




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HILL

Record of Proceedings, 21 March 2018

SAFE WATERWAYS BILL

Introduction

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (12.31 pm): 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 State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Safer Waterways Bill 2018 [\[392\]](#).

Tabled paper: Safer Waterways Bill 2018, explanatory notes [\[393\]](#).

The Safer Waterways Bill 2018 has multiple policy objectives. The bill places greater value on human life than the lives of crocodiles and seeks to responsibly reduce the risk of crocodile attacks. It aims to eliminate all crocodiles that pose a threat to human life from our waterways, while maintaining an appropriate level of protection to prevent crocodiles from becoming an endangered species.

The policy of prioritising human life over the lives of crocodiles is a response to community outrage at the lack of action taken to protect North Queenslanders from the risk crocodiles pose to visitors and residents. Communities across North Queensland are constantly reporting significant increases in crocodile numbers. Once popular waterways 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 last three years there have been nine attacks, three of them fatal. This means a third of all attacks and nearly half of all deaths over the past 33 years have occurred in the past three years, and this does not include attacks on stock or domestic animals.

An effective crocodile management strategy requires a balanced approach. The current strategy is biased towards protecting the lives of crocodiles against human life. The increase of crocodile numbers in populated areas not only endangers human lives but also adversely and significantly affects the way North Queenslanders live. In the *Cairns Post* recently, an article highlighted how lifesaving, rowing and skiing clubs are struggling because crocodiles are driving their members away. According to the article, the great Australian tradition of children learning how to become a lifesaver is under threat in the north because parents are afraid for their children. Clubs have reported a 13 per cent fall in registrations among five- to 13-year-olds. Nearly 40 per cent of parents said they had taken their children out of the junior lifesaving program because of concerns about crocodiles.

The Safer Waterways Bill 2018 provides a practical, balanced solution which will remove crocodiles from urban or public areas commonly used by people for recreation. This removal may involve killing or relocating the crocodile to an authorised farm, which is a policy position similar to the Northern Territory crocodile management strategy. 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 2018 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. 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 with and understanding of the land and should be empowered to manage that land as they see fit. Non-Indigenous private landowners can apply for the same rights.

As well as empowering landowners, this bill places a value on crocodiles and creates an unprecedented economic opportunity for landowners. Authorised landowners will be given authority 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 killed, 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 from a healthy crocodile population on their property. 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 their ongoing management in Queensland. It is hoped that any time a crocodile is killed, 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 producing blood and bone from unsaleable parts of the carcass.

The bill achieves the policy objective 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 life 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 the area rather than fly in and 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.

There has been extensive consultation undertaken in the preparation of this bill, including detailed engagement with affected communities through public forums and private engagement. Other major stakeholders consulted include Indigenous groups, local government, crocodile experts, professional fishing communities, federal members of parliament and other community groups.

The bill creates a new authority within the Department of Environment and Science 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. It is also to be noted that other jurisdictions allow for the killing of crocodiles. 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 crocodiles. 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 be relocated to farms or properly managed reserves. The consultation also reveals that because there are so many crocodiles that require removal to keep people

safe, it is very unlikely that there would be a desire from existing crocodile farms to house all those crocodiles. Based on this extensive consultation it has become clear that the combination of killing and relocating to farms is the best way to achieve the policy objectives. The costs associated with implementing the bill relate to the establishment of the 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. With regard to the extensive consultation that we have undertaken, we visited the communities of Innisfail, Port Douglas and Mareeba. The member for Mount Isa has consulted with communities and Indigenous groups in Burketown and Normanton. There were also public consultations in Cairns and with local councils. There was great concern expressed about the explosion of crocodile numbers. Concerns were raised about the impact on our international tourism market. When tourists are confronted by popular beach closures, crocodile warning signs and hear of crocodile attacks, it is no wonder they do not want to come back.

I grew up in North Queensland and swam in our beautiful inland lakes and rivers and on our beaches. Not once did I ever see a crocodile sign. Fear of crocodiles never entered my head nor that of my parents because crocodiles were not in the popular swimming holes and waterways. Under the current management policy the solution is to put up a warning sign, monitor their behaviour and distribute pamphlets warning locals and tourists to be crocodile wise.

We have introduced this bill to the House because people in North Queensland are sick and tired of ignorance of the issue, hearing about more studies and being told what they already know about crocodile numbers. The communities want action and they want action now. This bill deals with the problem. It approaches the challenges by protecting human life. Most importantly, the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 fulfils our duty of care to the communities 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 communities. I commend this bill to the House.

First Reading

Mr KNUTH (Hill—KAP) (12.41 pm): 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 State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! In accordance with standing order 131 the bill is now referred to the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee.