




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.09 pm): I am pleased to follow that contribution because some of what is being peddled here is absolute garbage. If the government has its way tonight on the Safer Waterways Bill, as would be expected, we should call this 'safer waterways for crocs not humans'. We actually intended for the bill to result in safer waterways for people. Clearly the intention of the government is to make our waterways safer for crocs rather than humans.

I would say at the outset that there was no policy change and no direction on crocodiles until we put this issue on the agenda and drove it. This is a big problem. This did not come from MPs on either side of this parliament; it came from us. It has driven a change in the government's attitude towards eggs, which is in part an endorsement of what we have been saying from the start. This is despite the rocks being thrown from that side. There has been an endorsement of one of the principles on which we based our bill. As for the LNP, the same goes.

The bill defines a growing chasm between the values and needs of people in North Queensland and those in the south-east corner. People in the south-east apply their ideologies and thoughts, often well intentioned, to issues facing those in the north, but they may be ill informed and not consistent or completely out of sync with how people in the north think. It imposes the ideologies of people some 2,000 kilometres away on the lives of others.

Do not think this is all about the seaways and beaches. I am directly affected by this bill in terms of the rivers through the gulf. Is it a problem? Let us define from the start whether this is a problem or not. Members should please say if they think it is not a problem because it is going to make them look ridiculous. I would love to hear people say that they do not think it is problem because I will send that straight back to the media up north. It is a problem.

The minister referred to the methodology being used. She said it is only based on sightings and we could see the same crocodile twice. It is the same methodology. If year on year we are using the same methodology and there is an increase, it does not matter what the methodology; it still shows an increase. That is not really a valid point.

The government website shows that in 2010 there were 176 crocodile sightings. This dramatically increased to 795 in 2018. That was not a change in methodology. That was just an increase. They were using the same methodology. Already in 2019 we have had 149 sightings. If we project that for the year that will mean there will over 1,000 sightings this year, yet people say that there is no problem.

I do not need these numbers to tell me that there is a problem. On a walk up any street in any of these areas in North Queensland—Townsville, Cairns, the gulf, Karumba, Normanton—one finds people who are not shooters, who are not involved in the industry or who are not interested in shooting or controlling crocs who say, 'It is a huge problem. It is massive. You never used to see them down the boat ramps.' It is only a matter of time in Karumba before someone goes to the boat ramp and sees one. It is consistently being said.

I say to members, please keep saying it is not a problem because it is good for us politically. It will make a fool of the people who say it. There is a problem and we are trying to do something about it. Quite clearly the government is trying to convince people that there is no problem or if there is that we should educate people not to swim in those areas. They would prefer people not to use those areas rather than deal with the problem. To me that is disgusting and falls well short of what a government should be doing.

The legislation grew after consultation with people in these areas. We are losing people from the surf club, the rowing club and the waterskiing club in Innisfail because it is just not safe. Surf lifesavers are saying it is a workplace health and safety issue. They have to check the nets in the morning. They are finding more and more crocs in the stinger nets. That is a problem.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr KATTER: That is not a problem for you obviously, member for Thuringowa. He is saying it is not a problem for surf lifesaving clubs. Go and talk to them because they think it is a problem.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr KATTER: They see it is as a problem.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr KATTER: Obviously you do.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order! Direct your comments through the chair, members.

Mr KATTER: There will be scaremongering from the government that we are so terribly irresponsible in North Queensland that we could not possibly be trusted to have an authority up there to manage croc numbers. What is the difference between having someone down here or somewhere up there doing it? They have nothing to do with us politically—far from it.

Under this bill there would be an authority up north to manage croc numbers. It is the same as happens with kangaroos, pigs, dogs or anything else: they use tags. It would not be a free-for-all as the member for Stretton was trying to say before. It would not be a free-for-all. There would be an authority that would watch over this. They are trying to undermine the integrity of that authority. Who is that offensive to? That is offensive to people in North Queensland who would look to manage the population as much as preserve the population. They would not be there to get rid of crocs but instead manage the population. In some cases it might mean reducing the population and in some cases letting the population grow. I think it is terribly condescending to say, 'If it is left up to an authority in Cairns it will be a free-for-all and a turkey shoot.' That is really insulting.

