the committee, Leanne Linard, is here. If anyone has a particular interest in that issue or wishes to be heard at three o'clock, please see Leanne. Thank you all for joining us this afternoon.

The committee adjourned at 1.59 pm.