



Australian Government
Australian Customs Service

customs media release

Customs wins award for trans-Tasman cooperation - Monday, 25th September 2006

A successful joint operation between Australian Customs and New Zealand wildlife authorities has been recognised with the agencies winning a Trans-Tasman Business Award.

On accepting the award as one of the joint winners in the environmental, social, government and community category from Telstra CEO Sol Trujillo in Sydney today, Customs National Manager Investigations, Richard Janeczko, said the award recognised the effectiveness of international cooperation in attempting to safeguard wildlife.

"Customs work with New Zealand authorities acts as a deterrent to those who may consider flouting the law by distributing and selling protected wildlife products," he said.

The operation uncovered an illegal exportation of 25kg of dried seahorse powder from China that was shipped via Australia to New Zealand earlier this year.

Acting on information supplied by New Zealand Wildlife Enforcement Group (a multi-agency government organisation with representatives from New Zealand Customs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Department of Conservation), Customs executed search and seizure warrants on business premises in Sydney's eastern suburbs and obtained evidence and other restricted products.

This resulted from the initial interception of the powder, which was made in New Zealand by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Inquiries indicated that the seahorse powder, declared as being a plant extract, was imported from China in May and exported within days to New Zealand as part of an import order for use in manufacturing medicines.

The Customs investigation continues and involves overseas inquiries with charges expected to be laid in the near future.

Seahorses, which are listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), are used in the manufacture of various pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines.

The importation and exportation of CITES-listed products without a permit is an offence under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* carrying penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment and fines of \$110,000.

The illegal trade in wildlife is considered to be the third largest illicit market in the world after arms and drugs.

"Customs takes its role of protecting the community and the environment seriously and joint operations with other countries, especially neighbors such as New Zealand, help to make the world a better place," Mr Janeczko said.