




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR HILL

Record of Proceedings, 2 April 2019

SAFER WATERWAYS BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (6.10 pm): I am very, very proud of the KAP for the work they have done on this bill. I would love to see this bill turn into an act. We visited many communities: Cairns, the Daintree and Mareeba. Robbie visited communities up in the gulf. We spoke to many Indigenous representatives to get their views, and we took the issues that were raised in those regions and put them into this legislation.

We have not seen any other legislation before the House. It is quite disappointing that we have heard a lot of speakers who do not understand because they were not brought up in North Queensland and never had the opportunity to swim in places like Stewart Creek or Saltwater Creek, or ski in the Johnstone River, or somersault off the pontoon at Lake Placid or ski in the Tully River. These are activities that we could once do. We enjoyed our quality of life in that region because of those activities, and that has been taken away from us because of crocs. All we are trying to achieve is to claim back our waterways; that is very simple.

After hearing the language used here today and at the previous sitting, I can understand the frustration that North Queenslanders in particular have with parliamentarians. Some members here have basically said that this is virtually an illusion and we do not have a croc problem. Back in 2017 we had 177 croc sightings but within the last two months there have been close to 170. By the end of the year that would equate to about 1,000. Last year there were almost 800 sightings. Government members say that people are reporting the same croc twice, but the formula is still the same from 2010 to what it is now. Nothing has changed.

I will read out a few articles. This is from the *Cairns Post*, 'Croc cull has clear support'. It does not have support here—we just noticed—but it has clear support in North Queensland where we have the problem. We do not have a problem here; we are going to vote against this bill. But there it says that it has clear support. In the *Cairns Post* the deputy editor said—

To cull or not to cull?

That is a question we asked our readers: Do you support a cull of crocodiles? The response was an unequivocal 77 per cent—supported a cull.

This grassroots feedback reflects a community that wants more action and that a sensible culling program is warranted.

We appreciate and understand the value of crocodiles to the environment, to tourism and as part of our special wildlife assets, but they are becoming a threat to our lifestyle.

Crocodiles are no longer endangered and are encroaching into urban living.

They are a risk at our beaches, creeks and drains. They are moving further inland. They are found in places never seen before.

Crocodiles are no longer wary of and will stalk people.

Instead of them being afraid we are afraid.

I table that.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Cairns Post*, dated 3 July 2018, titled 'Croc cull has clear support' [505](#).

I will table another one titled 'Biggest rise in beach closures due to crocodiles in Far North in five years'. I will also read this out. It states—

Surf Life Saving Queensland North Queensland regional manager Col Sparkes said the recent crocodile alerts were a 'wake-up call' for local politicians in terms of the change that has occurred to aquatic recreation in Cairns in recent years.

'We've had these wonderful swimming holes like Ross and Locke, but we can no longer swim at them,' he said.

'The people of Cairns just want their swimming holes back. But (the State Government's) advice is "this is croc country—don't go in the water".'

We used to swim in Ross and Locke and we used to swim in Lake Placid, but we do not now. The government says that this is their territory, but the people up there say 'This once was ours.' It continues—

He said the Government's crocodile removal program needed to be stepped up in order to protect swimmers.

'We need to be making sure that we're getting rid of these (crocodiles) out there,' he said.

I table that.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Cairns Post*, dated 3 January 2011, titled 'Biggest rise in beach closures due to crocodiles in Far North in five years' [506](#).

I table an article titled 'Report confirms that Queensland's saltwater crocodile populations are rising'.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Courier-Mail* online, dated 26 July 2017, titled 'Report confirms that Queensland's saltwater crocodile populations are rising' [507](#).

Another article is titled 'Crocodile kills and eats family dog on property near Innisfail'. That croc came out of the water beside where a five-year-old girl was walking. It took the dog right beside her; it could have been the girl. The parents are still traumatised over this. I table the article.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Courier-Mail* online, dated 4 April 2017, titled 'Crocodile kills and eats family dog on property near Innisfail' [508](#).

Mr Andrew: He's supposed to be educated.

Mr KNUTH: Supposed to be educated. Another article is titled 'Crocodile caught and killed in Cindy Waldron search found to have human remains inside'. I table that.

