




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2017

SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

Introduction

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (11.34 am): I present a bill for an act to establish the Queensland Crocodile Authority and for related matters. I table the bill and the explanatory notes. I nominate the Agriculture and Environment Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Safer Waterways Bill 2017 [\[796\]](#).

Tabled paper: Safer Waterways Bill 2017, explanatory notes [\[797\]](#).

The Safer Waterways Bill 2017 has multiple policy objectives. The bill places greater value on human life than on the lives of crocodiles and seeks to responsibly reduce the risk of crocodile attacks as much as possible. It aims to eliminate from our waterways all crocodiles that pose a threat to human life while protecting crocodiles from becoming endangered as a species.

The policy of prioritising human life over the lives of crocodiles came about in response to calls from North Queenslanders for action in response to an increased number of crocodile attacks. Communities across North Queensland are consistently reporting significant increases in crocodile numbers. Waterways which people previously regularly swam in are now infested with crocodiles. From 1985 to 2015 the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection recorded 25 crocodile attacks in Queensland, seven of them fatal. In the past 12 months there have been three attacks, two of them fatal. This does not include attacks on stock or other animals.

An effective crocodile management strategy is urgently required to save lives. The increase in crocodile numbers not only endangers human lives; it also adversely and significantly affects the way North Queenslanders live. There are life-saving, rowing and skiing clubs closing their doors because crocodiles are driving their members away.

The Safer Waterways Bill 2017 will ensure that crocodiles are removed by an authorised person if they are a threat to humans. This removal may involve killing or relocating the crocodile to an authorised farm. It would involve the removal of crocodiles from urban or public areas commonly used by people for recreation. If managed responsibly, crocodiles have the potential to be a great asset for Queensland rather than just a danger to people.

As well as protecting human lives, the Safer Waterways Bill 2017 aims to create a significant and sustainable crocodile industry in Queensland through controlled egg harvesting. The Northern Territory currently has a successful egg harvesting program. Evidence suggests that egg harvesting can help sustain crocodile populations rather than diminish them and creates a huge economic opportunity which is currently untapped in Queensland.

Significantly, the Safer Waterways Bill 2017 gives power to landowners to apply to manage crocodiles on their land. Indigenous landowners have a connection with and understanding of the land and should be empowered to manage that land as they see fit. This bill allows them to apply to do that

in relation to crocodiles. Non-Indigenous private landowners can apply for the same rights. As well as empowering landowners, it places a value on crocodiles and creates an unprecedented economic opportunity for landowners.

Authorised landowners will be empowered with regard to all aspects of crocodile management on their property. If a crocodile is on their property they may choose whether to kill it, have it relocated to a farm or let it remain on their property. If they choose for it to be euthanased they may do this themselves or accept payment from another person who wishes to kill the crocodile. By placing value on crocodiles, landowners are unlikely to simply kill all the crocodiles on their land unless this is necessary for them to safely live and operate on that land. The landowner will likely see the value in crocodile eggs and the income that can be generated for landowners.

If there are crocodile eggs on their land, they can choose to leave the eggs, harvest the eggs and sell them or have someone else pay to come on their land and harvest them. 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 of crocodiles in Queensland. It is hoped that any time a crocodile is euthanased, whether it be on private property or on state land, the crocodile's carcass is fully utilised by, for example, selling teeth, meat or skins or by producing blood and bone from unsaleable parts of the carcass.

The bill achieves the policy objectives outlined above by creating a Queensland Crocodile Authority. Under the bill, the Queensland Crocodile Authority would be required to remove all rogue crocodiles by killing them or moving them to an approved crocodile farm. Rogue crocodiles are defined as crocodiles posing a threat to human safety and include crocodiles in urban areas or waterways commonly used by people for recreation. The bill legalises egg harvesting for permit holders and allows people to pay to hunt crocodiles on private land with the landowner's consent if the landowner has the Queensland Crocodile Authority's authorisation to so manage the land. The bill ensures that the Queensland Crocodile Authority is based in Cairns and it is expected that all staff would live in that area rather than fly-in fly-out. The bill also creates a board to provide recommendations to the Queensland Crocodile Authority. The board is to be made up of people with relevant experience in crocodile management to ensure that Queensland is getting the best possible advice on managing crocodile populations and creating a crocodile industry that will benefit the state and its landowners for many years to come.

