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Abalone

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# NAMIBIA A PASSAGE FOR ABALONE SMUGGLERS

Large consignments intercepted at airport

**According to a report, South African abalone fetches up to twice the price of Chinese abalone on Asian markets.**

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Ellanie Smit - Namibia has become a transit route for abalone smuggling from South Africa to China.

According to a 2022 report on wildlife protection and law enforcement in Namibia, the existence of legal abalone farming in Namibia was used as a front for falsified documentation of seized abalone shipments.

According to the report, South African cartels are increasingly smuggling abalone via neighboring countries to stay under the radar.

A large cross-border smuggling operation was uncovered at Warmbad in the south of Namibia in 2022, while large shipments were intercepted at Hosea Kutako International Airport and other customs points in previous years.

"Namibia is now working with counterparts in South Africa to deal a blow to the illegal trade."

The report explained that abalone, a type of mollusc, is uniquely in demand as one of the most expensive types of seafood worldwide.

Numerous abalone species occur in the world's oceans - with South African abalone (*Haliotis midae*) considered one of the best.

According to the report, South African abalone fetches up to twice the price of Chinese abalone on Asian markets.

"China is the leading abalone producer worldwide. A high demand for South African abalone has driven a burgeoning illegal trade network in South Africa, which has decimated the natural stock."

The report noted that legal abalone farming was promoted to supplement natural populations and re-establish a controlled legal trade network.

Legal abalone farming has also been established on a relatively small scale on the southern coast of Namibia as South African abalone do not naturally occur in the cold Benguela Stream.

According to a report by the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network (Traffic) released in 2018, poachers poached at least 96 million abalone from South African coastal waters over 18 years.

According to it, an average of 2,000 tonnes of abalone are taken out by poachers annually – 20 times the legal amount – in an illegal industry that at the time was worth at least US\$60 million a year.

"Outside South Africa, the aquaculture industry in Namibia is the only other legal producer of abalone. However, an analysis of Hong Kong imports strongly suggests that illegal abalone is being smuggled from South Africa through Namibia."

The report indicated that Namibia exported an average of four tonnes of abalone products per year between 2012 and 2016 (except in 2013, when no exports were recorded). The largest part (96%) of the export products were in frozen and/or dried form. No exports of canned abalone were recorded.

According to the report, the most important importing countries/territories during this period were South Africa (accounting for 59% of all Namibia's exports), Hong Kong (20%), China (18%) and Angola (3%).

"However, import figures from Hong Kong alone exceed both Namibia's production and export figures, suggesting that stripped abalone from South Africa may be exported from Namibia or smuggled via Namibia."

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