



NEWS RELEASE

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**SALTWATER CROCODILES IN AUSTRALIA STAGE COMEBACK;
RECLASSIFIED AS THREATENED**

Rebounding from the effects of habitat loss and commercial exploitation, Australia's population of saltwater crocodiles (Crocodylus porosus) is being reclassified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from endangered to threatened, a less restrictive designation under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Protective management strategies by the Australian government are in large part responsible for the crocodile's recovery. The Service said it is also issuing a special rule allowing the importation into this country of skins of these crocodiles as well as Nile crocodiles (Crocodylus niloticus), also listed as threatened, if certain requirements are met.

The saltwater crocodile was listed as endangered throughout its range (except the Papua New Guinea, population which has never been listed) in 1979 because of severe habitat loss and the species' near extirpation due to illegal harvest to supply the international demand for products made from crocodiles.

"The remarkable recovery and reclassification of the saltwater crocodile demonstrates the effectiveness and flexibility of the U.S. Endangered Species Act," said Acting Service Director John Rogers. "Following the initial listing, habitat protection, trade restrictions, and the Australian state and federal governments' aggressive captive-breeding and ranching programs combined to bring back the species."

The reclassification to threatened status and the adoption of a special rule allowing commercial trade under certain conditions does not end trade controls for the species. The saltwater crocodile, along with the Nile crocodile, remains listed as an Appendix II species under the 130-nation conservation treaty, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This category allows commercial trade with appropriate export permits, issued by the country of origin, ensuring that such trade does not deplete wild populations.

The United States and other CITES member nations have been concerned about the commingling of legal and illegal crocodilian skins, especially in intermediary countries (those countries reexporting skins and products). At the ninth meeting of the Conference of Parties, held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in

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November 1994, the CITES member nations adopted a crocodylian skin-tagging resolution. This resolution recommended the use of export tags by countries of origin (range countries) and administrative tracking measures in intermediary countries.

Provisions of the special rule established with this reclassification action are designed to support the tagging and tracking practices in the CITES resolution. Most CITES member nations trading in crocodylian skins and products implement the tagging and tracking practices properly. The special rule establishes procedures to prohibit such trade from any country not in compliance with the resolution.

"By allowing a controlled trade in legally harvested saltwater and Nile crocodile skins, meat, and products, we hope to provide other countries with incentives for conserving the species," Rogers said.

The saltwater crocodile is one of the world's largest reptiles, growing longer than 20 feet and weighing several hundred pounds. It ranges in coastal waters throughout Southeast Asia.