

# Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ)

## Position Statement

August 2018

### Queensland crocodile management

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#### POSITION - TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND

We request that the Minister put in place a realistic, considered plan for crocodile management in Queensland. Current zoning strategies do not take into consideration the economic impacts - such as damage to the Queensland brand, as well as adding a barrier to travel in some areas with high Tourism use in our coastal areas. This economic impact is a strategic component of the Northern Territory plan.

We acknowledge and agree with current adaptation and mitigation strategies, such as the ongoing opportunity for tourism's contribution to 'croc-wise' messaging for public communications. The nuance of these communications is vital and can easily be misconstrued. Our industry makes great efforts to promote visitation and celebrate our region's attractions. We seek transparency but are concerned at perceptions that reinforce barriers to travel. In addition, we request your support for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to acknowledge and adapt to the threat of crocodiles in specific areas, allowing operators affected to diversify product and offer innovative new experiences that allow safe interaction with the marine environment in coastal areas.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of Environment and Science, Queensland Parks & Wildlife and Traditional Owners to review current crocodile Management and put in place a sustainable, balanced plan.

#### OVERVIEW

The time has come to put in place a realistic, considered plan for crocodile management in Queensland. Heated media, public and online debate, plus unlawful crocodile deaths is divisive and indicates that the current approach is not working for our community.

While we look forward to the release of detailed findings of the Queensland Government's estuarine crocodile population survey, we know that sightings of, and interactions with saltwater crocodiles along our coastline and waterways (including in inland and islands) are increasing. Regardless of average population density statistics, distribution of crocodiles is likely to be aggregated according to habitat and food availability. Recent research in the NT indicates feral animals such as pigs, are increasingly are a food source, with Reef & Rainforest Research Centre flagging a possible change in natural population architecture.

Reports that crocodiles are now apparently being found as far south as the Mary River, only 150km north of Noosa, underscores that this is a Queensland wide issue. Where nodes of high human use overlap, we are concerned at the current, and potentially future impacts to tourism. We recognise that wildlife viewing of crocodiles, particularly in the north, is an important attraction and that nuances of management will differ from place to place.

Tourism contributes an estimated \$3.3B to the TNQ region's economy and Tropical North Queensland is promoted as one of the world's most inspiring nature-based destinations with the Great Barrier Reef, beaches and the Wet Tropics rainforest at the centre of this focus. Our population swells in the Cairns region alone by about 40,000 visitors a day as they explore our natural environment. Tourism is a key economic driver for the whole state with \$25b revenue and employing over 225,000 people.

The Great Barrier Reef has recently been valued at \$56B, much of this associated with brand value. The brand value of "Queensland" as a visitor offering, is therefore likely to reflect its many unique attributes - from World Heritage status rainforest and reef, to its beaches, and range of experiences available to visitors. Enjoyment of our beaches and marine environment is critical to continued tourism growth and to the ongoing power and value of brand Queensland.

A single significant incident will have ramifications not just in the Tropical North, but across Queensland, and is likely to result both in a call for an extreme response, as well having a severe effect on our reputation. The potential impacts are well beyond tourism. Those who were present for the pilots' strike of 1989 will remember it was just as much newsagents and bakers, service stations and shops that were affected as it was hotels and tour operators.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland urges the Queensland government to act swiftly and decisively to review the current approach and put in place a plan for best practice in management. We note that in the Northern Territory, consideration is given to the effects of problem crocodiles "where the activity of the crocodile is affecting the productivity of industry or commercial enterprises" whereas the Queensland plan has no such provision.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of Environment and Science, Queensland Parks & Wildlife and Traditional Owners to review current crocodile Management and put in place a sustainable, balanced plan. Some of the actions that have been tried in the Northern Territory that should be looked at for inclusion are listed below. We ask the State Government to consider these initiatives and their potential Queensland application in the review;

- Impacts on productivity of industry or commercial enterprises in addition to public safety when defining "problem crocodiles"
- Establishment of egg collection and wild harvest policy that ensures economic benefit to landholders and the community for sustainable use of habitat, in particular local indigenous communities.
- Focus on growth of sustainable crocodile farming industry as a key driver for conservation, as well as other opportunities for regional economic benefit
- Consultation with Traditional Owners and employment of Indigenous Rangers
- Greater exclusion zones and intensive removal of crocodiles from highly populated locations
- Investigation and implementation of safe swim zones and safe swim enclosures at popular creeks and beaches
- Investment in research and development of deterrent, repellent and behavioural management techniques to discourage crocodiles from approaching humans

- Cooperation of key agencies such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to acknowledge and adapt to this significant environmental threat, allowing operators affected by crocodile activity to diversify product and offer innovative new experiences that allow safe interaction with the marine environment
- Ongoing investment in population study - particularly in areas of high human use
- Implementation of policy to control introduced species that create an artificial food chain (as indicated by recent results from NT showing pigs as a major food source in some areas)
- Subject to the results of the population survey, work with Federal government for removal of Crocodiles from the Vulnerable Species list
- Immediate investment in an effective signage and education program to minimize community and visitor risk while maintaining positive regional messaging and promoting crocodile tourism attractions.

Queensland needs a balanced management plan that goes beyond public safety and incorporates into the bigger picture a more incentive-driven conservation strategy to achieve economic growth and sustainability. Failing to heed the overwhelming community demand for a realistic plan will lead, in the end, to failure to achieve a sustainable future for crocodiles, residents, and our economy.