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Abalone

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# NAMIBIA BECOMES A SMUGGLING ROUTE

Illegally harvested abalone are smuggled to Asia

**According to a report "Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement in Namibia", illegally harvested abalone from South Africa are apparently being washed via Namibia. The seafood species is in high demand in Asian markets. Namibia is trying to counteract smuggling.**

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(Edited by T. Kipke)

Windhoek

Namibia has become a conduit for abalone (sea slug) smuggling from South Africa to China. It is considered one of the most expensive types of seafood in the world. Numerous abalone species are found in the world's oceans, with the South African abalone (*Haliotis midae*), also known as Perlemoen abalone, being one of the best. "This species can be recognized by its large size and the deep, radiating lamellae on its carapace," states the Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement in Namibia report for 2022. The existence of legal abalone farming in Namibia has often been used as an

excuse used for fake documentation of confiscated abalone shipments.

"The illegal abalone trade in South Africa is notorious around the world for its combination of commodity smuggling with drug trafficking, as well as for ruthless cartel operations."

The report states that South African cartels are increasingly smuggling abalone through neighboring countries. In 2022, cross-border smuggling was detected in Warmbad in southern Namibia, while in previous years large shipments were intercepted at Hosea Kutako International Airport and other customs posts.

"Namibia is working closely with its partners in South Africa to counteract the illegal trade."

According to the report, Perlemoen abalone are up to twice as expensive as Chinese abalone in Asian markets. "China is the world's leading abalone producer. The high demand for Perlemoen abalone has led to a burgeoning illegal trade in South Africa, which has

depleted natural stocks.”

The report noted that legal abalone farming was encouraged to replenish natural populations and controlled one restore legal trade. Legal abalone cultivation has also established itself on a relatively small scale on the southern coast of Namibia, as Perlemoen abalone do not occur naturally in the cold Benguela Current.

According to a Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network report, Traffic, released in 2018, poachers in South Africa's coastal waters have stolen at least 96 million abalones over the course of 18 years. It has been said that poachers take an average of 2,000 tons of abalone every year - 20 times the legal amount. The value was then estimated at at least 60 million US dollars per year.

An analysis of Hong Kong imports strongly suggests that illegally harvested abalone from South Africa are laundered via Namibia.