




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2019

SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.24 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Safer Waterways Bill 2018. As all regional Queenslanders know, crocs are a problem at times but, as members of this House, we must go further than just say there is a problem. It is our job to identify appropriate solutions. Whilst the Safer Waterways Bill contains a number of elements that I agree with, there are other elements that I oppose. It would be incorrect to say there are not already provisions that go some of the way toward dealing with the issue of rogue crocodiles. What is letting Queenslanders down is the management, or should that be mismanagement, of the government's crocodile management policies.

It is important to clarify a few issues with regard to this bill and the issues surrounding the challenge of crocodile management. No-one I have spoken to wants to see broadscale culling of crocodiles. Regional Queenslanders know that crocodiles are an important part of our environment and our ecosystem. The issue is not crocodiles in general; the issue is problem crocodiles. A problem crocodile is an animal that poses a danger to people—and that danger is real.

The proposed bill makes no mention of a time frame to address a problem crocodile. Effectively, we could find ourselves in the situation that we find ourselves in now—waiting 90 days for the removal of a problem croc. Not only is this disrespectful to those threatened by the crocodiles; it highlights that the current government puts crocodiles and not the safety of people first. The question that must be asked is: would people in the inner city be expected to stand by for three months while a dangerous animal is in the area? No, they would not and neither should people who live in regional Queensland.

For those in this House who have no experience with crocodiles, let me give some examples. Crocodiles are largely territorial. However, during the breeding season they are known to travel vast distances, and of course that means they will often come into contact with humans. Crocodiles are an apex predator. They fear nothing. I have been in a boat attacked by a croc and I can tell you that it is not something I want to repeat. I have seen a farmer's dog taken by a crocodile at Ingham. In their own environment they are absolutely lethal.

It is a fact that crocodile numbers are increasing and that, as a consequence, there will be the increased likelihood of interaction with people. So what is the solution? Allowing two-metre crocodiles in recreational areas is not the solution. Delaying reports is not the solution. Telling Queenslanders to change the lifestyle they have enjoyed for generations is not the solution. As we established earlier, waiting 90 days to relocate a problem crocodile is not the solution. A life-threatening situation is exactly that—life-threatening—and needs to be addressed urgently, not in three months.

The LNP's policy on problem crocodiles is simple. We have a zero-tolerance approach to dangerous crocs in urban areas. Regardless of whether that croc is sunbaking or swimming, an LNP government would remove that animal, not in three months but in three days. Unlike the current government, we are not putting size limits on removal. If the croc poses a danger, it goes. If it cannot be captured then we will humanely remove the threat. Why? Because we make no apology for putting the safety of Queenslanders first.

A genuine egg-harvesting industry would be created under an LNP government, and professional, trained and licensed operators would be called on and encouraged to be part of the solution. This system works well in the Northern Territory. I see no reason why Queenslanders should not embrace this policy which would create much needed job opportunities, particularly in North Queensland. This would provide economic opportunities and see a local approach to local problems.

The minister claims that crocodiles are an endangered species. I can assure the minister that in North Queensland crocodile numbers have exploded and they can be seen in plentiful numbers in most river systems in North Queensland on any given day. I do not support safari hunting and a return to the days where crocs were hunted and killed in large numbers. We need legislation that allows for the timely removal of crocodiles that pose a danger, egg collection that is sustainable in nature and a commitment to dealing with this issue. As I mentioned earlier, the Safer Waterways Bill falls some way short of the mark and the current government's approach is simply not protecting Queenslanders. I cannot support the bill, but I look forward to the next LNP government introducing measures that will actually protect Queenslanders.