

Operational policy

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service & Partnerships Responding to a crocodile attack resulting in a human fatality

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of Environment and Science (DES). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Policy statement

Response to incidents involving crocodiles will be a Department of Environment and Science (DES) priority and will use the most effective and appropriate resources available, regardless of where the incident occurs. The policy and procedures for the management of a response to a fatal crocodile attack as set out in this policy sit outside the DES Departmental Disaster Management Plan. The policy is consistent with the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS).

The response to any incident involving a fatal or suspected fatal attack will be led by the Queensland Police Service (QPS). DES Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service & Partnerships (QPWS&P) will support that response in the manner set out in this policy. For simplicity for the purposes of this operational policy a fatal or suspected fatal attack by a crocodile on a human will be referred to as a fatal crocodile attack.

As the first step to initiating its role of lead agency to a fatal crocodile attack, QPS will ordinarily appoint a police officer to the role of QPS Incident Controller (QPS IC). This officer has overall responsibility for coordination and leadership of the overall response of the incident.

Key objectives of a response to a fatal crocodile attack are:

- if the incident is a suspected fatal crocodile attack initiating a search and rescue function as soon as possible to seek to locate the person who may have been taken by the crocodile (the involved person) with the hope of finding them alive, or to locate and recover their remains.
- if a search and rescue operation does not locate the involved person, to seek to identify and capture any crocodile which is suspected to have been involved in an attack as soon as possible to secure any human remains or other evidence that may confirm that it was involved in an attack.
- to minimise the potential risk of crocodile attack to persons involved in the incident response.
- providing information to family and friends of the involved person and to the media.

Role of DES in the instance of a fatal crocodile attack

DES's role in supporting the QPS IC in meeting the objectives will ordinarily be to provide expert assistance and advice in the following areas:

- providing safety related advice on mitigating risk of crocodile attack to any persons involved in the incident response.
- providing expert advice on crocodile ecology and behaviour, particularly to assist in identifying locations where search and rescue activities might best be focused.
- searching for, identifying and capturing (including through euthanasia if appropriate) any crocodile

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which is suspected to have been involved in the attack for examination.

- arranging for the examination of any crocodile suspected to have been involved in an attack.
- assisting with providing information to family and friends of the involved person and to the media.

Notification of a suspected fatal crocodile attack

As soon as DES has been advised of a suspected or verified fatal attack, the DES officer who receives the advice will notify the Director of Northern Wildlife Operations (DNWO) or Director Southern Wildlife Operations (DSWO) (relevant Director depending on the location of the incident) by telephone.

The DNWO/DSWO or delegate will notify the Executive Director (ED), Wildlife and Threatened Species and Operations (WTSO), Assistant Deputy Director-General (ADG), QPWS&P, or Deputy Director General QPWS&P (DDG), by telephone within one hour of receiving the advice and furnish departmental heads with all known information.

Appointment of DES Incident Controller.

In the case of a suspected fatal crocodile attack, the DNWO/DSWO will appoint a DES Incident Controller as soon as possible after advice of the incident has been received. Until the appointment is made, the relevant Regional Manager Wildlife Operations will be deemed to be the Incident Controller for the purpose of directing DES response activities through the relevant Regional Wildlife Operations personnel.

Acknowledging the lead role the QPS Incident Controller will play in responding to a fatal crocodile attack, the DES Incident Controller will be referred to as the Deputy Incident Controller (Deputy IC). The Deputy IC will engage in regular communication and liaison with the DNWO/DSWO. This will include updates forwarded on an hourly basis or as set by the Deputy IC.

DES Incident Management Team (ITM)

Upon appointment, the Deputy IC will be responsible for organising, co-ordinating and delivering DES's further response which will be documented, if appropriate, in the Forward Response and Control: Roster and Resource Plan and will appoint an Incident Management Team (IMT) which, in their judgement, is appropriate and adequate to effectively respond to the incident, or as directed by the QPS IC. These roles are detailed under the attachment Points for Consideration for the IC/Deputy IC. An important ongoing role of the Deputy IC to estimate the level of risk to public safety after the control/response is put in place as part of risk assessment.

Situation Report (SitReps)

The Deputy IC is responsible for issuing Situation Reports (SitReps) in the standard format. In the case of a fatal crocodile attack, SitReps will be issued three (3) times daily as a minimum to the DNWO. This may change after discussions with DNWO/DSWO. Distribution will be as directed by DNWO/DSWO. The DNWO/DSWO may vary the rate at which SitReps are to be provided by the Deputy IC at any time.

Necropsy Examinations of Crocodiles

Depending on factors such as the remoteness of the capture location, the Deputy IC (in consultation with the QPS IC) should seek to ensure that a suitably experienced veterinarian is made available as soon as possible to undertake an examination of the crocodile or crocodiles which are suspected of containing human remains or other evidence of a fatal crocodile attack. The Deputy IC may also elect to have a suitably experienced wildlife officer conduct a necropsy on such a crocodile, if the prevailing circumstances warrant that approach.