Some views were expressed during consultation that no crocodiles should be killed or relocated. This does not align with the policy objectives of keeping people safe from crocs. Other views were expressed that the policy objective of keeping people safe from crocodiles could be achieved by relocating any problem crocodile to other locations. Consultation with experts suggests that crocodiles may become more dangerous once they have been relocated. Therefore, crocodiles should only be relocated to farms or properly managed reserves. The consultation also reveals that because there are so many crocs that require removal to keep people safe it is very unlikely that there would be the desire from existing crocodile farms to house all those crocs. Based on this extensive consultation, it has become clear that a combination of killing and relocation to farms is the best way to achieve the policy objectives.

The costs associated with implementing the bill relate to the establishment and operation of the Queensland Crocodile Authority. These costs will be met within the existing department's allocation. The bill has been drafted with regard to the fundamental legislative principles as defined in section 4 of the Legislative Standards Act 1992 and is consistent with fundamental legislative principles.

There has been extensive consultation. Significant consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this bill, including detailed engagement with affected communities through public forums and private engagement. Other major stakeholder groups consulted include Indigenous groups, local government, crocodile experts, professional fishing communities and other community groups, and federal members of parliament. The bill creates a new authority within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to enable several activities for the management of crocodiles in Queensland waterways. State based crocodile management frameworks exist in other states and territories and include some of the activities contemplated in this bill. There may be some areas of the bill that may encroach on the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. However, consultation with the relevant Commonwealth government ministers has indicated a willingness to consider mechanisms that will ensure no conflict between this bill and the Commonwealth act exists.

With regard to the extensive consultation that we have undertaken, we visited the communities of Innisfail, Port Douglas and Mareeba. Robbie Katter has consulted with communities and Indigenous groups in Burketown and Normanton. There were also public consultations in Cairns and with local councils. There is great concern with regard to the explosion of crocodile numbers. This is also

impacting on our international tourist market because when tourists come here all they see are croc-warning signs, they hear of croc attacks and if they swim in our waterways they could possibly be taken by a croc.

We have introduced this legislation into this House because people are sick and tired of hearing about more studies or more counts. People want action. I will read some of the concerns of residents who attended a public meeting in Innisfail. One person lives at Kurrimine Beach and has spent 15 years spearfishing. They said that there used to be plenty of dugongs and turtles but that, however, in the last 10 years they have been slowly disappearing. They believe that this is from the explosion in the numbers of crocodiles. They said—

We used to enjoy our waterways, sit by the water, walk along the waters edge—now we cannot do that.

Tourists who visit here don't understand the dangers and treat it like an adventure. They take no notice of signs or information pamphlets.

The State Government has a duty of care to the people in the region and listen to what we are saying. They don't seem to want to know about North Queensland and despite deaths, close calls and the erosion of our way of life do nothing. Crocs are now eating us ... and it is past time for action.

Another person travelled from Gordonvale for the meeting. They said—

The croc problem is likened to a full grown lion walking down the streets of Jburg. They don't belong there and the same as the crocs. They are in areas they never were in the past.

They have lost the fear of man and we cannot guarantee our kids safety.

Kids in Gordonvale used to enjoy swimming. Now they can't learn to swim and won't swim in local waterways.

Crocodiles are also now on private farms which is unacceptable.

We used to scare crocs by firing buckshots at them but we would be arrested if we were to do that now. We need to make them frightened of humans again.

One canefarmer said that in the off-season he used to hunt crocs through the gulf many years ago. He has seen and knows of 16-foot crocs in Cooper Creek where kids swim and believes that it is only a matter of time before children are taken. They said—

There were no attacks for 60 years when we used to shoot crocs. Now there is a spate of attacks because numbers have got out of control.

Never used to hear of attacks in the rivers with freshwater crocs, however now salties have invaded the waterways. They are aggressive, territorial and nobody would or should swim in these waterways now.

In places like Lake Placid kids would swim out to the pontoon and do summersaults. Now they would not even make it to the pontoon. In places like the Johnstone River people enjoyed skiing. You are lucky to be alive if you go and ski now. I could read a lot more in terms of what people have had to say, and that is why we have introduced this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—KAP) (11.47 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to the Agriculture and Environment Committee

Mr SPEAKER: Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee.