




Speech By  
**Cynthia Lui**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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### **SAFER WATERWAYS BILL**

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (6.30 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 put forward by the member for Hill. The bill was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 21 March 2018 and referred to the committee on 22 March 2018. The bill was first introduced on 25 May 2017 and referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee with a report due to be tabled by 27 November 2017. However, the 2017 bill lapsed when the 55th Parliament was dissolved on 29 October 2017. The Safer Waterways Bill was reintroduced in 2018 and referred to the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Minister for Environment, the Hon. Leeanne Enoch, for all of her hard work, as well as the committee secretary and assistant secretary and the committee chair and members.

During the committee process, significant consultation was undertaken in preparation of the bill, including detailed engagement with affected communities through public forums and private engagement in which stakeholders were invited to make submissions. In total, the committee received 34 submissions from Indigenous groups, local government, crocodile experts, the professional fishing community and other community groups and federal members of parliament. I would like to acknowledge the many stakeholders and individuals for their valuable contribution to the consultation process. What was most interesting about the feedback received from community stakeholders was that the majority of submitters did not fully support the culling of crocodiles—not to mention having untrained people killing crocodiles which would pose a real, serious and completely unacceptable risk to the public safety.

There are two fundamental but inherently contradictory responsibilities relating to crocodiles—an obligation to conserve them and an obligation to keep people safe from them. The obligation to protect people from harm has to accommodate and accept the realisation that it is neither practical nor economically feasible to ensure complete safety from crocodiles in and around the natural waters of Northern Queensland. Risks can be minimised but they cannot be completely eliminated.

The committee handed down its report to the Legislative Assembly on 21 September 2018 and recommended that the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 not be passed, and it is clear to see why. The issue surrounding crocodile management in Queensland is of huge public interest in relation to people and community safety. However, the content of this bill highlights major loopholes in how this bill would actually uphold public safety first and foremost. This bill talks about placing a greater value on human life than that of crocodiles and seeks to responsibly reduce the risk of a crocodile attack as much as possible by eliminating all crocodiles that pose a threat to human lives, 'while protecting crocodiles from becoming endangered as a species'.

Firstly, crocodiles in their natural environment are always going to be a threat to human life and eliminating crocodiles will not reduce the risk of harm on human life. This bill proposes protecting crocodiles from becoming an endangered species but fails to recognise that eliminating crocodiles will not protect them from becoming endangered. This bill poses a huge threat to crocodile numbers by elimination, but what is most concerning is the risk to public safety by giving the public a false sense of safety leading to complacency and an increased risk of attack.

The bill further seeks to establish a statutory authority—the Queensland crocodile authority—to assume responsibility for crocodile management, to establish an egg-harvesting industry, to create crocodile reserves and to allow members of the public to kill crocodiles. It is ironic that authorities for managing crocodiles in this bill would be linked to those under the current Nature Conservation Act 1992, which already provides a robust framework for removing problem crocodiles and for egg harvesting.

Again, this bill proposes that crocodiles be removed by an authorised person if they are a threat to humans and this removal may involve killing or relocating the crocodile to an authorised farm. It should be noted that the Department of Environment and Science investigates all crocodile reports and seeks to remove any animal assessed as being a problem crocodile. Where crocodiles pose a threat to human safety, they are targeted for removal under the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan.

This bill presents a number of unacceptable conflicts with other legislation. These include the compliance role of the Queensland crocodile authority, animal welfare issues and weapons licensing issues. This bill jeopardises the Commonwealth's approval of Queensland's Wildlife Trade Management Plan as the Australian government must be satisfied that the take of the species is not detrimental to its conservation and is humane.

The Cook electorate is vast, with 290,000 square kilometres of land. I have the coastlines of eastern and western Cape York to the very tip of Queensland and take in the Torres Strait Islands, with Saibai Island being just four kilometres shy of the PNG border—not to mention the intricate network of rivers and creeks throughout the electorate. When we have a bill that proposes safer waterways, what does this really mean to my communities? Nothing. This bill fails to recognise the vastness of an area such as Cook, let alone North Queensland, and therefore does not fully guarantee safer waterways and public safety. It does not matter how many crocodiles are removed. No waterway in crocodile country can ever be considered to be crocodile free. I do not support this bill.