



TRI-STATE RAIDS SEIZE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE PRODUCTS

A joint operation by Australian Customs, the Department of the Environment and Heritage and the Australian Federal Police resulted in one of Australia's largest seizures of endangered wildlife and plant products used in complementary medicines.

Officers raided outlets in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane where they found large quantities of illegal imports derived from endangered species that are prohibited under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Products labelled as containing bear bile, tiger bone, rhinoceros horn and parts from other endangered animals and plants were found during the searches. These species are listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora because unregulated trade is a major threat to their survival.

The operation will have a dramatic impact on the illegal complementary medicines trade.

Following a report by the World Society for the Protection of Animals on the illegal bear bile trade in Australia, a number of outlets had been under surveillance for several months.

Customs focus for the operation was to identify and seize illegally imported products. Part of Customs border and community protection strategy is to work alongside other agencies in a joint law-enforcement approach. The operation was an example of excellent inter-agency cooperation.

In Australia, alternative health is now a \$1.5 billion a year industry. However, the growing popularity of complementary medicines here and overseas has increased demand for endangered wildlife species traditionally used for medicinal purposes.

Since 1999, the Australian Government has seized more than 29,000 illegal wildlife imports and exports, mostly small imports brought in by travellers for personal use. This seizure of commercial quantities, which follows another large seizure in October 2003, sends a clear message that the Australian Government is committed to eliminating the illegal trade in products made from endangered species.