

Media Releases 2007

Authorities seize more than 5 tons of abalone, 6 arrested in KZN

Durban, 11 April 2007 - An intensive joint investigation by various government agencies today uncovered a sophisticated network of abalone smuggling in the largest seizure of abalone in KwaZulu-Natal to date. Six suspects, four of whom are foreign nationals, were arrested during an early morning raid on a farm in Camperdown outside Durban.

The investigation, based on intelligence gathered of abalone smuggling in South Africa, uncovered between 5 and 6 tons of dried and wet (shucked) abalone worth between R10 million and R12 million. This is the largest seizure in KwaZulu-Natal as the province is not traditionally known as a prominent destination for abalone smuggling.

The suspects are expected to appear in court later this week.

Investigators from the Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the Directorate of Special Operations (DSO), the South African Revenue Service (SARS), and a Special Task Force of the South African Police Service (SAPS), early this morning raided a farm in Camperdown outside Durban.

As of May 1 this year abalone will be included on the Cites list of protected species. However, the levels of illicit trade in abalone are fast depleting South Africa's marine resources. Abalone is listed under the Prohibited and Restricted Goods List administered in terms of section 113 of the Customs and Excise Act (91 of 1964), and thus permits are required for exporting abalone.

This species may be legally sold by registered commercial fishers and retailers. An operating license from MCM needs to be obtained for this purpose.

Based on research figures of confiscations during 2005, which totalled more than 1.1 million tons, conservative estimates of earnings for smugglers and poachers for that year probably exceeded R1.2 billion. This does not only represent the risk of revenue loss to the fiscus but also comprise convergence of other forms of criminal activity including drug smuggling, money laundering, smuggling, racketeering and human trafficking.

ENDS.

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Publication date: 11 April 2007