




Speech By
David Kempton

MEMBER FOR COOK

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CROCODILE CONTROL AND CONSERVATION BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr KEMPTON** (Cook—LNP) (5.54 pm): Estuarine crocodiles—or, more precisely, *Crocodylus porosus*—are among the largest reptiles to inhabit the planet. They are, in fact, the last of the dinosaurs, as my friend informs me. It is incorrect to call them saltwater crocodiles as they are equally at home in freshwater lakes, rivers, streams and water storage facilities. Estimated to have been around for 240 million years, these highly developed apex predators are an integral component of the diverse ecosystems of much of my electorate of Cook.

Crocodiles can grow up to seven metres and are adaptive and skilled hunters, taking whatever crosses their path, and are increasingly relying upon land-based prey, which, unfortunately, can include humans. Crocodiles pose a significant threat to humans entering their space, and few people survive attacks. With about half of the state's crocodile population being found in Cape York in almost every waterway, finding a balance between preserving this iconic reptile and keeping people safe can be challenging. Let me say now that my position has always been that if by its size, location or behaviour a crocodile poses a threat to human life then it must be removed. This does not condone forays into remote crocodile habitats through reckless or thoughtless acts.

The crocodile management plan that was in place under the previous Labor government was, by and large, workable. However, after a decade of inaction by Labor and an inability to implement the plan, the lines between human safety and crocodile preservation have become very blurred and the interactions, sometimes fatal, are frequent. Of particular concern was the incursion of estuarine crocodiles into the waterways around the farming district of Mareeba over the past decade. Increased sightings and interactions were occurring in creeks, dams and channels as well as in the Mitchell and Barron rivers and Southedge Dam, where crocodiles were previously unknown. Locals became increasingly alarmed as sightings became more frequent, yet the previous government's response was one of indifference.

I supported the findings of the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee in rejecting the Katter's Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025 that proposed to cull crocodiles and encouraged trophy hunting as management tools. Notwithstanding the existing Crocodile Management Plan and the committee's findings, I continued to advocate for a comprehensive survey of all of the Tablelands waterways, including the Barron and Mitchell rivers, and tributaries to locate and identify all estuarine crocodiles and remove them.

George Adil, affectionately called 'George Dundee'—a landholder impacted by crocodile incursions—started a public campaign several years ago and ultimately lodged a petition with the parliament earlier this year with over 4,000 signatures seeking reform of the Crocodile Management Plan. George and other advocates such as Evan McGrath and Lenore Wyatt should be congratulated for their efforts to raise awareness and get results in relation to this issue.

In just a few short months not only has Minister Powell and his team listened to me as the local member, heeded the advice of the local landholders and made changes to address the current crocodile management issues facing my constituents; he has also put in place safeguards for future management. The update to the management plan will include a reportable removal zone for so much of the Barron catchment as is in the Mareeba shire and for part of the Mitchell River catchment, including Southedge Dam, which was previously included in zone F. This means any crocodile reported and found in these zones will be removed. Further, the minister proposes a five-year review process should the demarcation between natural habitat and human activity necessitate further changes. This will involve a four-week consultation each year to give locals a chance to provide feedback.

I must make some comment about the bill put forward by the Katter party. Someone more inclined to cynicism than I might suggest that the Katters have attempted to garner support for their position by conjuring up images of enormous creatures wandering over the landscape preying on hapless humans. Whatever the motive, the flow of the Katter river has in recent times dwindled to a trickle. The problem with the Katter bill is it creates more bureaucracy, creates an unworkable hunting regime and risks public safety. The proposed update by the Crisafulli government, in my view, gets the balance right between the preservation of estuarine crocodiles and the protection of humans. Critically, the success of this process is the flexibility and review to ensure management practices remain in lockstep with the reality of crocodiles inhabiting locations frequented by humans. I join the rest of the parliament in rejecting this bill.