

Hefty sentences for abalone smugglers

The Hawks in the Western Cape have welcomed the hefty sentences imposed on five suspects who operated an illegal abalone enterprise.



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The members of the syndicate were sentenced by the Cape Town High Court on Monday, 19 March 2018.

Steven Phillip Muller, Willie van Rensburg, Gavin Wildschutt, Tony Du Toit and Johannes Liebenberg were found guilty on numerous charges that included the contravention of the Marine Living Resources Act as well as the Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA).

The Hawks' intelligence driven investigation exposed their export companies which were dealing with illegal abalone concealed in containers and shipped to China.

Various plants were raided and abalone worth over R21,000,000 was seized and 18 suspects were arrested and brought to Court.

Wildschutt and Du Toit were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on POCA and other charges such as contravention of the

Marine Living Resources Act 18/1998.

Van Rensburg was sentenced to eight years imprisonment, while Muller was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

Liebenberg was sentenced to one year imprisonment on one count of contravention of the Marine Living Resources Act 8/1998 which was wholly suspended with stringent conditions.

During the court processes, one of the suspects linked to the syndicate died, three absconded and warrants of arrest have been issued.

The other six suspects, who were workers on these entities' plants, entered into plea agreements and were all given suspended sentences while three were found not guilty and released.

Meanwhile, the 17 suspects arrested in Gansbay as part of the clamp down on an abalone syndicate in the province, appeared in the Cape Town Regional Court on Monday and the matter was postponed to the 10 April 2018 for bail application.

The suspects still remain in custody.

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