

Australia mulls crocodile safari hunts

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An estuarine crocodile better known as the saltwater or saltie, lies in the sun on the banks of the Adelaide river near Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory. Australia is mulling a plan to allow the trophy hunting of saltwater crocodiles, officials said Thursday, with the controversial idea being thrown open for public comment.

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The federal government rejected a similar proposal several years ago on the grounds that it was not appropriate, but has agreed to revisit the issue as croc numbers soar.

Environment Minister Tony Burke said he would not comment until the consultation process, open until July 25, takes its course.

"There are different views among different traditional (Aboriginal land) owners on this and I really want to make sure I get the opportunity to hear those different views," he said.

If approved, it would mean hunters could pay money to kill crocodiles, which the Northern Territory government says will provide jobs for [Aborigines](#) -- with most crocodile habitat on their land -- and stimulate tourism.

"We have been pushing the government to

consider safari hunting for some time as a way to generate indigenous employment and I'm very pleased to see steps taken in this direction," said Northern Territory Chief Minister Paul Henderson.

Under the plan, 50 [saltwater crocodiles](#) will be available for safari hunting for a two-year trial period, taken from the annual sustainable harvest quota of 500 adults already allocated under an existing management programme.

But not everyone is happy, with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) saying it would take precision and skill to kill a crocodile humanely.

"There is no possible conservation benefit to be derived from the killing of crocodiles for trophies, nor does it provide a means of controlling problem crocodiles," said RSPCA Australia chief scientist Bidida Jones.

"This is nothing more than killing animals for entertainment and there is no justification for that."

Northern Territory environment minister Karl Hampton argued that safari hunting of feral animals such as buffalo and pig already existed on private land, and similar strict regulations would apply to crocodiles.

"Just like those safaris, the one proposed as part of our Crocodile Management plan is subject to the Animal Welfare Act and strict humane obligations will apply," Hampton said.

Saltwater [crocodiles](#), which can grow up to seven metres long and weigh more than a tonne, are a common feature of Australia's tropical north and kill an average of two people a year.

They have been protected since the 1970s with their population estimated at over 150,000.

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