



Speech by

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Hansard 5 December 2001

CROCODILE FARMING

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (7.26 p.m.): I refer to one of our newer tableland industries which is very exciting and which could see the establishment of more jobs for locals in our area. In Mareeba on the Atherton Tableland there is a crocodile farm that was established in 1992. For the first six or seven years a lot of research and development went into this project.

Commercial crocodile farming began in Australia in the 1980s. Currently, 13 farms are situated in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The main products are skins and meat. High-quality handbags, boots, briefcases, belts, garments and luggage are manufactured from the skins. Even ex-President Clinton and President Bush sport boots valued at approximately \$10,000 per pair made from our north Queensland crocodile skins.

The Australian saltwater crocodile is reputed to produce the finest quality skins of all crocodiles. The Australian industry is small in terms of world trade and currently supplies about one per cent of the world crocodile meat and leather market each year. Domestic demand for meat currently exceeds production, and meat from Papua New Guinea is imported each year. Australia has only two species of crocodile—the saltwater or estuarine crocodile, and the freshwater or Johnstone River crocodile. Both are farmed in Australia, with more emphasis placed on the larger saltwater crocodile as its leather is easier to tan and manufacture. The trend for good quality leather products is steadily increasing and demand is forecast to more than double in the next five years.

Crocodile farming is not as demanding as many other agricultural industries and requires only minimal daily attention once established. The Melaleuca Crocodile Farm is situated approximately eight kilometres north-west of the Mareeba township. At present, it is the smallest operating farm in Australia. Currently, the total of 480 saltwater crocs are housed at Melaleuca and it is anticipated that 180 will be turned off in May 2002. However, a plan is in place to turn off 1,000 in 2003. The owner chose to value add and go into processing as well as breeding, and a crocodile processing facility for the production of skins and meat was opened in Mareeba recently. This processing works is only the fifth such facility in Australia and is part of a strategic plan to introduce other growers into the industry.

Crocodiles are turned off at approximately two years of age. A small team of employees process the crocodiles for meat and their skins, and there is little waste. The feet are even used in the form of souvenirs for the tourist industry. Australia faces competition from countries such as Papua New Guinea, Africa, Asia, North America and South America; however, the Australian saltwater crocodile skin is still the most highly prized of all crocodile species. A market is being negotiated at present in China. Because the demand for crocodile products is increasing, there is a bright future ahead for this industry. So next time you smile at a crocodile, just remember that this handsome animal could be your next handbag or pair of boots.
