



Management Program for Saltwater Crocodile in the NT

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

February 2024

The Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak professional association representing veterinarians in Australia.

Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and quarantine systems while other members work in industry, research, and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

We empower the veterinary profession to thrive by providing a voice, education, community, and support.

Contact details

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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) thanks the Northern Territory Department of Environment Parks and Water Security for seeking consultation on this matter.

While veterinary expertise is being involved in the consultation process through the research and scientific focus group of the crocodile industry group this year, it is noted that unfortunately the AVA was not made aware of this consultation on the *Management Program for the Saltwater Crocodile* at the time it was opened. We would greatly appreciate if notification to key stakeholders, such as the AVA, is provided when consultations are opened, to enable us time to seek input from the subject matter experts within our membership.

The AVA's over-arching recommendation is that consultation with appropriate subject matter experts, including that of the veterinary profession, is undertaken wherever animal welfare is being considered.

The AVA's greatest concern regarding the welfare of crocodiles, is that animals are handled using best practice or best welfare outcomes.

It is requested that AVA guidelines and recommendations, found in the following AVA Policies, are taken into consideration during any consultation process.

Harvesting and culling of native fauna (<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/wild-animals/harvesting-and-culling-of-native-fauna/>)

Guidelines

The following guidelines should be observed for harvesting and culling of native fauna:

1. Harvesting and culling programs for native animals must be based on current scientific data on population dynamics and habitat to ensure maintenance of viable ecosystems and population numbers (see Chee and Wintle (2010) for an approach). Where appropriate, efforts should be made to harvest meat and meat products from culled animals.
2. Programs must be designed and regulated^[1] in a way that will prevent unauthorised harvesting or culling of target species and have minimal effect on non-target species.
3. To avoid adverse effects during live transport of trapped native animals, capture and transport techniques that cause minimal injury and avoid pain and stress must be used and be validated by appropriate studies.
4. Killing methods must be rapid and humane, and carried out by trained, skilled operators.
5. If it is suspected that an animal remains alive after the killing procedure, then every reasonable effort must be made to locate it immediately. The dependent young of killed adult female animals should be humanely destroyed without delay. Harvesting and culling activities should be carried out to avoid circumstances which require the consequential killing of dependent young animals.
6. Where harvested animals are used for human consumption, adherence to relevant carcass processing, packaging, transport and storage and meat



hygiene and inspection protocols is necessary^[2] to ensure public health and product quality.

7. Free-living fauna may harbour diseases transmissible to humans or other animals. Harvesting and culling protocols must be designed to prevent disease transmission.

Farming of native fauna (<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/wild-animals/harvesting-and-culling-of-native-fauna/>)

Guidelines

The following guidelines should be observed for the farming of native fauna:

- Species selected for farming must have behavioural characteristics that allow them to adapt to the farming enterprise.
- When animals are captured from the wild, capture and transport methods must minimise stress, pain and injury and the husbandry methods during the initial period in captivity and the enclosure into which wild-caught animals are first released must be specifically designed to allow the animals to adapt to captivity with minimal risk of stress and injury.
- A concerted effort should be made to overcome deficient areas of knowledge regarding the behaviour, management, healthcare and nutrition of the species, as well as the effect of the farming operation on the animal.
- Operators should be trained in the management and welfare needs of the farmed species.
- Farm managers should work with veterinarians to maximise the health and welfare of their animals.
- Veterinarians servicing native animal farms should acquaint themselves with the husbandry and health needs of the relevant species. They should acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to provide a professional service to such enterprises.

Other recommendations

The design and operation of farming enterprises should be regulated by an appropriate government body to ensure appropriate habitat, feeding, transportation, killing practices and humane management of animals.

Veterinary expertise and adherence to AVA policy is viewed as most pertinent for the following points in this Management Program proposal:

2.4.2.2. Feeding of crocodiles

Crocodiles learn quickly to associate food with boats and the sound of an outboard motor. Electric boats reduce but do not prevent that attraction, and this must be taken into consideration where these types of activities are being managed.



3.2.6 Biosecurity

Permitted crocodile farms must be mandated to develop and implement a site-specific biosecurity plan.

3.3.1. Hunting and Cultural Experience Tourism

The establishment of any hunting enterprises must take animal welfare into prime consideration.

3.5.2. Jumping Crocodiles

Development of a “Code of Practice” must include consultation with veterinary profession expertise.

3.6.2. Social Drivers

Engagement and alignment with the trusted veterinary profession and AVA policies would help contribute to maintaining social licence of programs and enterprises.