




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGEES

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CROCODILE CONTROL AND CONSERVATION BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. LM LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (5.18 pm): I rise to speak to the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill. The bill before us largely resembles the private members' bills the member for Hill and the KAP have introduced on four other occasions in this House: the Safer Waterways Bill 2017, the Safer Waterways Bill 2018 and the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2024. Now we have the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025. I will give the member this: he has started including the word 'conservation' in later versions of the bill but only in word, not in substance. This bill, like the ones before it, is focused on the culling of crocodiles. Little else has changed in the member's wording or in the justification for the bill. I appreciate the point the member makes each time he introduces one of these bills—that it is about public safety. Of course I understand that. As a child of the Northern Territory, I appreciate what it is like to live with very large crocs.

I have no doubt that it is that core principle of public safety that motivates the member to keep bringing the bill back. Public safety has to guide the government of the day's management of crocodiles and, indeed, any wildlife that poses a risk to human life—it is certainly what drives the opposition's response—but culling is not an effective way to provide for that safety. The evidence does not support it and it does not stack up. While the member does not actually mention the words 'cull' or 'culling' once in the explanatory notes, that is what this is about. Sections 10 and 23 of the bill make that clear. The stated objectives of the bill are to place greater value on human life by responsibly reducing the risk of crocodile attacks as much as possible. The wording is—

... to eliminate from our waterways any crocodiles that pose a threat to human life, while continuing to protect crocodiles from becoming extinct as a species.

You cannot eliminate—which means to completely remove, not reduce—the threat to human life from saltwater crocodiles unless you eliminate all crocodiles—every single one. They are an ambush predator. That is a reality. Unless you cull to the point of extinction you cannot eliminate the risk, which is where we got to when they were hunted to the brink of extinction in Queensland until 1974, when they were protected as a threatened species under the Nature Conservation Act 1992. Even if we did remove every crocodile from Queensland's waterways we would still need to deal with the risk of crocs migrating from neighbouring jurisdictions. They swim really well, which was a point well made by Simon Booth from the QPWS during the committee's inquiry. He is a person I have the utmost respect for as a true croc expert.

How you can reduce the risk to public safety is to have a robust management program that is scientifically led and proven, and that is what Queensland currently has. The Queensland Crocodile Management Plan, the overarching statewide plan that manages estuarine crocodiles, is world leading. The 2021 independent expert committee, led by the then chief scientist, found that the Queensland Crocodile Management Program was world class, fit for purpose and highly effective in reducing the risks to public safety while conserving crocodile populations in the wild. Our 2021 review of the plan

was informed by evidence-based science, including the findings of key monitoring and research work undertaken by the then Queensland government and external experts. This is what has to guide our management of this species, not a bill that makes a lot of claims that are not contemporary or true—claims that were not supported during the committee process.

The prevailing public sentiment from public committee hearings was in opposition to the bill. The bill claims that it is needed because of increased reported sightings and increased crocodile attacks. I do not doubt that there are increased sightings. Our former Labor government invested heavily in increasing the community's awareness of the risks of living in or travelling within croc country, allocating an additional \$4.175 million in 2023 over three years and \$300,000 per year ongoing to promote crocwise behaviour and invest in detection and deterrence products to enhance public safety. I hope to see the government continue that increased funding in the interests of public safety. We also introduced the QWildlife app in 2020, improving the ease of reporting sightings, at the same time we were investing in public education and awareness campaigns for locals and tourists to North and Far North Queensland. We introduced new offences to discourage people discarding food sources that may attract crocodiles to public places such as boat ramps, and for people who deliberately remain within the vicinity of a crocodile or ignore move-on directions. All of these steps and many more were designed to raise the awareness and visibility of crocodiles in the environment to keep people safe, so an increase in sighting numbers, many of which are duplicated, is a fair and reasonable expectation.

The bill makes the claim that crocodile attacks have increased because the population has increased to an unsafe level and likens it to the Northern Territory. The estuarine crocodile population in Queensland is estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000. That is approximately one-fifth of the Northern Territory population. The average rate of population growth for the species is about 2.2 per cent per year. The population growth has largely plateaued and their average size has decreased, likely due to ongoing removal of problem crocodiles and the fact that we have far less extensive ideal habitat for the species to breed.

The rate of fatalities from saltwater crocodiles currently sits at about 0.4 deaths per year. When you compare that to instances of other animal related deaths—from snakes, sharks or even dogs—it is significantly lower. That is certainly not to diminish how traumatic every death and every attack from a crocodile is for those affected, but no-one would propose a cull of dogs, which had a fatality rate in 2023 alone six times higher than that attributed to crocodiles. Instead, we rightly regulate dogs, as we do crocodiles under the Crocodile Management Plan.

That does not mean that the plan should not be constantly reviewed and changes made to respond to community concerns like those raised by the member for Hill. When in government we committed to a major review of the Crocodile Management Plan and we consulted widely. We released a draft plan in 2024 and included updates to crocodile management zones, a consolidation of the number of zones from six to four, changes to existing zone areas and the introduction of an annual feedback process for the plan, including the opportunity for members of the public to request changes to the crocodile management zones. We commenced trials to proactively change crocodile behaviour using conditioning techniques such as hazing to increase wariness and drive them away from high-use recreation areas and included changes to provide clearer information about the risks and management responses for each zone to help improve the community's understanding about crocodile management in their area, how problem crocodiles are identified and targeted for removal and what happens to those that have been removed.

None of the improvements that we have made over the past eight years since the QCMP was introduced are acknowledged in this bill, yet these changes came from consultation with the community. They reflect their requests for improvements to public safety and an evolution of the science, and that is how we should continue—not by a return to the days of culling to extinction which this bill proposes, if not in its actual words then certainly in the substance of the intent that underlies it. The government has now had that draft plan for 12 months, and I note that the minister has only today tabled its new plan. I will be very interested to see what is included. I truly hope it is still led by science. I know that traditional owners and the environment sector are watching with equal interest.

The bill also calls for greater powers for Indigenous landowners to manage crocodiles on their land. This is something the member for Hill and I certainly do agree on. Their knowledge needs to be respected and listened to in the management of crocodiles on their traditional lands. They have coexisted for thousands of years and want greater opportunities to manage them on country. Recently elders and community leaders on the cape raised this with me again. They do not feel heard by this government in that regard. The government needs to do better. It certainly needs to start actually listening and responding to their aspirations for management of a totemic species on their lands. That should be realised and respected. There are calls for a crocodile reserve in the cape to realise conservation and potential tourism outcomes. It is something at the very least they should be supported

to explore. They do not feel they have received that support. I will continue to support their calls to see that vision become a reality. For these reasons and many others that time does not allow me to expand on, the Labor opposition does not support the bill.