

5.5. CROCODILE MANAGEMENT SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION

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DEPARTMENT: CEO Unit

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to support and submit the attached Crocodile Management submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection invited the Councillors of Douglas Shire Council to provide a submission regarding Crocodile Management in the Shire.

BACKGROUND

The Shire has been included in the Cairns Regional Council Saltwater Crocodile Management Plan since its adoption in June 2013.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (the Department) made contact with Douglas Shire Council to arrange a meeting to be held on Wednesday 29 June, 2016 to discuss crocodile management in the Douglas Shire.

Council also extended the invitation to officers from the Mossman Police Station and the operators of the Daintree Ferry, Sirron Enterprises (Qld) Pty Ltd.

The Shire is currently **Zone 3** as per the definition below. The **Zone 2** definition has also been included for comparison.

Zone 3: the objective is to remove crocodiles of concern. A crocodile of concern is a crocodile that:

- has attacked, or is about to attack, or is behaving aggressively towards, a person;
- is determined by the department to pose a potential threat to human safety or wellbeing because of the crocodile's location or behaviour; or
- has passed a crocodile prevention barrier and has attacked, or is about to attack, or is behaving aggressively towards, stock, working dogs or aquaculture fisheries resources.

Zone 2: The objective is to remove any crocodiles two metres (m) or greater in length or a crocodile of any length that displays aggressive behaviour once a sighting is confirmed. At any given point in time, this zone may have undetected large crocodiles in it or large crocodiles that have been sighted but have not yet been removed. This zone has four main types of areas included in it, i.e. open coastal water and their associated beaches, inland water, designated urban areas and around boat ramps. In open coast waters it is not practical to capture animals and the removal technique is generally to encourage their movement out of the zone.

Definitions are provided by the Cairns Regional Council Saltwater Crocodile Management July 2013, Wildlife Conservation, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection <http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/livingwith/pdf/cairns-cmp.pdf>

Further to the workshop held with representatives from the Department, a workshop was held with Councillors on Tuesday 5 July and again on Tuesday 26 July 2016.

The information and discussions from the three workshops has formed the basis of the Council submission regarding Crocodile Management in the Shire.

COMMENT

Crocodiles play a very important role in the Douglas environment and the economy, with many tourists visiting the area to see a 'croc'. However, while it is advantageous for crocodiles to remain in their natural habitat, it is important both residents and visitors are conscious of the potential danger crocodiles pose to both tourists and our local communities.

A number of suggestions in the submission are an expansion on already existing initiatives, including improved education programs and the signage.

The Department has identified surveying of crocodiles as a key priority in its review of crocodile management, to commence in early 2017. The inclusion of identified popular freshwater swimming locations will assist in identifying crocodile numbers and movements.

These popular swimming areas include:

- Shannonvale Causeway.
- Anich's Bridge.
- Spring Creek.

It has also been suggested that should crocodiles be found in the identified areas above they should be removed immediately. This in effect would be similar to a Zone 2 for those identified areas only. This action would assist in maintaining areas within the Shire that are very popular with local residents and visitors as 'croc' free as possible.

As crocodile management is a State responsibility it is important that Council is able to advocate for the communities of Douglas while collaborating with the Department to promote crocodile awareness in the region.

PROPOSAL

That Council resolves to support and submit the attached Crocodile Management submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Council has no budget or resource allocation to undertake any aspect of Crocodile Management which is properly a responsibility of the State Government.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

While crocodile management is the responsibility of the State, Council does have a role as advocate for the community and has mitigated some risk by including 'croc wise' information on the website and developing 'Croc Wise' flyers for distribution at the Daintree Ferry, Mossman Library, Mossman Administration Building and the Port Douglas Customer Service Centre.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Nil

Environmental: Nil

Social: This issue has the potential to become socially divisive. If unchecked the issues could result in community disagreement regarding the future management of crocodiles.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 4 – Engage, Plan, Partner.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Advocate	Supporting communities and groups by advocating for certain actions from other organisations (usually other levels of government)
Facilitator	Bringing people together to develop solutions to problems

CONSULTATION

Internal: Consultation has taken place with Councillors at workshops held on Tuesday 5 July and again on Tuesday 26 July 2016.

External: The Department of Environmental and Heritage Protection
Officers from Queensland Police Service – Mossman
Daintree Ferry Operators

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This was a Department-lead engagement activity. The Department provided opportunity for wider community comment via its web site and also targeted engagement with communities north of the Daintree River.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Letter to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection August 2016.

In previous communications with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection in April 2015 and its officers, Council:

- Requested the development of a 'Service Charter' that states approximate response times and the process of responding to calls from the community.
- Considered that clarification regarding terminology would be beneficial as the communities' interpretation can be significantly different to the true meaning. An example of this is 'crocodiles of concern'.
- Considered it would be valuable to promote the actions taken and the education programs that are in place such as the survey of crocodiles in Dickson Inlet, school visits and community information sessions to improve the communities' confidence in the Department and the crocodile management plan.

At the meeting held with Officers from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection on Wednesday 29 June 2016 and a Councillor workshop held on 7 July 2016, the following were identified as useful actions:

- Signage - A comprehensive audit of signage throughout the Douglas Shire needs to be undertaken. The text on the signage should be reviewed to include the term "saltwater" crocodile along with estuarine. The signage message should be clear to non-English speakers, Suggested inclusions on signage are:
 - Image of a crocodile
 - Universal danger symbol
- Improved education programs – We recommend these be tailored to tourists and to permanent residents as two distinct groups with differing levels of understanding. As discussed on 29 June 2016, a large number of local residents are taking risks in known crocodile areas.
- Survey of popular freshwater creeks – There are a number of freshwater swimming areas that need to be included in the survey areas. These include:
 - The Mossman River from Foxtan Bridge to Anich's Bridge
 - The Mossman River from South Mossman Bridge to Shannonvale Causeway
 - Spring Creek
- The possible installation of barriers in areas of high pedestrian traffic such as immediately adjacent to the north and south Daintree Ferry landings (subject to consultation with the Ferry operator).
- Authorised Local Officers – It has also been suggested that local officers be fully trained in hazing and are then authorised to conduct 'hazing' activities in identified areas.

We have been advised that the 'hazing' that was scheduled concerning a crocodile that is presenting an issue near the Daintree Ferry was not successful due to the crocodile of concern not being present.

Having local officers, trained and authorised to conduct this activity would ensure they are available when the crocodile of concern is present.

Since we met in late June there have been a number of concerns raised regarding crocodiles in public spaces. This includes the pathway along St Crispins Avenue, Port Douglas near the body of water, crocodiles sunning themselves on the lawn of a resident's waterfront property and individuals paddling in the Dickson's Inlet in an inflatable canoe. Local residents are also fishing in close proximity to crocodiles near Cooya Beach.

While we can not control the actions of people who chose to take these risks or ignore the possible implications, we can make every effort to ensure the message is widely distributed and locals and tourist alike are aware of the possible dangers. Our non-English speaking tourists must be catered for with appropriate signage as mentioned above.

To assist with this Council has created a flyer to be distributed at the Daintree Ferry and Council buildings such as the Mossman Administration Building, the Mossman Library and the Port Douglas Customer Service Hub.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the progression of our identified solutions and any alternatives you or Departmental officers may suggest.

Please do not hesitate to contact Kerrie Hawkes at any time on 0740 999 411 or Kerrie.hawkes@douglas.qld.gov.au

Yours faithfully

Councillor Julia Leu
MAYOR
DOUGLAS SHIRE COUNCIL