



Key biosecurity role in animal products seizure

Officers from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry played a key role in identifying biosecurity and quarantine risks during a very large multi-agency seizure of illegal wildlife products in Sydney.

The macabre find at a house in Parramatta on 3 August included the full skins of large cat breeds, an assortment of animal skulls of monkeys and possums, a wolf pelt, carved ivory goods and weapons. It was one of the largest wildlife product seizures in Australia and followed detailed monitoring and investigative work by several agencies.

The investigation, code named Operation Bonaparte, was led by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, and it included officers from the Customs and Border Protection Service, the NSW Office of the Environment and Heritage, the NSW Police and the RSPCA. The Sydney-based DAFF Biosecurity officers who assessed biosecurity risks were Jessica Hammond, Catharine Whitney, Bruce Smith and Michael Oldfield.

They were later commended for determining the biosecurity risk from almost 400 illegal wildlife artifacts discovered at the house after a search warrant was issued under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

DAFF Secretary Dr Conall O'Connell said: "Our officers played a key role in the operation by providing advice on quarantine issues, searching for and locating specimens, and handling exhibits posing a quarantine risk. This is one example of how our staff can work with other agencies to meet common objectives."

Australia is one of more than 175 countries that are party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which was established in 1975 to regulate international trade in endangered species or those at risk of endangerment. It is enforceable under Australia's national environment law and helps protect 5000 threatened species of animals and 28,000 species of plants. Penalties for the illegal importation of wildlife include fines of up to \$110,000 and/or up to 10 years in jail.

The unregulated global trade in wildlife products has become a major factor in the decline of many species of animals and plants. It has had a devastating impact on the wild populations of certain plant and animal species, such as the impact of the ivory trade on elephants.