



Speech By Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 9 December 2025

CROCODILE CONTROL AND CONSERVATION BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (5.32 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025. This bill's intention is clear: it is about reducing the risk of crocodile attacks and deaths by crocodile attack in Queensland. I acknowledge the member for Hill for his commitment to this bill and past bills that he has brought into the House in respect of this matter. Unfortunately, this bill is not based on science or evidence. It ignores the work and progress of the Queensland Crocodile Management Plan and other scientific research that has been implemented for over eight years. To understand this point, I want to critique something that probably most people in this House would be familiar with, which is the contribution of the Irwins.

Following the passing of Steve Irwin, the then Australian government—in fact, it was the conservative Howard coalition government—purchased the Bertiehaugh cattle station as a living memorial to honour Steve Irwin's commitment to conservation. This unique 300,030 acre property was purchased via a \$6 million grant as part of the National Reserve System and to honour Steve Irwin's conservation efforts. I had the opportunity to travel there initially in 2009, following the opening of the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, when I represented the then federal minister for environment, Peter Garrett. I want to talk about the reserve for the benefit of people in the chamber who may not have had the privilege of travelling there. For me, it has become a bit of a pilgrimage as I have travelled there about six times.

After arriving at Weipa Airport, you travel for about 1½ to two hours on a dusty bumpy road in a four-wheel drive. Eventually, you come to the beautiful, mighty Wenlock River, which you cross in the four-wheel drive. Generally, that night you get a briefing about what your endeavours will be the next day and about the crocodile research that the Irwins do up there each August. The following morning you are woken by a chorus of birds. You have some breakfast and then the group goes down the Wenlock River in a number of tinnies to check the crocodile traps, which range from bag traps to water traps. It is certainly an experience.

World-renowned research conducted by Australia Zoo involves: the tagging and tracking of crocodiles on the Wenlock River and Ducie River with acoustic technology and GPS satellite transmitters, with over 270 animals having been tagged; and vital research uncovering the distances crocodiles move and their ability to return to their home range after relocation. Australia Zoo has a partnership with UQ that dates back more than 20 years. Each August, Professor Craig Franklin, a professor of zoology in UQ's School of the Environment, and his scientific research team are involved in the annual crocodile research trip with the Irwin family and Australia Zoo.

From my involvement with Australia Zoo I understand that the bill represents some problematic provisions such as zero tolerance zones, which would provide a false sense of security amongst Queenslanders and tourists who may believe that the government has removed the risk of crocodile

attacks occurring as the Queensland crocodile authority is supposed to be vigilantly and thoroughly removing or killing all crocodiles within 48 hours. Additionally, the bill proposes to establish crocodile sanctuaries or reserves for crocodiles removed from the zero tolerance zones.

During the briefing on my first night at the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve in 2009, Professor Franklin explained an experiment conducted in 2004. They captured a 4.5-metre male crocodile and relocated it to the east coast of the cape where they let it go. It swam back to its original location, which was a distance of over 400 kilometres, in under 20 days. Therefore, I am keen to see the plan that has been released by the minister today in terms of relocation exercises given the history of such experiments. I am certain he has had some dialogue with the Irwins about this because I know he has a strong association with Australia Zoo and Terri Irwin, as do I.

I commend the good work of prior Labor environment ministers in addressing many areas that today provide safe locations for people. As has been indicated, crocodiles are apex predators and their management is different to what we do in the Shark Control Program, which I was responsible for for 7½ years. You can manage sharks under such a program, but that is not the case with crocodiles. They are a different species. They are apex predators. They will focus on human beings as they would on a cow, a pig or certain wildlife. Anyone visiting crocodile country should always be alert to the risks posed by crocodiles, which are characteristics of that environment, and that is best done through education and current management practices.

I give credit to Dr Terri Irwin for her continued conservation efforts. Her care and commitment in terms of not only crocodiles but also the sustainability of wildlife is highly commended. I wish her all the best in the future.

It is a shame that this bill was not debated before the Hinchinbrook by-election. I understand the purpose behind that. Notwithstanding my involvement in the by-election, there may have been a different result. However, we are debating the bill today and I am looking forward to the contributions of those who are on the speaking list.

Mr Crandon: You might have ended up with only six per cent.

Mr FURNER: No, it would have been greater than that, my friend. It is such a concern that we are playing politics with a bill that, as I indicated, should have been debated in the last sitting week before the by-election. In saying that, as I did earlier, I do wish the member for Hinchinbrook all the very best. I am sure he will do his seat justice. With those few comments, as with the committee report, I cannot support this bill in the chamber today.