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CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007

ABALONE

1. The attached document has been submitted by South Africa.
2. The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

On 2 February 2007, (CITES Notification 2007/007) South Africa listed its endemic abalone species *Haliotis midae* in Appendix III of CITES. The listing came into effect on 3 May 2007, 90 days after the notification of the listing. *H. midae* is the only *Haliotis* species listed on CITES.

As this listing occurred intersessionally, this document serves to provide CITES Parties with information on the reasons for the listing, the nature of legal and illegal trade in *H. midae* and information of practical use for compliance officials and CITES Management Authorities.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Abalone is the common name used to describe the genus *Haliotis*. Five species are found off the South African coast: *H. speciosa*, *H. quecketti*, *H. spadicea*; *H. parva* and, *H. midae*. Only *H. midae* is harvested for commercial purposes.

In this document, the name abalone will be used to describe the species endemic to South Africa, *H. midae*.

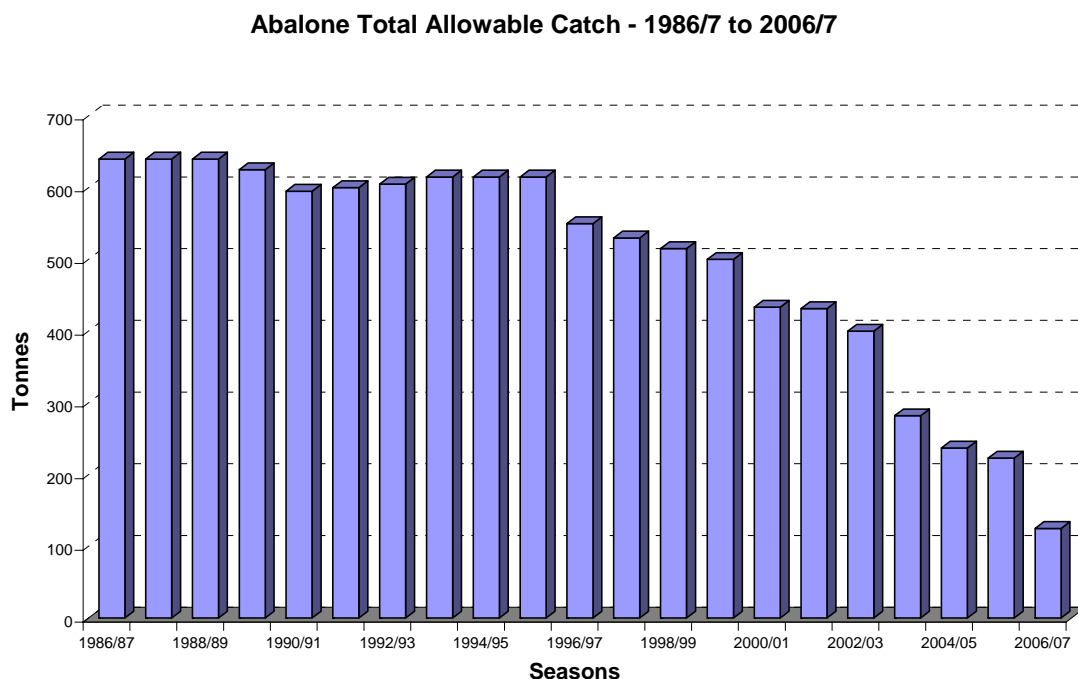
Abalone, also known as perlemoen in South Africa, is found primarily between Cape Columbine and Cape Agulhas on the Southern West coastline, but also extends along the East coast of the country to approximately Port St John's. Abalone is harvested mainly for its meat. Abalone harvesting dates back about 6,000 years but it was not until the late 1960s that the resource began to be over-exploited as a result of demand as a delicacy in East Asian markets. Abalone is also sold as an aphrodisiac and its shells are sought after as ashtrays, soap holders and food platters.

## **LEGAL COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL FISHERIES**

The South African abalone resource has supported both commercial and recreational fisheries since the early 1950s. Abalone fetches the highest price for any seafood product harvested in South Africa and the commercial fishery has provided direct employment opportunities to hundreds of members of coastal communities. During the 2004/05 season, the industry supported approximately 300 holders of commercial fishing rights, not including support staff and their dependents.

The commercial total allowable catch (TAC) for abalone has continued to be reduced over the last 10 years with the TAC for the 2006/2007 season being set at 125 tonnes, which is 20% of the TAC of 615 tonnes for the 1995/96 season. Three of the seven harvesting zones were closed for the 2006/7 season as the resource was considered to be too heavily depleted to sustain continued harvesting. This reduction is primarily due to the effects of illegal poaching on the resource, although environmental changes have also affected two important zones. The TAC for abalone for the period 1986/7 to 2006/7 can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:**



**MARKETS AND TRADED FORMS**

There is very little domestic consumption of abalone in South Africa, with over 95% of the legally harvested catch being exported. The majority of these exports go to Hong Kong, with other importers being China, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan, Province of China.

