




Speech By  
**Hon. Leanne Enoch**

**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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### **SAFER WATERWAYS BILL**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (5.38 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 and state from the outset that the government will not be supporting this bill. This bill threatens the safety of Queenslanders and tourists, Australia's international obligations for crocodile management and the ongoing viability of Queensland's important crocodile farming industry. Furthermore, it ignores the years of science and research that provide the framework for Queensland's crocodile management program.

This bill has been introduced in an attempt to take advantage of community concern about crocodile numbers. By the 1970s the estuarine crocodile was hunted to near extinction, which would explain the assertion by the member for Hill that, in the 1970s, people could swim in the waterways. Now, under the Nature Conservation Act 1992, the crocodile is classified a vulnerable species. Crocodiles are also protected nationally under Commonwealth legislation and internationally under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The presence of crocodiles is essential to the health of the ecosystems where they live. They are also a major tourist attraction throughout Northern Australia, both in the wild and in wildlife sanctuaries.

Of course I admire the concern that the member for Hill has for human safety. It is a concern that the Queensland government also shares. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this bill will make the community any safer than does the current management framework. The bill's definition of a 'rogue' crocodile is consistent with the current definition of a 'problem' crocodile under the current Queensland Crocodile Management Plan. This plan provides the guiding framework for Queensland government staff and its authorised partners to remove problem crocodiles from Queensland's waters. The plan's approach includes the active removal zone in areas where there is a high risk of human crocodile interaction, such as the Cairns foreshore area and the northern beaches. In that zone, all crocodiles seen are targeted for removal regardless of their size or behaviour.

Throughout the 2017-18 financial year, the Department of Environment and Science received 731 reports of crocodile sightings, which I have to add for the benefit of the member at times included multiple reports of the same animal. Of those reported, all were investigated and 64 animals were removed from the wild. Under the Queensland government's approach, the average time in the 2017-18 financial year for removal of a declared problem crocodile was fewer than eight days. However, this bill's proposal to mandate that all Queensland crocodile authority staff reside and work in Cairns would compromise these response times as staff would no longer be distributed across all crocodile habitat in Queensland.

For the benefit of the House, I note that at the end of February the LNP announced a crocodile management policy of sorts, which also mentioned crocodile removal time frames. The member for Broadwater declared that they would catch every crocodile in three days, which shows that the LNP clearly does not know much about what is involved in this highly specialised work. These animals do

not just swim into a trap the moment it is launched. Removal is a process that requires time and trained professionals. I thank the departmental staff and the authorised partners who undertake this important work.

In contrast, this bill, along with the LNP's policy, proposes that members of the public could be authorised to catch and kill crocodiles. I support the statement of the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee that the bill's potential to allow untrained people to kill crocodiles and also legalise trophy hunting poses a real, serious and completely unacceptable risk to public safety. Previous proposals for trophy hunting have already been rejected by the Australian government on both conservation and animal welfare grounds. This government would never legislate or sanction such activity.

It is a fallacy for anybody to say that all crocodiles can be removed from Queensland's waterways. It is just not possible to say that all crocodiles have been removed and to suggest as much would present a false sense of security to the public. Therefore, community education and awareness is a critical component of ensuring that people are crocwise. Sadly, this is an element that is missing from the framework of the bill and from the LNP's recent announcement. In fact, last year the member for Broadwater was in the media saying that the government's Crocwise education program and its three-year monitoring program are a waste of money. That is what he thinks of evidence based policy.

The Queensland government's approach to crocodile management is based on an acute understanding of the science and not populism. Estuarine crocodiles are an apex predator and they play an important balancing role in the environment. They ensure the health of populations of animals that constitute their prey in an ecosystem by weeding out the sick and injured. Further, when a dominant animal is removed from an area, younger males can compete aggressively for that territory, increasing the risk to the public.

Currently, the crocodile is regulated as a vulnerable species in Queensland. I cannot be any clearer than that. That is why the Queensland government has embarked on a three-year estuarine crocodile monitoring program and related crocodile research. It is work such as that, based on science and thorough research, that will inform the decisions of this government, which stands in stark comparison to that of those opposite and this bill.

It is important for this House to understand that Queensland is bound by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known as CITES. This convention regulates the trade of crocodiles. In order to meet the requirements of the convention, the Australian government has established requirements under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 for wildlife trade management plans. The approval of a wildlife trade management plan ensures that Queensland's crocodile export industry can continue.

This bill fails to address key requirements of a wildlife trade management plan, including that crocodile harvesting should not be detrimental to the conservation status of the species and that the treatment of crocodiles should be humane. Indeed, clause 11 of the bill provides that all crocodile management decisions included in the bill are only to ensure that crocodiles are not put at risk of extinction. This is a much lower bar than that required by the Australian government and CITES. Should this bill be implemented, it is possible that the Australian government would not be satisfied that Queensland's legislation is consistent with CITES' requirements as adopted under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. That would put the entire industry at risk.

This bill's proposal with regard to egg harvesting as a means of crocodile population control is reckless at best. The LNP will claim that its policy on egg harvesting and crocodile management is the middle ground. My response to that is: show me the science. Without scientific rigour to back up some of its outrageous rhetoric, the LNP will remain on the fringe of debates such as these. By making comparisons with the Northern Territory's quotas, the LNP clearly has no understanding of the science or the fundamental differences between the crocodile population in Queensland and that of the Northern Territory. Preliminary data from the first year of the government's monitoring program in 2017 found average densities of fewer than one animal per kilometre of waterway. That is significantly lower than it is in the Northern Territory, where the average densities are between five and 10 crocodiles per kilometre.

The egg-harvesting licence that was recently granted in Pormpuraaw with an annual limit of 800 eggs was backed by almost a decade of scientific research and has been endorsed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature Crocodile Specialists Group. The licence was approved with the strictest conditions, including requiring applicants to prove with scientific evidence that their harvesting will not impact crocodile population numbers. Traditional owners from Pormpuraaw and Cape York Peninsula supported the introduction of crocodile egg harvesting because they believe that it will create sustainable local employment opportunities.

On that note, I acknowledge Australia Zoo and its submissions against the bill and the attendance of people from Australia Zoo at a number of committee hearings. I know that they are incredibly passionate about these issues. Although we will not agree on everything, I absolutely acknowledge their efforts in this space.

This bill and the LNP's announcement in February are nothing more than a political stunt with no scientific basis. The 'removal of crocodiles by any means' mantra by the Katter party and the LNP will not make the public safer; it will only give the public a false sense of security leading to complacency and an increased risk of attacks. The proposal for widespread egg harvesting in the complete absence of any supporting scientific information smacks of populism rather than well-considered policy. The LNP and the Katter party want to return Queensland to the dark old days when crocodiles were executed and hunted to near extinction. The government will not be supporting this bill.