Engagement with Coroner

In the instance of a suspected or confirmed human fatality, the State Coroner may appoint a Coroner to investigate the matter. Where a Coroner is appointed, the Coroner will ordinarily liaise directly with the QPS IC and the Deputy IC and may seek advice and give directions, including how a crocodile or crocodiles suspected of being involved in a human fatality may be dealt with. The Deputy IC will comply with any direction given by the Coroner or the QPS IC in this regard.

Where the Coroner of QPS IC requests an examination or remove the stomach contents of a crocodile, the Deputy IC will make available any DES officer that the Coroner or QPS IC requests to conduct or assist with this process.

Counselling support


The examination of a crocodile which has been involved in a human fatality can be distressing to involved persons, particularly if it results in the discovery and retrieval of human remains.

The Deputy IC will ensure that counselling support is available to such personnel involved in the incident and particularly those involved in the examination or removal of the stomach contents of a crocodile which is suspected of being involved in a human fatality or in the retrieval of human remains.

Approved By

Kirstin Kenyon

10.9.2020



Signature

Date

Executive Director, Wildlife and Threatened Species Operations, Department of Environment and Science

Human Rights Compatibility

The Department of Environment and Science is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the *Human Rights Act 2019*, the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this code of practice, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to Comply with Human Rights Act).

Attachment 1

Points for Consideration for the IC/Deputy IC

Incident Management Team (IMT) roles (AIIMS based)

After consideration of the various risks, the Deputy IC should consider appointing the following roles in the IMT, as required:

- **Planning Officer:** Strategy development, including development and updating of the IRP; forward resources planning and reporting to the Deputy IC and to the broader IMT as is necessary, tracking and monitoring of influences such as weather, tides, resource availability etc. The Planning Officer should ideally be a person with sound mapping skills and extensive experience in managing crocodiles in the wild and/or understanding of crocodile biology and ecology.
- **Communications Officer:** Organisation, co-ordination and supervision of all aspects of operational communications including production and maintenance of an Incident Operations Communications Plan (IOCP), sourcing, provision and maintenance of communication networks and equipment. A key function of this role is to ensure that systems, equipment and services are in place and operating, so that all members of the IMT can communicate effectively, and the Deputy IC can communicate with other key stakeholders. The Communications Officer should ideally be a person with experience in managing communication networks, equipment maintenance and electronics.
- **Operations and Resources Officer:** Organisation, co-ordination and supervision of on-ground crews and associated deployment of resources such as communication devices, boats, vehicles, traps etc., including succession planning, rostering and resource tracking to ensure on-ground capability for the duration of DES's response. The Operations and Resources Officer will communicate with the Planning Officer and Deputy IC to support up-to-date, effective and adaptive response. A key role of the Operations and Resources Officer is to ensure an adequate response while safeguarding the health and welfare of all response participants. The Operations and Resources Officer will ideally be a person with sound rostering, resource planning and plant and equipment management experience as well as experience in managing crocodiles in the wild.
- **Logistics Officer:** Organisation, co-ordination and supervision of the sourcing and deployment of resources, equipment and services to support the IMT, including HR and financial matters, catering, accommodation, and transport and sourcing of essential equipment. Ideally, the Logistics Officer will be a person with a finance, administration and purchasing background.
- **Media Liaison Officer:** Support the DES IC and Queensland Police in communications with the media regarding the response including development of a Media and Stakeholder Communication Plan (MSCP), co-ordinating and/or making media comment etc. The Media Liaison Officer should ideally be a person with extensive media liaison and journalistic experience, and communication planning skills.
- **On-ground Crews:** Under the direction of a Crew Leader, carry out on-ground implementation of the IRP, including regular communication and reporting to the Operations and Resources Officer to support effective and adaptive response. All on-ground crews should comprise DES staff fully trained and accredited in crocodile handling and management.

Key considerations for the Deputy IC for crocodile capture

- Crocodiles have a highly acidic digestive system. Consequently, if human remains are suspected to exist within an animal, it must be secured as quickly as possible, so that it may be subject to examination by a veterinarian or suitable experienced wildlife officer.
- The capture method used for a crocodile which is suspected of containing human remains must take into account the possibility the crocodile being lost in the capture process. The humane shooting of a crocodile on a bank beside deep and/or fast flowing water should be avoided where possible, as even minor movement by the animal may result in it entering the watercourse and not being immediately retrievable. The shooting of crocodile which is suspected of containing human remains must be done in accordance with the Code of practice for the humane treatment of wild and farmed Australian crocodiles.
- A trapping program commenced at the earliest opportunity is a preferred method of capturing a crocodile which is suspected to contain human remains, noting that, on previous occasions, crocodiles which have already taken a human have still been attracted into a trap. However, other means which provide a high level of capture, certainty may be used by the Deputy IC.