



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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CROCODILE PROTECTION PLAN

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (10.22 pm): I draw the attention of members to the issue of recent calls for a review of the crocodile protection plan to provide a more effective regime for dealing with crocodiles near populated areas and public facilities. The issue has been given more salience in north Queensland recently with sightings of crocodiles off The Strand in Townsville, a near miss for a tourist at Cape Tribulation and a man being taken by a crocodile in Lakefield National Park.

In my electorate of Hinchinbrook and in many north Queensland and far-north Queensland electorates, the issue of crocodiles near populated areas and public facilities is of considerable concern to the community. The matter has had some coverage in the Herbert River district recently, where the Hinchinbrook Shire Council has called for a review of the crocodile protection plan to allow the professional capture of problem crocodiles near public facilities by accredited crocodile farmers. This follows discussion on the issue at a recent North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, where several councils indicated that they would be supportive of a review to give effect to that proposal.

It is always difficult to settle on a protection plan that conserves the population of native animals and provides adequate protection for the people in the community. It is clear from the large increases in instances where crocodiles and people are coming into close contact and from observations in the wild that crocodile numbers have significantly increased since they became fully protected and they are not endangered. At the same time, a call for the cull of crocodiles is not a desirable management tool for a native animal if an acceptable alternative can be put in place.

What is clear is that the current crocodile protection plan is not an adequate tool for the management of crocodiles that become problematic near populated areas or public facilities. A head-in-the-sand approach from the Beattie government, which refuses to make changes to the provisions of the protection plan on the basis of some misguided notion of conservation, will only result in further close calls and community unrest, which will encourage support for a cull. The government needs to be proactive and put in place measures to deal with this before the situation arises.

The proposal to allow certified crocodile farmers to remove problem crocodiles has merit because they are very experienced in handling crocodiles. They have an advantage over zoos insofar as crocodile farm facilities are often much better equipped to hold crocodiles directly from the wild. Moving from the wild to an artificial enclosure like a zoo is not ideal. Some zoo crocodiles get too big for zoo enclosures and, subsequently, become difficult to manage.

Again I would like to point out that this proposal would be pursued as a sensible approach to managing the interface between people and crocodiles. The current crocodile protection plan is not working. If it fails to protect the public and a tragedy occurs, there will be an increased call for a cull. If the government acts to provide this situation, we can have a positive result for both crocodiles and the wider community.