

Press Release: Massive wildlife trafficking across Sulu-Celebes Seas Needs Enforcement and Legal Attention

1 message

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Wed, May 24, 2023 at 9:01 PM

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Press Release: 25th May 2023



Massive wildlife trafficking across Sulu-Celebes Seas Needs Enforcement and Legal Attention

A new report and recent investigations point to high volumes of wild animals being trafficked through the Sulu-Celebes seas shared by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Meanwhile, conservationists and government agencies are teaming up to reverse this alarming trend that threatens the survival of many terrestrial and marine species.

Recent government operations and seizures in the three countries reveal that organized wildlife crime syndicates are trafficking large quantities of sea turtles, sharks, pangolins, wild birds, giant clams and more. Freeland sources point to Indonesia being a major target of the trade, with the Philippines and Malaysia also suffering from global commercial demand of their biodiversity.



Photo Credit: Freeland/ Jo-Anne McArthur, "Illegal Marine Trade"

A new Traffic study reports over 25,000 live animals and over 120,000 tons of wildlife, parts and plants seized from illegal trade in this area between June 2003 and September 2021. These spanned hundreds of species and included marine as well as terrestrial wildlife.

Traffic's examination of online wildlife trade in marine turtles, pangolins and sharks and rays from September to December 2021 echoed found that rays were the taxa most frequently offered for sale online in the area and were documented to be stockpiled or sold through live-streaming sessions. Reports received by Freeland this year show that shark fins, rays and skates are still be traded in unsustainable volumes, with the legal trade masking a large illegal trade. Freeland recommends that the legal trade in sharks, skates and rays be paused, at least until stronger enforcement measures be implemented.



Photo Credit: Freeland, "Illegal Turtle Trade and Seizure"

Traffic's data also revealed a substantial illegal trade in pangolins and live birds, with birds accounting for 96% of all live animals recorded as seized in seaports in the area.

The report highlights the deeply interconnected nature of illegal wildlife trade in this region. It argues that solutions must involve looking at the region as a whole, making the case for much greater inter-agency and transboundary cooperation, particularly when it was reported that these high number of seizures resulted only in a low number of successful convictions.

Freeland has been tracking the cross-border nature of the illegal trade in the region, with government counterparts confirming that a significant amount of the trade in birds, pangolins, shark fins, sea turtles and more heading toward Vietnam and China, pointing to the need for regional counter wildlife crime collaboration.

The study carried out by TRAFFIC was funded mainly by Freeland through a US Department of State- Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs project combating wildlife trafficking in the region called "TRIPOD", and by project partners IFAW and WWF. The report was released on May 25 during a TRIPOD webinar disseminating the tools developed and/or promoted during the project.

The "Targeting Regional Investigations for Policing Opportunities & Development (TRIPOD)" project was implemented from 2021-2023 in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to strengthen the capacities of hundreds of law enforcement officials and other relevant stakeholders.

National Counter-Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC) trainings were delivered by Freeland with a focus on breaking criminal supply chains. In addition, Care for Confiscated Wildlife trainings were delivered by IFAW and WWF, addressing the challenges in the handling and repatriation of seized live wildlife. The project culminated in a regional Special Investigation Group meeting earlier this month in Thailand, to develop a cross-border counter wildlife crime network.

The TRIPOD project will disseminate other helpful tools to law enforcement agencies, including Rapid Reference Guides for Indonesia and Sabah, Malaysia, guidance on handling and caring for confiscated live specimens, the CTOC Marine Manual, an Open Source Intelligence Manual, WildScan, and a sea turtle identification tool called ShellBank.

IFAW also helped form a new Confiscation Advisory Network in the region that will help enforcement officers properly care and repatriate seized animals.

The hotlines listed below are now open for public information on the illegal trade, with over 30 agencies in the three countries trained up to respond.

- Malaysia Hotline:

Sabah Wildlife Department - pa.pengarah@sabah.gov.my

Sabah Forestry Department - +6013 707 2100

Royal Malaysian Police - TikTok: [pdrmwildlifecrimebureau.my](https://www.tiktok.com/@pdrmwildlifecrimebureau.my)

- Indonesia Hotline:

Ministry of Marine Affairs & Fisheries - +62 858 8888 4171, 021-3519070 ext 2833

was.sdk@gmail.com humasdjpsdkp@kkp.go.id

- Philippines Hotline:

+63 91290 92310, wrc@bmb.gov.ph | wrd@bmb.gov.ph

DENR-BMB: +63 2 8925 8952 or +63 2 8925 8953

Other concerns: bmb@bmb.gov.ph

For more information: info@freeland.org



Photo Credit: Freeland/ Kartika Rana, "Illegal Marine Wildlife Seizures"