

# Alleged abalone thief to appear in court

PRETORIA: A Chinese national, who was arrested on Monday, 6 February 2012, after being found in possession of dried abalone, will appear before the Bellville Magistrate's Court today.

According to Cape Town's Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, a total of 5 736 dried abalone as well as various drying processing equipment were confiscated during the biggest abalone bust this year.

Following a tip-off from the public, several officials of the Monitoring, Compliance and Surveillance-division (MCS) of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), the Hawks and Environmental Crime Investigation Unit of SANParks, raided the property in the Bellville-area that was used in its entirety as an illegal processing plant, said the department.

The three partner organisations will continue to investigate the case and they expect more arrests will be made in the near future.

South Africa has indefinitely suspended abalone fishing in its waters, effective from February 2008, as marine authorities take drastic measures to protect the rapidly depleting shellfish species from commercial extinction.

Illegal fishing and increased inward migration of a lobster species that destroy abalone habitat are being blamed for a decline in the shellfish's numbers.

One reason for the decline is the migration of West Coast rock lobster into abalone areas. The rock lobsters consume the sea urchins, which provide shelter to juvenile abalone.

A main cause for the decline, however, has been rampant poaching over the years, as the shellfish is highly coveted and fetches high prices especially in the Far East.

The department thanked the public for their support and reiterated its plea for continued support of all efforts to bring such illegal activities to an end and to bring these criminals to book.

**Reported by:** South African Government News Service

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