Submission to the Queensland Parliament Inquiry: Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2025

To: State Development and Regional Industries Committee, Queensland Parliament
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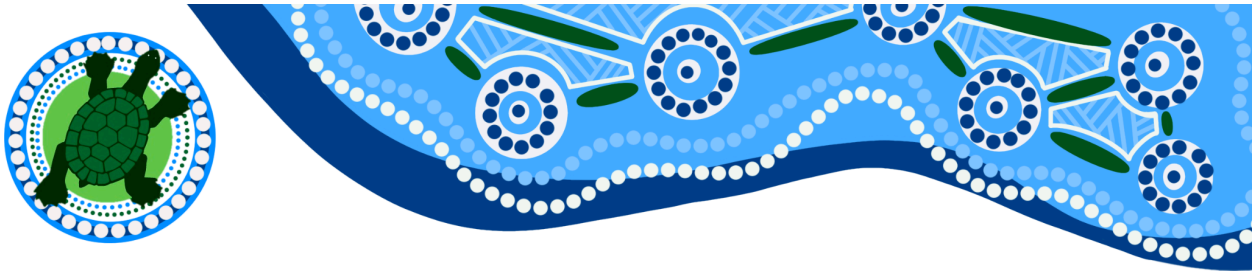
Acknowledgement of Country

Capricorn Conservation Council acknowledges and pays deep respect to all First Nations peoples across Queensland and Australia. We honour the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and skies—those who have cared for Country since time immemorial—and acknowledge the enduring connection to place, law, storylines, and kinship. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Our work to protect Country is guided by the knowledge, authority, and custodianship of First Nations communities.

Introduction

The Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC) has been a leading voice for Central Queensland's environment since 1973. Our submission is informed by partnerships with Traditional Owners, environmental scientists, government agencies, and community groups. We strongly oppose the Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2024, as tabled by Mr Shane Knuth MP. This Bill lacks scientific merit, disregards established crocodile management frameworks, and fails to respect



the rights and expertise of Traditional Owners who have managed crocodile populations on Country for thousands of years.

This submission incorporates evidence from Queensland Government materials, the **Livingstone Shire Biodiversity Strategy 2021–2027**, and extensive Traditional Owner knowledge documented through programs such as the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program.

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1. The Bill lacks a scientific foundation and endangers a vulnerable species

Estuarine crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) are listed as a **vulnerable species** under Queensland's *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and are protected under Commonwealth legislation via the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*. The Bill's proposal to cull crocodiles from "populated waterways," allow en masse egg harvesting, and introduce trophy hunting is **not grounded in any contemporary ecological research** or conservation principles.

Scientific studies such as the *Queensland Estuarine Crocodile Monitoring Program 2016–2019* and the *Genetic Structure and Connectivity of the Estuarine Crocodile in Queensland 2018–2020* report that crocodiles exhibit high site fidelity, with 90% remaining within 50 km of their birthplace. Culling does not reduce risk, but rather destabilises territorial populations and can increase risk through the influx of unknown individuals.

Recommendation: Reject the Bill in full, as it contradicts national conservation laws and the Queensland Government's own scientific findings.

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2. Embed Traditional Owner leadership in crocodile conservation

The Bill fails to consult or collaborate with First Nations groups. Crocodiles are deeply embedded in the cultural identity, Dreaming, and spiritual law of many First Nations peoples. Indigenous Ranger Programs, such as those completed by **Tunuba Rangers- Darumbal Enterprises**, show how Traditional Owners are already delivering expert management of Sea Country, integrating lore with science.

An important national example is the work of Indigenous rangers in Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory, as highlighted by ABC News (2023). In regions like Maningrida, crocodile conservation is community-driven. Traditional Owners there view crocodiles as kin and spiritual ancestors. One Yolŋu ranger explained, "***We don't see them as dangerous. They're part of our story. They look after us, so we look after them***." Their program tags and monitors crocodiles while educating local children and tourists about living safely on Country. The program has led to reduced incidents and strengthened intergenerational cultural knowledge.