Tabled paper: Article from *ABC News* online, dated 4 June 2016, titled 'Crocodile caught and killed in Cindy Waldron search found to have human remains inside' [509](#).

I table an article titled 'Crocodile captured that killed spear fisherman Warren Hughes in far north Queensland'.

Tabled paper: Article from *ABC News* online, dated 22 March 2017, titled 'Crocodile captured that killed spear fisherman Warren Hughes in far north Queensland' [510](#).

I table an article titled 'Hungry crocodile stops swimmers at Far North beach'. Another article is titled 'Babinda croc at large'. No-one would have ever believed in their wildest dreams that with the crystal clear water at the Rotary Park camping grounds they would ever swim up that far. Thousands of tourists come up every year to swim in that region because they are told they are going to be safe. Now three-metre crocs are in those beautiful swimming holes. I table that.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Cairns Post*, dated 6 June 2018, titled 'Babinda croc at large' [511](#).

Another article is titled 'Bingil Bay turtle croc goes viral'. This article states—

... a 3.5m metre croc swimming towards a beach where two children were swimming.

Mr Flaherty got the kids out of the water before filming the reptile with his drone and saw it had a turtle in its mouth.

That is one of our favourite swimming places. I table that.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Innisfail Advocate*, dated 25 April 2018, titled 'Bingil Bay turtle croc goes viral' [512](#).

I table an article titled 'Beach empty as croc sighted'.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Cairns Post*, dated 18 January 2018, titled 'Beach empty as croc sighted' [513](#).

I have another inch of A4 papers I could read out, but I do not have time because there are that many of them. You would say, 'This is an illusion. It is not reality. They are just dodgy figures. We only have one croc every kilometre.' No wonder the people of North Queensland lack trust in the politicians and MPs who are supposed to represent them. I table those documents.

Tabled paper: Bundle of media articles regarding crocodiles [514](#).

I want to read out a loaded question from the member for Stretton to the chairperson of Tourism Tropical North Queensland at the Cairns public hearing on 27 August last year. This is a loaded question from the chairman of the environment committee to the chairperson of Tourism Tropical North Queensland. He said—

We will now move on to questions. Mrs Morris, this issue—

meaning the crocs—

has been the subject of a lot of debate. You talked about the impact on tourism and the need to look at strategies. It is the job of this committee to analyse this bill and report to the parliament. Although some people may skirt around the issue, the reality is, in my view, that this bill would undoubtedly lead to the killing of a lot more crocodiles than currently is the case. I want to get your view on what kind of impact you think that would have if there was large-scale killing of crocodiles in Far North ...

The chairperson of the environment committee is asking this. He is putting a question to Tourism Tropical North Queensland and he says—

... a lot more crocodiles than currently is the case. I want to get your view on what kind of impact you think that would have if there was large-scale killing of crocodiles in Far North Queensland in terms of the potential tourism impacts.

He is asking for his view on large-scale killing of crocodiles and its impact on tourism. He went on—

I am thinking about measures that were introduced a few years ago in Northern Territory to try to control the camel population—camels are an introduced species obviously; saltwater crocodiles are native to Australia—and the international attention that garnered. I am wondering what impacts and what kind of commentary the large-scale killing of crocodiles could cause.

This is the chairman of the committee asking a question about the tourism industry. This is an absolute disgrace. The member for Stretton clearly tried to bully the spokesperson for the peak tourism body in North Queensland. He should be removed from the committee.

What the member for Stretton should have asked was: 'What would be the impact on the tourism industry from worldwide media generated if a child was taken by a crocodile in Far North Queensland?' He tried to set the course of the public hearing by sensationally misleading and misinterpreting views that suit him in Brisbane but do not suit the people of North Queensland. That would be far more damaging to the industry than any culling program ever would be. Losing a child would be far more damaging to the tourism industry than the culling of crocodiles would be.

As I said, 75 per cent of North Queenslanders want to see crocodiles culled. Why? It is because they have had enough. As I said, there were 177 sightings in 2010, 800 sightings in 2018 and 158 sightings in the last two months. That extrapolates to 1,000 by the end of the year. Government members will say that people are reporting the same crocodile. The majority of people are not reporting sightings anymore because they know that it is an utter waste of time.

