




Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

---

Record of Proceedings, 2 April 2019

**SAFER WATERWAYS BILL**

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (5.51 pm): I have to say that doing nothing about the control of crocodiles is worse than actually doing something for them. The reason I state this is that, when the community take things into their own hands, crocodiles are killed—just like some of the things I said with the platypus. One of the reporters said to me, ‘Mr Andrew, how do you know that platypuses are dying in the wild?’ No-one is actually going to show a photo of a dead platypus that comes out of an opera house pot. They throw it in the grass and discard it because of the shame it brings upon them and also it is against the law.

The best thing for crocodiles is to actually make them worth something and then they will be conserved through commerce, rather than being lost to a backyard where someone puts out a hook and catches them and lets them die or shoots them because they think they are a risk to their livestock, their family or their dogs that are working the banks that the crocodiles live on. It would be different if people knew that they were worth something and that they were protected through a scheme like the one the Katter party are proposing. With any other native animal, we use mitigation permits that are looked at by departments or the people in the authority that is running it.

We do have the research so we know what is happening, as Minister Furner pointed out, and we are putting money towards research. Why wouldn't we use that research to conserve these reptiles through commerce? In that way, we would get the best out of them for Queensland and we would know there was no vigilante activity happening in the background where these animals are killed off without anybody actually realising it is happening. This is the shameful part of it. You can all sit here and think, ‘That's not a problem. We'll do nothing and leave it as the status quo,’ but what actually happens in the wild and in the districts is the total opposite.

People are destroying too many of these reptiles and then we are losing the understanding of the numbers and what is going on and we are not conserving anything because we do not know what is being done. People think there are some problem crocodiles, but rather than taking one or two that may pose a problem, they think, ‘Let's just get rid of the lot.’ When that happens, we do not know what is going on. Is that the right way to handle things here? Let us legislate to make it sensible. We do a mitigation permit system now for other native species. This should be extended to the crocodile. It is just common sense and it would also allow the species to go on.

I have so many stories I could tell the House. One of the biggest crocodiles that was ever caught was in the Pioneer River. It was shot off the Leichhardt Hotel with a .600 Nitro Express, a Martini-Henry. It was 32 foot long; it was a massive creature. It was no doubt related to the ancient *Sarcosuchus* that actually roamed way back in the prehistoric times. That animal was shot because it stalked the people who were going on horseback across that river over to Cremorne every day and it scared one of the girls and took one of the kids off the back of a horse. If the locals had actually wanted to live with the crocodile, it probably could have lived. If it was worth something to someone and we knew about tourism in those times, it probably would still be alive. Who knows?

Instead, no consideration was given to it and people just turned a blind eye on the issue and said, 'Don't worry about it. They'll look after themselves. They'll just keep growing in the populations as they're doing.' That is not going to happen. Let us be realistic. It will not happen. They will be killed behind the scenes and the poor animals do not even get a chance. I am a shooter myself, and the last thing I would ever consider doing is shooting a crocodile because I think they are great because I know what they do for the environment. I know the leavings that they put in the swamp look after the barramundi fingerlings and they do everything else for the different ecosystems where they live. It would be a way better option to make this structured, rather than just turning a blind eye and thinking it will not happen, or they will not reduce their numbers or we will not see a decline in the population down the track because people start taking it into their own hands.

I will say that there is a great potential for Queensland to invigorate a sleeping resource that we have not tapped into. A lot of the traditional owners gave evidence in Mackay at the crocodile hearings. Eddie Ramsamy was there, John Lever was there and one of the other traditional owners, George Tonga, was there. They all said the same thing: 'This would be great for us up here and it would be great for the people to know that we're looking after this resource and we're bringing export dollars back into Queensland.' I think that has heaps of merit.

As I said earlier, it is conservation through commerce. That is an important thing we should be looking for, especially with an animal like that which does not scream out when it gets caught. Crocodiles can stay on the end of a hook and die from exposure because someone wants to get rid of them. We are not allowing these people to have the rights and to understand what they should be doing as a person who wants to conserve this resource.

As we know, 90 per cent of the eggs are eaten by either goannas or wild pigs, so egg harvesting should be a big thing that we look at. Again, if people on the land could make money out of even spotting or finding these egg clusters, it would give these animals more of a place in the community and they would be looked after rather than destroyed. We have to understand this, rather than just say, 'No, we're not doing anything.' Using the private enterprise skills of people like John Lever and Eddie Ramsamy, who have been in the game for years, we can train and use mitigation permits to be able to work within the framework of what the Katter boys are actually saying. That would be a win for the people and also a win for the crocodiles.

Egg harvesting places that crucial value there and that understanding. If there is a dangerous animal, we could watch it, take it out of the system and give it to John or John could come and grab it. Then people would not say, 'There was a problem crocodile. Now we've taken it away and everything else gets left behind.' There would be none of these vigilante shooters going out and thinking, 'We've got to make sure we get the right crocodile so let's just shoot them all and make God the judge.' We do not want that.

Honourable members might think it does not happen but it does. I know that in the old days that was the way it was done. Being who we are, being restructured the way we are and knowing the research that has been done, we should take a different approach and add that value to them. In that way we could conserve their future so that they are in the waterways.

I have been to New Guinea. People say that there are big crocodiles there. However, they will not be seen because they have been hunted so much that they are flat out even laying eggs. If we do nothing crocodiles will not even have their own place in the waterway because they are pushed by people we do not know who have bad intentions in the name of making things better and safer for people. As I said, we should take it upon ourselves to do these things through mitigation permits and through scientific research that Minister Furner mentioned earlier. Then we could have a really good outcome that gives Queensland export dollars, that gives us a safe waterway for people to work within and guess what? It would be free of problem crocodiles. The ones who want to live there and do their thing would be left alone to keep working throughout their life span and be able to give back to their own community.