

# Genuine Australian leather

## — a responsible and sustainable choice

### Key points

- As a recycled by-product of the food industry, leather aligns with the societal shift towards meaningful, slow consumption in which we 'take, make, and re-use'.
- Leather is the ultimate performance material delivering longevity, resilience, and beauty.
- Great strides have been made to reduce leather's carbon footprint.
- Consumer confusion exists around the composition of leather alternatives.

### Making better choices

As a society we are being encouraged to make better choices and move away from fast, disposable fashion and consumer goods. Natural leather hides come from animals raised for food. Their hides and skins, which are a valuable, versatile resource, would otherwise be discarded and end up in landfill. This responsible choice converts co-product from the food industry and enables tanners and manufactures to make products we use in everyday life.



**ahslea**

AUSTRALIAN HIDE, SKIN  
& LEATHER EXPORTERS  
ASSOCIATION

# The ultimate natural performer

Genuine leather is made to last and be reused, repaired, refurbished, and even repurposed into other leather items. It is a high-quality durable material comprising of collagen cells of the skin, where the natural ageing process is slowed by the tanning process. Rich in carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen which bacteria and fungi consume, at the end of its life phase, natural leather is biodegradable.

## Natural benefits

- **Beautiful:** its natural aesthetic improves with age and leather manufacturers work to bring out its best qualities.
- **Comfortable:** its breathability allows body temperature to be regulated and it will mould to the wearer.
- **Water-resistant:** leather can be made to absorb water, resist water or be completely waterproof.
- **Long lasting:** well-made leather ages well and lasts a long time.
- **Repairable:** it is easy to repair and maintain.
- **Recyclable:** it can be recycled and repurposed.
- **Versatile:** the raw material can be used to create many different articles or products with a variety of qualities.

## Cleaner technologies and practices

Over the last four decades Australian leather processors have implemented a range of exciting sustainable initiatives to reduce leather's carbon footprint including adopting cleaner tanning technologies and practices.

An example is the significant lowering of the total dissolved solids discharged in the effluent through green processing and processing hides near to the source, so they don't need to be preserved for long. The result – an Australian tannery processing 20,000 tonnes of hides a year now saves more than 7,000 tonnes of salt compared to four decades ago.

Australian leather processors are world leaders in:

- drum technology
- energy consumption
- water usage
- air and noise emissions
- waste treatment
- effluent treatment
- elimination of restricted substances on the [Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals \(ZDHC\) Manufacturing Restricted Substances List](#).



# Consumer confusion around leather alternatives

Recent consumer research has uncovered alarming levels of misinformation around the composition of alternative leathers including so-called ‘vegan leather’, which can potentially be 100% PVC or PU rather than made from ‘all natural’ materials.

Such marketing terms are being used to reassure consumers they are making sustainable choices, when in actual fact many alternatives to leather are synthetic materials which can cause considerable harm to the environment.

## Genuine leather vs synthetic leather

	Genuine leather	Synthetic leather
<b>RAW MATERIAL</b>	Prevents about <b>7.3 million tonnes</b> of hides and skins from ending up in landfill around the world every year.	Is often made from polyurethane (PU) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) - <b><u>the most environmentally damaging of all plastics.</u></b>
<b>CARBON FOOTPRINT</b>	It takes about 16 milligrams of carbon dioxide to make a piece of leather using new technologies.	It takes about 15 milligrams of carbon dioxide to make a piece of synthetic leather.
<b>LIFESPAN</b>	A piece of leather lasts for about eight years on average.	A piece of synthetic leather lasts for about two to three years on average.
<b>CHEMICALS</b>	Tanning agents include chromium, vegetable tannins and alum, which are recovered and reused.	<b><u>PVC production</u></b> uses phthalate and petroleum. The process produces dioxins, which are toxic to humans and animals and remain in the environment.
<b>DECOMPOSITION</b>	Finished leather products can take <b><u>10-50 years to break down</u></b> depending on the environment and how the leather is tanned.	PVC can take up to 500 years to break down.

The Australian Hide Skin & Leather Exporters Association (AHSLEA) is the national membership body representing the interests of the major exporters of Australian cattle and calf hides, sheep and lamb skins, kangaroo skins and goat skins. It is also a member of the International Council of Hides, Skins and Leather Traders Association (ICHSLTA), which promotes, develops and protects the international trade in raw hides, skins and leathers.