



IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY

SMUGGLING OF 31 BALES OF PYTHON AND LIZARD SKINS

The reticulated python and monitor lizard are threatened species (ie. Appendix II) protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to which Singapore is a Party. Under the Singapore's Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act (ESA), the export and import of python and monitor lizard skins must be accompanied by CITES permits from the exporting and importing countries.

2 On 31 October 2004, the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) received information from the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) that 31 bales of illegal reticulated python (*Python reticulatus*) and monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator*) skins were discovered among plywood, on a barge towed by an Indonesian tugboat.

3 The shipment from Jambi, Sumatra, was discovered after ICA officers from the Anti-Smuggling Team at Coastal Command conducted a routine check on the tugboat and barge that was loaded with 544 crates. The crates were declared to contain plywood products. A search of the contents of the crates revealed bales of snake and lizard skins hidden among the plywood products in five of the crates. A total of 31 bales or approximately 40,000 pieces of air-dried python and monitor lizard skins, which did not have the necessary permits, were seized. The contraband is estimated to be worth \$800,000. The skins were to be imported into Singapore for distribution and sale. The captain was charged in court this morning for the illegal import of CITES species. He was fined \$5,000 and sentenced to jail for three months.

4 Since February this year, ICA has referred four major cases involving illegal shipments of CITES species to AVA for investigations. The 4 prosecution cases involved the seizures of a total of 56 metric tonnes of red sandalwood (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) and 6,555 turtle eggs of the marine turtles of the species, Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). In the three cases involving red sandalwood, the offenders were prosecuted and each fined \$2,000. The red sandalwood was repatriated to India, country of origin for the wood. The smuggler of the turtle eggs was fined \$5,000 and jailed for 5 months. So far, a total of 78 illegal wildlife enforcement cases involving smuggling and possession of illegal wildlife (and their parts or products) such as marine turtle eggs, corals, giant clams, seahorses, Asian arowanas, snakes, tarantulas and sandalwood were investigated by AVA this year. Of these, 7 cases were prosecuted, 58 compounded and the remaining 13 were given warnings.

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5 Under the ESA, it is an offence for any person to import and export CITES-protected species without a permit from AVA. Upon conviction, the offence can carry a penalty of a fine of up to \$5,000 (\$10,000 for repeat offences) per species and a jail term of up to 1 year. The illegal specimens would also be forfeited to AVA.

6 In line with the stepped-up security checks carried out at all checkpoints, ICA will continue to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband such as illegal wildlife. ICA would like to advise the public against smuggling unlawful goods into Singapore. AVA would like to remind the members of the public and traders not to purchase or accept illegal wildlife specimens from dubious sources. Under the ESA, anyone who possesses illegally imported CITES specimens, is also liable to be prosecuted and fined up to \$5,000 (\$10,000 for repeat offences) per species and/or jailed up to 1 year. If anyone has information on illegal wildlife trade, please contact AVA immediately at tel: 62270670.

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[FN: Appendix II – Lists species, which are threatened and may be traded commercially with proper permits. Examples of Appendix II species are monkeys, most crocodiles, pythons, agarwood.]

**Jointly Issued by
Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority
Ministry of National Development
and
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