This approach, rooted in tens of thousands of years of co-existence, demonstrates the success of Indigenous-led strategies. These lessons must be embraced across Queensland, where many First Nations groups share deep connections to crocodile habitat and law.

Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements (TUMRAs) and Indigenous Ranger teams demonstrate the ability to lead crocodile monitoring, education, habitat protection, and safety programs. These systems must be expanded and embedded as core pillars of any crocodile management framework.

Recommendation: Co-design crocodile management with First Nations peoples. Fund Indigenous ranger programs to lead safety education, population monitoring, and conflict mitigation on Country.

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3. Expand Be Crocwise and adopt a Tag and Track System

The Bill omits reference to the **Be Crocwise** program, a proven and essential public safety education tool. This mirrors the Queensland SharkSmart campaign, which encourages personal responsibility, situational awareness, and behavioural change.

To improve community safety, CCC recommends the implementation of a **tag-and-track program for estuarine crocodiles**, mirroring the **SharkSmart tagged shark map system** (www.sharksmart.com.au/shark-activity). Tagged crocodiles could be monitored using satellite or acoustic telemetry and their movements displayed on a public-facing map.

This system, as outlined in the **Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021–2025**, enables:

- **Early alerts to authorities and public**: Tagging crocodiles and integrating data into a CrocSmart map would allow local councils, tourism operators, and community members

to receive real-time updates when a crocodile enters high-risk zones, improving safety without resorting to lethal measures (SharkSmart, 2025).

- **Data collection on movement patterns**: As seen in shark monitoring programs, tagging generates valuable ecological data about migratory routes, seasonal hotspots, and breeding behaviours, which can inform both conservation and community planning (Queensland Shark Management Plan, 2021–2025).
- **Targeted risk management in populated areas**: Instead of indiscriminate culling, targeted interventions can be employed when a known crocodile consistently appears in populated zones. This mirrors the "catch-alert drumline" approach used for sharks, where a captured animal triggers GPS alerts for a humane and scientific response.
- **Public transparency and education**: A publicly accessible tracking map, like the one used in the SharkSmart program, would empower Queenslanders to make informed decisions about water safety, and build community trust in conservation-based management practices.

Recommendation: Introduce a CrocSmart tracking and alert system based on SharkSmart methods. Tag high-risk crocodiles and display movements through an accessible online platform.

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4. Conservation-aligned tourism and biodiversity protection

The Livingstone Shire Biodiversity Strategy and CCC's **Destination 2045** submission outline the importance of protecting apex predators for healthy ecosystems. Crocodiles, like sharks, are integral to trophic balance in riverine and estuarine ecosystems.

Crocodiles can also support regenerative tourism, including:

- **Indigenous-led eco-cruises**: Guided tours operated by Traditional Owners offer a culturally safe and ecologically rich way for visitors to engage with crocodile habitat, learn about local lore, and understand the significance of crocodiles in Dreaming stories and Country. This empowers communities and supports truth-telling tourism.
- **Croc-safe cultural education programs**: Programs in schools and tourism precincts can provide immersive education on crocodile behaviour, cultural importance, and Be Crocwise safety. These programs can build on the work done in the Northern Territory by Yolŋu rangers, who have successfully integrated traditional stories and modern conservation techniques into public learning experiences (ABC News, 2023).

- **Citizen science and tracking tourism**: A CrocSmart map system, similar to the SharkSmart initiative, could include opportunities for the public to contribute observations, sightings, or participate in ranger-led tagging and telemetry tours. These experiences would provide authentic engagement with conservation science while deepening public understanding and respect for crocodiles and Country.

Trophy hunting and culling would threaten these emerging industries and Queensland's international reputation.

Recommendation: Support Indigenous-led crocodile tourism, research and citizen science. Oppose any recreational hunting or culling proposals.

