

AVA crushes 7.9 tonnes of seized ivory worth \$13m



ILLEGAL: The confiscated ivory being destroyed weighed about 7.9 tonnes and was estimated to be worth \$13 million. TNP PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO

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Jun 14, 2016 06:00 am

The noises of heavy machinery crushing 7.9 tonnes of seized ivory drowned out the pouring rain yesterday morning in Tuas.

Officials and reporters alike huddled under the shelter while witnessing the first public destruction of ivory by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA).

Worth about \$13 million, the ivory was compiled from previous confiscations by Singaporean authorities.

Witnessing the event were diplomats from the British High Commission and the US Embassy to Singapore, as well as representatives from Singapore Customs and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority of Singapore.



Official representatives from the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Wildlife Reserves Singapore and wildlife conservation groups were also there.

"The public destruction of ivory sends a strong message that Singapore condemns illegal wildlife trade," said guest-of-honour Desmond Lee, Senior Minister of State for National Development and Home Affairs.

The seized ivory was intercepted by Singapore authorities between January 2014 and last December.



AVA said these shipments of ivory were disguised as coffee berries or even hair wigs, and were intended to arrive in Vietnam and Laos from their original sources in Africa.

BIG STEP FORWARD

After confiscation, ivory tusks and ivory related products such as bangles and ivory cubes were donated to the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum for educational purposes.

The remaining ivory was pulverized by an industrial rock crusher and incinerated at an eco-waste plant yesterday, with the ashes to be used as landfill at Pulau Semakau.

Ms Anbarasi Boopal, the Director of Acres Wildlife Rescue Centre at the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), said yesterday's ivory-crushing by the AVA is a big step forward in deterring the development of the illegal trade.

Stringent measures have also been put in place by the AVA to weed out illegal wildlife trade in Singapore. These include the regulation of trade, routine monitoring of retail outlets and imposing penalties such as jail sentences and fines to deter would-be offenders.

"There is still a need for more measures and educational outreach" Ms Boopalsaid.

Ms Tan Poh Hong, AVA's chief executive officer, urged the public to play a part in putting an end to such illegal trade.

"The public can help reduce demand by not buying such products. When demand falls, poaching will naturally fall too," she said.

"AVA will continue to ensure that regulatory measures against illegal wildlife trade are enforced."

Those with information on the illegal trade can contact AVA on 68052992 or submit their online feedback via its website, www.ava.gov.sg.

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- Ms Tan Poh Hong, AVA's chief executive officer