People keep talking about the 1970s and 1960s. Times were a lot different then and things that were acceptable back then are not now. We accept that. That is reflected in what we have tried to do in the bill. That is why there is an authority to control the population. Not everyone can go out. People would have to get permission from the authority to do it.

We accept that in this day and age it is reprehensible to kill anything. There will naturally be a huge stopgap. Trying to say that this will wipe out a species like back in the 1970s is ridiculous. Those days are over. At best we can try to manage the situation. That is what we are trying to do. If we were successful with this bill, we would probably bring the numbers down a bit through our efforts. What we are talking about is a huge sparsely populated area and many rivers. We are trying to stem some of that flow.

It is definitely a free-for-all when it comes to pigs. Everyone goes for pigs. People shoot pigs by the thousands and the numbers still grow. They are still there. The effort and recreational shooting we see with pigs would greatly surpass anything we would see with crocodiles, even if we had our way. We cannot even put a hole in the number of pigs. Let us get real. Let us not try to create an imaginary world where thousands of people are out there shooting crocodiles. That is not the reality. That is not foreseeable practically.

A large focus of this bill is on how we can benefit First Australians. They used to manage this themselves. We heard stories of this during our tours. They would harvest the eggs and control numbers that way. Sometimes they would leave a big croc because they knew it would control the little ones. The same as the authority would, this bill would give them the opportunity to do that. There is a misinterpretation of our proposal to allow them some financial advantage from killing crocs or getting someone else to do it. That is immediately badged as trophy hunting. People are trying to destroy the integrity of what we are trying to do here.

People will hear arguments about crocodiles playing a role in tourism. They certainly are playing a role. I admit that on croc tours they say it is important that we take people to see crocodiles. I accept that. Despite our efforts with this bill there will still be plenty to see in the rivers. That is greatly offset by

the number of tourism operators we have run into in Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville and the like who say that this is a problem. My wife went to swim in the Magnetic Island swim event a couple of years ago but it was called off because of the four-metre salty found on The Strand. It was unheard of, but these are the things happening now.

We cull kangaroos. Kangaroos are natural to our environment. They were not natural in the mid-west and north-west where I live, or not in big numbers. We brought artesian water to the surface and we saw kangaroo numbers explode, so we manage their numbers. Some species of pigs, dogs and cats were introduced and they are all controlled. We even control koalas in this country. I table an article on culling koalas in Victoria.

Tabled paper: Article from the ABC online, dated 4 March 2015, titled 'Starving koalas secretly culled at Cape Otway, "overpopulation issues" blamed for ill health' [409](#).

They are at unhealthy numbers and they are out of sync. They have inadvertent, negative effects on the environment. I cannot bear the thought of killing a koala. That is terrible to me, but it is done sometimes. It has to be done. It is a very unsavoury thing to consider, but it is done.

Large goppers and large barra used to feed off the fingerlings. They are not there in the numbers they used to be. Nature is out of balance. We have cats eating goannas and other things that used to eat the crocodile eggs. That is not done now. There are not as many of those around. We do not have our First Australians harvesting eggs. Nature is out of balance. No kidding: the numbers of crocodiles are building up. We are trying to deal with that in a sensible way and people are not letting us do it.

Lastly, I want to address the argument that this will create a false sense of security. That is an argument to do nothing. If there is a problem and you are saying that trying to deal with it creates a false sense of security then that is ridiculous. That does not make sense. That is an argument to do nothing. That is saying that we should do nothing because, if we try to do something, it will create a false sense of security. That is a ridiculous argument. I think it sounds more and more ridiculous every time you say it. I want to continue holidaying at the Gregory River like most people in Mount Isa. Crocodiles are coming up the river. The day they are spotted and we are forced out of the Gregory, I will be even angrier than I am now.