




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.40 pm): I rise to oppose the Safer Waterways Bill as introduced by the member for Hill. They got it wrong from the get-go by calling it 'safer waterways'. Crikey! You could not get this bill to go anywhere near being safe. Everyone knows that it is the KAP's prime intent to allow people—almost anyone—to go out, get a gun and shoot up our waterways.

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members. You have had your opportunity. Let the member for Thuringowa have his.

Mr HARPER: This bill is ill informed, the explanatory notes are woeful, it is dangerous and it does not make our waterways safe—far from it. This bill would put more people at risk if it were ever to see the light of day.

An opposition member: What's your solution then?

Mr HARPER: We have a plan for removing crocs. How about the member listens? As a young man growing up in North Queensland and as a family man I have spent many weekends and holidays fishing and crabbing throughout North Queensland. Mind you, I do not think I have wet a line since I started this job. I have fond memories of enjoying these activities in the waterways of the Haughton, Bohle and Hull rivers, Sleeper Log and Crystal creeks or in the Hinchinbrook Channel itself. There is the famous Rod Point at the entrance to the Ross River, but that is a story for another day. Regardless of the location of these trips, I have known, seen and been up close with crocs that generally are on the banks catching some sun. I have always known that I am in their territory, and I have a very healthy respect for that fact.

This bill seeks to establish the Queensland crocodile authority to assume responsibility for crocodile management in Queensland. It also seeks to allow members of the public to kill crocodiles, establish an egg-harvesting industry in Queensland and create crocodile reserves. The bill's proposals have the potential to present real and serious risk to public safety by allowing members of the public to kill crocodiles and by requiring the staff of the Queensland crocodile authority to work in Cairns. This arrangement will compromise wildlife officers' capacity to respond to crocodile sightings relative to the current staffing distributed across crocodile country in Queensland.

On egg harvesting, Queensland's new estuarine crocodile egg-harvesting laws have been written to ensure the practice is ecologically sustainable. Eight years of research was conducted before the Queensland government changed the laws to allow croc egg harvesting. This program allows 5,000 eggs to be harvested annually and the DES has the ability to amend or cancel permits if any adverse impacts on local populations are identified. The department will monitor crocodile numbers to ensure harvesting does not have a detrimental impact on the local population.

The LNP and the Katter party do want to return Queensland to the dark old days when crocs were executed and hunted to near extinction. The LNP's policy announcement was nothing more than a political stunt with no scientific basis that puts at risk Queensland's entire croc farming industry. The

LNP's 'remove all crocs by any means necessary' in three days that they were talking about will not make the public safer. It will only give the public a false sense of safety, leading to complacency and increased risk of attacks. The proposal for widespread introduction of egg harvesting in the complete absence of any supporting scientific information smacks of populism rather than well-considered policy.

I attribute some of the following to Townsville submitter Mr Dan Bamblett, or 'Ranger Dan' as he is more fondly referred to in our community. He has worked in Billabong Sanctuary for many years and has been heavily involved in croc egg harvesting and nurturing and feeding crocs. He owns his own business called Hands on Wildlife and has an absolute in-depth knowledge of all things croc related—far more than the supposed croc experts we have in this place. He has worked with crocs for over 20 years both here and in the US. I know this well because he is my brother-in-law and I have a healthy respect for what he does.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HARPER: I have to tell the honourable member that he should listen and learn because, just like the KAP, he continues to cherrypick pieces of the facts and deliver them in a deliberately misleading manner. World renowned crocodile researchers Dr Grahame Webb and Charlie Manolis, whom I also know from Kelso, researched saltwater crocodile survival rates and maintain that the rate of survival from egg to hatching is 25 per cent and from egg to mature crocodile is much less than one per cent. While a female saltwater croc can produce up to 70 eggs in one clutch, it will take about 150 to 160 eggs to produce one adult animal. This hardly supports the notion that crocodile numbers are exploding. They simply cannot explode. I point that out for the member for Burdekin.

Crocodile is a keystone species; every stage of the crocodile life cycle has an impact on the surrounding ecosystem. Eggs and hatchlings are food for goannas; water rats; snakes; fish, including barramundi and mangrove jack; crabs; and birds. Most importantly, large crocodiles are one of the major predators of medium sized crocodiles, which is a natural protection against overpopulation. A significant drop in croc numbers will have a negative ecological effect that will cascade right through to animals that we depend on commercially and recreationally such as barramundi, mangrove jack, mud crab and many other sought after species. Healthy croc numbers produce healthy fishing environments. The economic value of recreational fishing and fishing tourism in North Queensland would be worth many, many times any financial gains to be made from harvesting wild crocodiles. Mr Bamblett stated during the hearing in Townsville—

I believe the proposed Safer Waterways Bill is not going to make our waterways safer: I think it is going to make a crocodile attack more likely.

If the public believes that even more crocodiles are being removed from the environment they will begin to engage in high-risk activity, entering croc habitat more frequently and that will create a situation where an attack is more likely to occur. The primary focus of any crocodile management plan in legislation must involve education.

I want to talk about a special community event held last weekend at Cardwell.

Mr Dametto: Ha, ha!

Mr HARPER: The member for Hinchinbrook laughs now, but a large number of people in Cardwell turned out to farewell Bismarck, a large male salty that was illegally killed by a coward with a gun. He is estimated to have been 80 to 100 years old. That crocodile was considered to be an icon for the region and was seen as a free-range mascot that never caused anyone any grief, except the odd turtle. Tourists would stop in Cardwell, in the member's electorate, and walk out to the jetty to try to get a glimpse of this animal. The people who turned up to farewell him were from all backgrounds: local teachers, tradies, business owners and traditional owners. His killing has even angered local fishing charter operators who understand how important animals like Bismarck are to the long-term success of their business. Locals know the intent of the Katter private member's bill and do not support it. Locals in Cardwell did not even expect the member for Hinchinbrook to turn up to that event. I do not think they really wanted him there.

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr HARPER: They had a laugh because the light banter was along the lines of, 'How do we stop the local member for Hinchinbrook turning up?', much like setting a trap—

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr HARPER: Much like the trapping of a croc, how could they trap the local member to keep him away? The light banter was, 'We will put a couple of mirrors at the entrance to Cardwell and that will pull him up for a couple of hours.'

The continued spruiking of a croc cull by ill-informed politicians is likely to encourage the illegal killing of large crocodiles like we have seen in Cardwell. The bill presents a number of unacceptable conflicts with other legislation. They include the compliance role of the Queensland crocodile authority, animal welfare issues and weapons licensing issues.

In conclusion, more people have been envenomated by Irukandji and snake envenomation. Maybe the next Katter bill will be to propose a crack team to go out there and take out the Irukandji and snakes. I do not support this bill. It is absolute garbage and it puts more people at risk. The KAP need to learn from people involved in the industry. I absolutely oppose the bill.