Excerpt from the “Kakadu National Park Crocodile Management Strategy 2004” (pages 4 and 5)

**Crocodiles and people in Kakadu**

Both species of Australian crocodile, the estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) and the freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstoni*), live in Kakadu National Park. The estuarine crocodile is most common in tidal wetlands and freshwater bodies associated with sub-coastal plains. Both species occur in the upper freshwater regions of tidal rivers, creeks and billabongs. Estuarine crocodiles are dangerous to humans. Freshwater crocodiles, although generally harmless to humans, can be dangerous, particularly if they are annoyed or interfered with.

Before non-Aboriginal people arrived in this area, Bininj/Mungguy (Aboriginal people) and crocodiles preyed on each other. People understood the risks. Bininj/Mungguy killed problem crocodiles to stop them from attacking people, and they also hunted crocodiles and their eggs for food. Today, Bininj/Mungguy still live in Kakadu and still eat crocodile meat and eggs, but they take far fewer crocodiles and eggs than they did before non-Aboriginal people arrived. This is because there are fewer Bininj/Mungguy than there were in the past, they live in fewer locations and they are not solely reliant on hunting and gathering for food.

Crocodile numbers were reduced in the 1960s by both legal and illegal hunting. Legal hunting was stopped in 1972. The crocodile population grew rapidly in the 1980s then levelled out in the 1990s, however the number of estuarine crocodiles found in upstream areas is still increasing each year. Parks Australia staff estimate that, as at 2004, there are about 6,000 estuarine crocodiles in Kakadu.

Today, about 2,000 people live in Kakadu and about 180,000 people visit the park each year. Many residents and visitors carry out activities near or in waterbodies in which crocodiles occur. Bininj/Mungguy continue their customary hunting and gathering of food in these areas. Other residents and visitors carry out activities including camping, fishing, boating and, in some locations, swimming. Estuarine crocodiles present a risk to people carrying out these activities. The level of risk varies depending on physical features of the area, the time of year, the size and behaviour of crocodiles in the area, the type of people that use the area and the activities they carry out.

Some activities dangerously attract the interest of crocodiles. Such activities include: cleaning fish; leaving offal or food scraps near the water’s edge; camping close to the water’s edge; fishing while standing in the water; getting captured fish by hand from the water; holding fish in the water for some time before releasing them; going very close to crocodiles in boats; feeding crocodiles; annoying crocodiles; boating in unsafe or small craft; adults or children wading and splashing at the water’s edge; and swimming in areas where crocodiles may be.

There have been numerous adverse interactions between crocodiles and people since the park was declared, ranging from crocodiles entering campgrounds to scavenge food waste, to fatal attacks on people. Over the years, Parks Australia developed and
adopted a range of strategies to reduce the risk of crocodile attacks on people in Kakadu, and to respond to any attacks, in consultation with traditional owners and other crocodile management experts.

These strategies were documented and reviewed by park staff following a fatal attack on a visitor at Sandy Billabong in 2002. The review recommended a number of additional measures to further reduce the risk of future crocodile attacks on people in Kakadu, including the need to prepare and seek expert comment on this Crocodile Management Strategy.

**Legal and management framework for managing crocodiles in Kakadu**

Kakadu National Park is a Commonwealth reserve under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Approximately half of Kakadu is Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Land Rights Act) and is owned by Aboriginal Land Trusts on behalf of the traditional Aboriginal owners. The Land Trusts have leased the land to the Director of National Parks. Most of the remaining land in Kakadu is under claim under the Land Rights Act.

The Director of National Parks and the Kakadu Board of Management manage the park, in accordance with the EPBC Act and the management plan for the Park. Day to day management is carried out by Parks Australia (staff within the Department of the Environment and Heritage).

Section 354(1) of the EPBC Act prohibits killing, injuring, taking, trading, keeping or moving a member of a native species except in accordance with a management plan. Each management plan for Kakadu since 1986 has specified that park staff may capture and relocate or destroy problem crocodiles.

The EPBC Act, the Land Rights Act and the lease agreements protect the rights of indigenous people to continue their traditional use of areas and resources in the park for hunting, food gathering, ceremonial and religious purposes. This means that indigenous people have rights under contemporary legislation as well as under traditional Aboriginal law to continue to take crocodiles and their eggs in Kakadu for food and other traditional purposes.

Kakadu has been listed on the World Heritage List for both its natural and cultural values. Australia has obligations under the World Heritage Convention, codified in the EPBC Act, to protect, conserve and present the attributes of the park that are of World Heritage significance. The World Heritage values include animal species of conservation significance, including crocodiles.

Crocodiles are listed as endangered on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This listing placed restrictions on international trade in crocodiles and crocodile products. Consequently, Part 13A of the EPBC Act regulates imports and exports of crocodiles and crocodile products to and from Australia. Within Australia, crocodiles they are protected and managed under Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation. In Commonwealth
areas, including Kakadu, crocodiles have strong legislative protection through being listed as migratory and marine species under Part 13 of the EPBC Act. This strictly limits the circumstances under which crocodiles or their eggs may be taken. In the rest of the Northern Territory, the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2000* provides for the protection of crocodiles and regulates the harvesting of crocodiles and eggs.

This Crocodile Management Strategy must be read in the light of any management plan in force in the park, and can only be implemented to the extent that it is consistent with the plan.