I have good news. I appreciate the fact that the government has endorsed one of the components of this bill—that is, egg harvesting. We appreciate that. We believe that it needs to increase from 5,000 to about 100,000 eggs per year. I also note the opposition's support for removal of crocodiles in populated areas. The KAP put this on the agenda. We met with the federal Minister for the Environment, Josh Frydenberg. To ensure that Queensland could manage its own biodiversity, we wanted to make sure the federal government would not step in. We had acceptance from Josh Frydenberg that the federal government would not interfere if Queensland wanted to cull crocodiles.

I will quickly refer to comments made in respect of the crocodile authority. Members talk about shooting and culling. Then they say, 'We will do nothing because of this culling. We will just leave everything the way it is. Let's promote our tourism industry in North Queensland and encourage people from America and elsewhere to come and swim in our pristine waterways but say to them when they get here, after they see signs about crocodiles everywhere, "If you go out there, there is a really good chance that you will die."' That is the reality. This was said by every other member who spoke in the House tonight. It is about an authority playing a part. The explanatory notes state—

The bill achieves the ... objectives ... by creating the Queensland Crocodile Authority.

They continue—

... the Queensland Crocodile Authority is based in Cairns—

not Brisbane. Where are the problems? They are in North Queensland and not in Brisbane, where there are no crocodiles.

The bill states that the Queensland crocodile authority would be responsible for authorising persons to farm crocodiles in the state and for deciding the number of crocodile eggs that may be harvested each year in any part of the state. Members on both sides of the House do not know. They propose 5,000. Indigenous communities are saying that to get a return they need 100,000.

The bill states that the authority would also authorise persons to harvest crocodile eggs in any part of the state, decide the number of crocodiles that may be culled each year in any part of the state and authorise persons to carry out the culling of crocodiles in any part of the state. Who is authorising it? The member for Stretton said that it would be all-out blasting. It would be the crocodile authority that authorises it—not Shane Knuth but a government department.

The bill states that the authority would ensure the prompt management of rogue crocodiles by authorising persons to kill or relocate rogue crocodiles in any part of the state and would ensure that the carcasses of all crocodiles killed under an authorisation granted by the director are dealt with so that, as far as possible, no part of a carcass is wasted. This bill is about putting a value on crocodiles and ensuring a return to the local economy, from which all Queenslanders benefit. It is not a free-for-all.

The bill states that the authority would coordinate research into, and the routine surveying of, crocodile population numbers and distribution in the state, and crocodile egg numbers and distribution in the state; promote the farming of crocodiles and the harvesting of crocodile eggs in the state; investigate the viability of the use of state land to farm crocodiles or as crocodile reserves; declare and manage crocodile reserves; and make recommendations to parliament about crocodile management in the state.

We travelled all around the north of the state and got all of this information from the Indigenous communities, from the Cape York Land Council and from crocodile farmers. Even the federal member for Leichhardt said, 'We need some sort of body people go to, because it is no good going to Brisbane. People need a local response to deal with crocodile problems on the ground.' That is what the bill provides.

We appreciate the fact that two elements of the bill have been accepted. One is egg harvesting and the other is the removal of crocodiles in populated areas within 72 hours. Our proposal was for removal within 48 hours. That is all well and good, but there are other issues to be dealt with. One is dealing with crocodiles in swimming holes in unpopulated areas. The areas might be unpopulated but the swimming holes are well used. Well, they are not used now because they are full of crocodiles. The issue of egg-harvesting permits is something that both sides of the House need to deal with. The financial return to Indigenous communities from crocodiles is another issue that needs to be dealt with. It is all right to say that we will remove crocodiles from populated areas within 72 hours, but we need to deal with all of the other factors.

The KAP—small party that we are—has put this bill together. We have made the effort because we are passionate about reclaiming our waterways. We want kids to enjoy the quality of life that we enjoyed when we were growing up. They do not have that opportunity currently.

Brisbane has Lang Park. It is a great facility. I have been there many times to watch football. I have also played there. I also acknowledge that South Bank is a great asset. The south-east has trains running frequently so that people can travel from the Gold Coast to the Sunshine Coast, out to Ferny Grove and so on. Brisbane also has big shopping centres. What do we have in North Queensland? We have freshwater waterways, and they have been taken off us. We are trying to claim them back. That is all we are asking. That is not really a lot to ask for, that we reclaim a wonderful recreation.

