




Speech By
Jason Costigan

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

 **Mr COSTIGAN** (Whitsunday—Ind) (6.00 pm): This is the first time I have risen in the House since becoming the Independent member for Whitsunday to speak on a bill. It is an issue that is certainly polarising for a lot of people. I would like to cut to the chase. This bill was introduced by the member for Hill, formerly the member for Dalrymple. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that whilst we have not always agreed on everything, the member for Hill has been patient—and then some—in waiting to see this bill come before the House. No matter who they vote for, a lot of people in North Queensland have been waiting to see where this lands on George Street. There is no doubt in my mind that what we have here is a North Queensland solution to a North Queensland problem.

I was on that committee that travelled around North and Far North Queensland. We heard from Mr Ramsamy, as my neighbouring colleague the member for Mirani has alluded to; Mr Tonga; and Mr Lever, who is one of the foremost authorities on crocodile management in the nation and perhaps second only to Professor Grahame Webb from Crocodylus Park in Darwin, whom we also visited as part of our deliberations in examining the bill before the House. There is no doubt that people are becoming more and more scared of a fatality, of a rogue croc taking a tourist or a local.

No matter where we sit on the political spectrum, surely the first job of anyone coming into this place is to look after the citizens of Queensland and visitors to our state, to protect our citizens. I appreciate the economic considerations, and we have heard that from different people in the crocodile farming sector in terms of our responsibilities internationally to CITES. It is a bit like comparing our obligations to Paris. What about us? What about our kids? What about our tourists?

I can tell honourable members in the House tonight that the chairman of Tourism Whitsundays, Al Grundy, told me some time ago that they have even seen crocodiles at Blue Pearl Bay on Hayman Island, and nobody wants to talk about it. I am going to talk about it in the chamber tonight because it is in the public interest to do so. Those investors are pouring millions and millions into rebuilding our tourist resorts in the Whitsundays, the place that I call paradise, yet there is a growing menace out there. No-one wants to knock out an entire species. I do not want to do that.

Mr Katter: No-one wants to do that.

Mr COSTIGAN: I take the interjection from the leader of the KAP, the member for Traeger. No-one in their right mind wants that. As we all know, they were shot at almost until extinction until things turned around in 1974. Consequently, my generation grew up in North Mackay not even thinking about crocodiles and, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that resonates with you, with due respect.

Mr Andrew: McCreadys Creek.

Mr COSTIGAN: I heard the interjection from the member for Mirani, McCreadys Creek, which forms part of the southern boundary of my electorate. I heard what the member for Mirani had to say about that crocodile that is part of folklore that was shot from the banks of the Pioneer River many, many moons ago. There are people in my electorate today who remember the two girls going to school

at Pindi Pindi many moons ago and the tragic consequences on that particular day. A lot of time has passed since then; we have moved into a new century and a new era and we have an industry there that we need to consider and foster.

I go back to what was said by those who came before the committee. In their overview in their submission, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, the regional tourism body, said that the current approach is not working for our community. With great respect to the Minister for Agriculture, that came from the regional tourism body. Remember between the Whitsundays and the far north, we are basically it when it comes to the Great Barrier Reef with all due respect to other destinations, and honourable members can look at the numbers. There is no doubt that if there is an incident, whether it is at Four Mile Beach at Port Douglas in the electorate of Cook, Palm Cove, Mission Beach, The Strand in Townsville or in Airlie Beach, it will lead to catastrophic consequences for the tourism industry in our state.

Anyone who follows the tourism industry in Queensland—and I would have thought that is just about everyone in this chamber—would know that the value placed on the Great Barrier Reef recently was something like \$60 billion. I come back to what I said a moment ago. Imagine a crocodile not in an estuary, not even at the boat ramp, but swimming at Blue Pearl Bay on Hayman Island where people go diving looking for Nemo and Dory. Imagine the shock if those people saw a crocodile coming at them. I do not want to have to take a phone call from the BBC or CNN as we go into damage control. We would never ever hear the end of it.

What did the local tourism body in the far north that is Tourism Port Douglas and Daintree, TPDD, have to say to the committee? They said—

... negative publicity surrounding crocodile sightings and attacks in the mainstream and social media, contributes to a perceived increasing risk and resulting diminishing safety of our beaches, which poses a potentially devastating impact on our tourism industry through lost visitation and reduced length of stay.

It is about conservation through commerce. I do not want to see people taken by crocodiles; no-one wants that. No-one wants that at all. Back home the people of Tourism Whitsundays probably will not like what I have had to say tonight in this debate. I do not want to scare the tourists, but recently we have had crocodiles sighted again off Cannonvale Beach. There are more and more sightings, so we cannot just sit back and do nothing.

This committee did good work. It conducted public hearings in Port Douglas, in Cairns, in Townsville and in Mackay. All North Queensland members in this chamber, particularly those members north of the Tropic of Capricorn, should be putting public safety at the top of their priorities in this debate. I look forward to seeing how the member for Burdekin in particular votes on this, and I would not be the only one.

I have to say that before the last state election the member for Clayfield—and the crossbench would be particularly interested in this—the then leader of the LNP, came to my electorate to hear the concerns of John Galea, co-patron alongside myself and his wife, Gaye, of the Eimeo Surf Lifesaving Club. Mr Galea made it very clear that these concerns are real. Do not drop the ‘C’ word—no culling. I have not advocated a free-for-all at all. I never have and never will.

Mr Andrew: No-one has.

Mr COSTIGAN: No-one has; I take the interjection from my crossbench colleague. I come back to public safety being of paramount importance. Surely it is the first job of anyone who comes into this place.

Mr Katter: People’s lives are at stake.

Mr COSTIGAN: There are a few crocodiles on George Street, but these are the ones that really concern me. As the member for Traeger has just said, people’s lives are at stake as well as our much vaunted tourism industry.

I want to thank everyone who came to the public hearings in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Port Douglas. It was interesting that the Whitsunday Regional Council did not take any interest in this. As I recall, they did not provide a submission; they did not turn up. Recently they started talking about crocodiles in the Proserpine River on the back of me trying to save the Wilson Beach swimming enclosure. Our lifestyle has been turned upside down. We have lost what we used to enjoy. I am not suggesting for one minute that this provides an ironclad guarantee.

Mr Dametto: No-one is.

Mr COSTIGAN: No-one is suggesting that either. I take the interjection from the member for Hinchinbrook. The risk is going up and up. What are we going to do? Are we just going to sit around and do nothing? Are we just going to sit on our gluteus maximus and come up with a big fat zero? I do not think so.

Mr Andrew: Preserve the species through commerce.

Mr COSTIGAN: I take the interjection from the member for Mirani. Through commerce we can preserve the species. The crocodiles are there to be respected. Our first Australians are concerned. We heard the comments from Mr Ramsamy at the public hearing in Mackay. There are so many people expecting us to do something about it. Needless to say, I support the bill.