



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**  
AUSTRALIA

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The Honourable Meaghan Scanlon, Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs; and

The Honourable Mark Furner, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities.

March 31, 2023

**RE: Concerns about reckless behaviour in saltwater crocodile habitat.**

Dear Minister Scanlon,

Humane Society International (HSI) is the world's largest animal protection charity with 10 million supporters worldwide. We have been established in Australia since 1994 where we work to secure a humane and sustainable world for animals.

HSI Australia is writing in relation to the human/crocodile incident that occurred at the Bloomfield River in Queensland on 22/02/23. Alistair MacPhee waded into the river ignoring prominent warnings about the presence of saltwater crocodiles in the form of signage, crocwise messaging and personal warnings from members of the local community. MacPhee was injured and his pet dog was killed by a crocodile. In response, two crocodiles were euthanised by the Department of Environment and Science (DES).

This incident has highlighted the limitations the Nature Conservation Act in relation to reckless behaviour in known crocodile habitat. Section 88 of the Act notes that it is an offence to take or interact with protected wildlife. However, crocodiles may fall though a gap in the legislation as they are an ambush predator, therefore proving a deliberate interaction may be difficult to establish.

HSI Australia recommends reform to the NC Act to create a new offence for reckless human behaviour in crocodile habitat. The new offence would not limit the right to enjoy waterways, but act as a preventative deterrent for reckless behaviours that impact the safety of people and crocodiles. There are similar regulations already in place to deter interactions with protected wildlife such as dingoes on K'gari to mitigate

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the possibility of injuries and fatalities to both wildlife and people. These penalties are strongly enforced and promoted.

Furthermore, we suggest the filming of this reckless behaviour to post on social media be an aggravated offence. As it currently stands, there is a lack of sufficient deterrents in place to discourage people from taking risks in crocodile habitats and social media has rapidly evolved since the last update of the Nature Conservation Act. We recommend an update to the relevant legislation so that the deterrents and penalties are stronger and clearer for future reckless behaviour in crocodile habitat.

HSI Australia seeks a review of the scientific justification for the current DES policy to kill so called 'problem' crocodiles. A review should be held in consultation with various stakeholders including scientists, NGO representatives and traditional owners. HSI is concerned that there is no scientific evidence to support the notion that killing 'problem' crocodiles solves a public safety risk. As DES acknowledges other crocodiles will fill the habitat vacancy that is created. A more appropriate and effective response is to address the human behaviour that increases the risks of negative interactions.

HSI Australia would welcome your response to our recommendations on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Louise Boronyak  
Wildlife Campaigner