At a meeting of tourism operators in Port Douglas one operator said that her tourism facility could make money because people might come up there because they could see a croc. She said that 25 years ago if people asked if they could swim in the water she could say, 'Yes, no problem at all. It's possible. There's still a risk, but it's an acceptable risk.' What she was saying is that right now it is an unacceptable risk. That is the situation we are trying to bring back. It is always going to be a risk. People will always get a false sense of security and swim after crocodiles have been removed and still get taken by a croc. That is what it was like in the seventies, eighties and nineties. There was always that little bit of risk, but we did not have to worry about seeing all of these croc signs and we did not have to worry about swimming in that nice little saltwater creek. It was never a concern. That is all we are trying to achieve—that is, to bring it back so it is an acceptable risk.

The department talks about its survey, and we saw that 18-year-old who jumped in the Johnstone River. Everyone said that he was a fool for jumping in the river because a croc bit him straightaway. He was showing off to the girls and it said that he was a fool for doing it, but the department told him that there is only one croc every kilometre. That one croc per kilometre must have been right there at the spot where he jumped in! There are many pictures in Innisfail—

Mr Millar: Don't use him.

Mr KNUTH: No, I am not using him. I am using—

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

Mr KNUTH: There are pictures around Innisfail when they used to be able to swim there. Going back 20 years ago they used to ski in the Johnstone River. They all swam in that water. Now they cannot. They skied in the Tully River and Banyan Creek. These are just some of the areas in my electorate. People used to spearfish and swim in Banyan Creek that runs through Tully, so they would just go down and out towards the sea and they would be able to spearfish there. Now they cannot or they will be dead. People used to picnic next to the Tully River and swim in the Tully River and Jarra Creek going through Tully. They used to have barbeques next to the water. They cannot now.

At Hull River farmers now have crocs all through their bore drains. What is the government doing with regard to the crocs in bore drains? It says that it has a policy to remove the crocs, but they are not being removed. The ones in the freshwater waterholes are not being removed. In terms of the Crocodile Management Plan, it only removes them in certain zones, and they are lucky to be removed even in those zones. If a crocodile is seen at a Cairns beach, very rarely is that crocodile removed or culled.

Mr Katter: How do you know it's aggressive?

Mr KNUTH: In most of those areas where those crocodiles are sighted, the department will come back and say that they have to show aggression. Meanwhile, an 18-foot crocodile is out there ready to kill somebody but it must show aggression. What is the farmer going to do every time he goes down to turn on his pump and there is an 18-foot crocodile? If members do not believe me, they should look at some of the recent pictures in the paper of dead crocodiles that were displayed. They end up dead, because farmers have a choice of whether it is them or the crocodile. Our bill will take away this problem while at the same time protecting crocodiles. It will stop people taking matters into their own hands because we will do something with them.

Surf Life Saving numbers are way down. Parents are pulling their kids out. Nipper numbers are down. Rowing club numbers are down. Ski club numbers are down. We are trying to look for another form of recreation, but we would hope that when we have a parliament and a government that is elected it will do something. That is what those people in the north are crying out for. They are just hoping that we have a government that will do something. I never thought I would say this, but I admire previous premier Peter Beattie for what he did because there were a lot of problems with regard to dingoes on Fraser Island. He was copping a lot of flak because he was not doing something about the wild dogs on Fraser Island. Then the boy was mauled and killed by a pack of dingoes, so Peter Beattie went and shot the crap out of those dingoes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Hill—

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw. Sorry for those comments.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr KNUTH: People admired him for the fact that he put people first. He put those children first. That is what we are about. We are here to claim back our waterways and we are hoping that the government and the opposition will support us in something that is so important for rural and regional Queenslanders—that is, protecting the lives of people whilst claiming back our waterways. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I put the question, member for Hill, one of the documents that you have sought to table has already been tabled. I refer to previous Speakers' rulings that documents already tabled should not be tabled again. The relevant document will be returned to you and will not be tabled.