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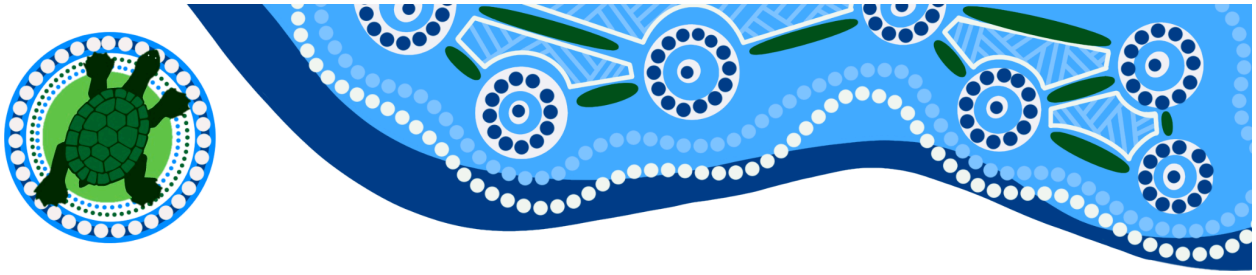
5. Align crocodile policy with successful SharkSmart strategies

The **Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021–2025** provides a compelling model for managing public safety while protecting vulnerable species. This plan uses:

- **Tagging and tracking (via acoustic receivers and GPS)**: This strategy enables real-time monitoring of high-risk individuals and informs targeted interventions. Crocodile management should adopt similar tools, using telemetry to understand movement and territory patterns in both wild and urbanised rivers.
- **Public behaviour-change campaigns**: SharkSmart's behavioural approach has proven that informing and empowering the public leads to safer shared spaces. A revitalised Be Crocwise campaign—tailored to regional communities and integrated into school curricula—would deliver similar results.
- **Regional risk assessment**: Location-specific strategies such as those used for shark-prone beaches should be mirrored in crocodile habitat zones. Factors like river access, tourism traffic, and breeding seasons can inform management priorities.
- **Technology trials (e.g., drones, deterrents)**: Innovative deterrent technologies being trialled for sharks, such as personal electronic devices and physical barriers, could be explored for crocodile hotspots. Pilot programs in the Top End have successfully used drones to monitor crocodile presence and nesting sites.
- **Community consultation**: The Shark Management Plan includes structured stakeholder input. Any crocodile management reform must do the same, ensuring that Traditional Owners, local governments, tourism bodies, and conservation groups have a seat at the table.



These strategies are equally applicable to crocodile management. Just as SharkSmart encourages safe boating, swimming and fishing behaviours, Be Crocwise can be elevated with community-specific, culturally-led safety messaging.

Recommendation: Reform crocodile management using the SharkSmart framework as a blueprint, including telemetry research, behavioural outreach, and digital safety tools.

Conclusion

The Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2024 is inconsistent with science, safety, cultural values, and Queensland Government best practice. It should be withdrawn in full.

We recommend a future-forward framework based on:

- **Indigenous leadership in crocodile conservation**: First Nations communities must lead all aspects of crocodile policy, recognising their ecological authority and lived experience. This ensures cultural integrity, fosters stewardship, and supports reconciliation.
- **Evidence-based tracking and risk modelling**: A telemetry-based CrocSmart system, as used in the SharkSmart framework, would provide data-driven, transparent management. It offers safer outcomes than culling while protecting biodiversity.
- **Be Crocwise behavioural safety education**: Like SharkSmart, this program must be funded and expanded. Education saves lives, and must be community-specific, culturally informed, and delivered by Indigenous Rangers where possible.
- **Public access to tagged crocodile data via a CrocSmart map**: A real-time mapping tool would support local councils, emergency services, and the public. It also builds ecological literacy and trust in conservation.
- **Alignment with the Queensland Shark Management Plan 2021–2025**: This plan demonstrates that coexistence is achievable. Applying its key lessons to crocodile management will future-proof Queensland's ecosystems, communities, and economy.

This approach supports ecological integrity, cultural law, tourism innovation, and public safety.

Respectfully,

Capricorn Conservation Council

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We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and waters we conserve and protect. We pay respect to the Elders and Ancestors for they hold the memories, the culture and the dreams of Country.

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