

Australia pushes to boost crocodile exports

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The population of Australian crocodiles has swollen since the reptiles were officially protected in 1971, posing dangers for swimmers, boaters and fishermen

Australian officials are looking to increase the export of crocodile products in 2016, after decades of official protection to stop them being hunted to extinction have increased their numbers.

Under a new Saltwater Crocodile Wildlife Trade Management Plan (WTMP), which came into effect at the start of the year, the Northern Territory's government wants to increase the trade in crocodile products, including skins.

"Significantly, the WTMP supports the growth of industry by allowing an annual harvest ceiling of 90,000 viable eggs and 1,200 animals," its Minister for Land Resource Management Minister Willem Westra van Holthe said in a statement.

"This represents a 40 percent increase for eggs and a 100 percent rise for animals over the previous five-year plan limit."

The eggs taken from the wild would be sent to crocodile farms for incubation, while live animals could be used for breeding or the export of skin and other body parts.

The local government hopes to benefit more from the deadly reptile, which is rounded up in the hundreds each year to protect residents.

The reptiles were considered a dangerous pest in the Northern Territory and hunted almost to extinction before being officially protected in 1971.

The population has swollen since then, posing dangers for swimmers, boaters and fishermen.

More than 250 [crocodiles](#) were removed from waterways around Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, last year including a 4.25 metre-long (13.9 feet) male.

"Saltwater crocodiles were removed from many parts of the territory... including Darwin Harbour, the northern suburbs as well as tidal creeks and inlets, meaning they could be anywhere at any time," ranger Tom Nichols said.

The Australian government rejected the idea of crocodile safari hunts in 2014, with Environment Minister Greg Hunt saying they risked "cruel and inhumane" behaviour.

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