



CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2019

# Saltwater Crocodile harvest and trade in Australia

## SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

The Saltwater Crocodile is harvested in the Northern Territory (NT) at the “Top End” of Australia to produce skins that are exported for high-value leather goods trade.

Rural community members, many Aboriginal, are involved in almost all aspects of crocodile harvest and trade, and women are involved in most, if not all aspects. The harvest draws heavily on traditional knowledge in timing of egg harvest, location of crocodile nests and management of habitats.

The NT and other Australian populations were severely depleted by uncontrolled hunting during the 1940s to 1960s, but over roughly five decades since protection, they have recovered under a program of sustainable use and are now assessed as at carrying capacity (see Fig 1).

Harvests of crocodiles from the wild in the NT primarily involves collection of wild eggs; these are incubated with hatchlings reared in captivity.



**SALTWATER CROCODILE**  
*Crocodylus porosus*



**APPENDIX I/II**  
**(AUSTRALIAN POPULATION IN II)**



**LEAST CONCERN**

## LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

The livelihood benefits of the crocodile harvest and trade to rural communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are diverse, significant, and hard to replace.

The economic value of the crocodile farming industry to the NT as a whole has been estimated to be AUD 107,000,000 (approx. USD 74,600,000).

Hundreds of people from rural communities, including many Aboriginal communities, are employed in the harvest and farming of Saltwater Crocodiles. Most of these jobs

are in remote rural areas where other jobs are very scarce.

In addition, in the NT, the owners of land on which eggs are collected (private or Aboriginal traditional owners) receives a payment of AUD 20-40 (approx. USD 14-28) for each egg collected. Over half the current harvest of approx. 60,000 eggs are collected from Aboriginal land, meaning around AUD 750,000 per year (approx. USD 515,000) in income is returned to Aboriginal communities annually from these



Photo: Grahame Webb.

egg payments alone, that is not currently replaceable by any viable alternatives. Further, several Aboriginal ranger groups (which have legal conservation responsibilities) are involved in incubating eggs for sale to farms, generating additional income.

Many Aboriginal groups in the NT have strong cultural and spiritual relationships with crocodiles as a totem, and Saltwater Crocodiles are an important motif in Aboriginal art. Involvement in the crocodile harvest and management builds on and strengthens cultural and traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous people, enabling them to stay “on country” using traditional skills rather than moving to urban areas for jobs.

Further, the involvement of Aboriginal ranger groups in harvest programs has built on and strengthened, community-based wildlife management on Aboriginal lands. Communities also gain opportunities to learn important new skills and knowledge on the species and its management.



## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Saltwater Crocodile populations have steadily increased in the NT under sustainable harvesting (see Fig 1). They are dangerous predators, and regularly kill both people and livestock. Incentives for conservation provided by the wild harvest are a key factor in winning public and political tolerance for re-establishment of a large and healthy wild population. Extensive wetlands are now highly valued and protected by landowners to ensure an annual supply of eggs, and the harvest further motivates control of invasive buffalo, pigs and plants that damage wetland habitats.

## LESSONS LEARNT AND DIRECTIONS

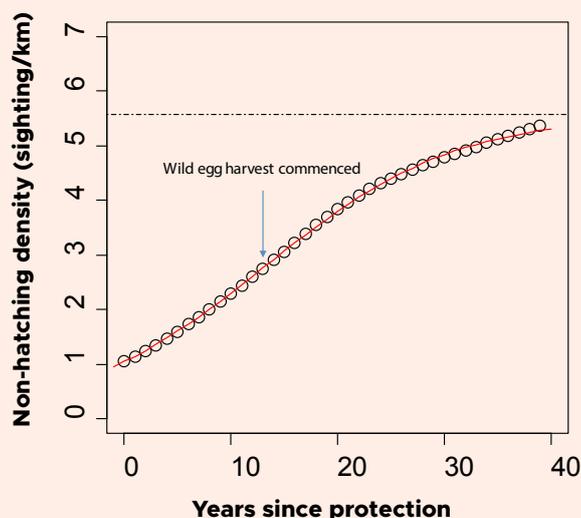
Crocodile harvest has supported extensive livelihood benefits to Aboriginal and other rural communities, while supporting species recovery and habitat conservation.

The program has overcome many challenges over its evolution. Key factors that have made trade in CITES-listed species work here are:

- the strong and cooperative roles played by multiple stakeholders
- strong NT and Commonwealth government oversight and management, including consistent monitoring and support for research
- generation of revenues through good prices for the consistently high quality skins produced by the NT, with equitable benefit-sharing providing clear incentives for conservation of species and habitat
- building of wildlife management capacity in remote, indigenous communities
- sound market strategies to sustain and build the industry that underpins this conservation approach.

A key threat, however, to both wild crocodiles and Aboriginal livelihoods, is recent moves by some actors in the fashion industry to stop using wild crocodilian skins.

**Case study prepared by** Y Fukuda and G Webb. Edited R Cooney.



**Fig 1.** NT Saltwater Crocodile abundance since protection in 1971 and establishment of a sustainable use program in 1983 (reproduced from Fukuda et al. 2011).



Photo: Grahame Webb.

IN COLLABORATION WITH:



The presentation of material in this publication does not imply expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or concerning the delineation of its frontiers or borders. The views of the author(s) do not necessarily reflect those of the CITES Secretariat; the responsibility for the contents rests exclusively with its author.

[www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

@cites

For the full case study see [cites.org/eng/prog/livelihoods](http://cites.org/eng/prog/livelihoods)