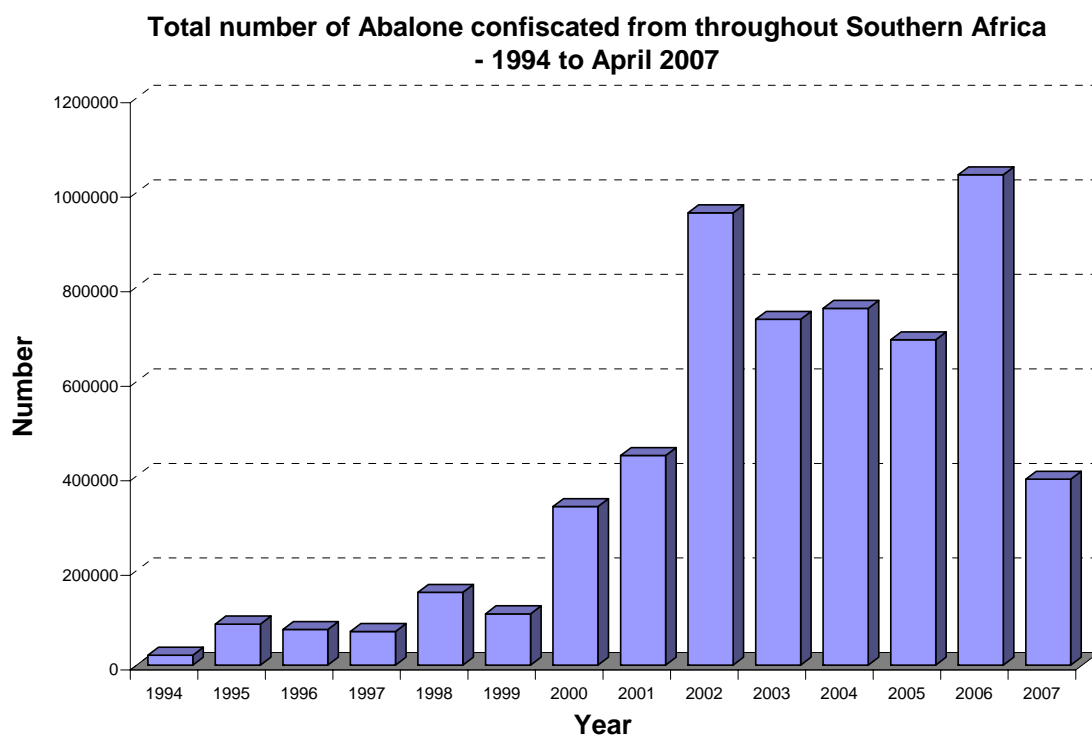
Abalone is traded in live, frozen, canned and dried forms.

**ILLEGAL HARVEST AND TRADE**

In recent years, poaching has severely impacted on the resource with current model projections indicating that at existing poaching levels, the resource can only sustain commercial harvests far below levels those that were possible when poaching started increasing in the early 1990s, prior to the escalation of illegal trade. Poaching of abalone in the past four years has increased to previously unprecedented levels, largely as a result of an inability to adequately patrol the extensive coastline. Trends in 2006 and 2007 indicate that similar levels are being experienced.

Confiscation records for abalone since 1994 demonstrate a more than tenfold increase between 1996 and 2006. In 2006, more than one million abalone were confiscated, the highest figure to date. Confiscation figures for the period 1994 to April 2007 are reflected in Figure 2.

Figure 2:



Records of the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong show large quantities of abalone being imported into Hong Kong from neighbouring countries of Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Poached abalone is also known to be traded through Namibia and this poses enforcement challenges since there is currently one known legal commercial abalone aquaculture operation in Namibia producing and trading in *H.midae*.

The South African abalone species is endemic and legitimate South African exporters have indicated that they do not export abalone, in any form, to other Africa countries. Further, apart from the South African fishery and aquaculture production and the Namibian aquaculture operation, there is no other known legal commercial harvesting or trade in abalone in any African countries.

Thus, it is almost certain that all abalone exported from Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe to Hong Kong was illegally harvested in South Africa and laundered through neighbouring countries.

The majority of illegal trade is in dried and frozen abalone, although there are recorded incidents of illegal trade in canned abalone. There are no recorded incidents of illegal trade in live abalone.

#### **NATIONAL MEASURES TO CURB POACHING AND ILLEGAL HARVEST AND TRADE**

In an attempt to curtail illegal abalone harvesting, a number of joint operations with the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism: Branch Marine and Coastal Management and the South African National Defence Force have been launched over the past few years. These operations have deployed approximately 70 staff members on a 24-hour, seven-day per week basis throughout the year, using high-speed patrol vessels, navy divers, abalone "sniffer" dogs, unmanned aerial vehicles, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

The cost of implementing these additional forces, which include personnel from local law enforcement bodies, nature conservation agencies and the Organised Crime Unit of the SAPS, has been in the region of ZAR20 million (USD3.2 million) per annum.

Other organs of State, such as, South African Revenue Services and South African National Parks have also been involved in tackling illegal harvest and trade.

Along with the CITES Appendix III listing, other compliance measures introduced in previous years include: a consignment-based export permit for all abalone consignments; specific export permits for the mariculture industry; close control over the sale of farmed (undersize) abalone within South Africa's borders; the determination of an annual TAC through a dedicated Scientific Working Group; and, amendments to national legislation to secure greater penalties in terms of fines and imprisonment sentences.

### **COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE**

South Africa recognises that the CITES Appendix III listing of abalone will only be effective if comprehensively implemented in all countries of export, re-export and import. South Africa also recognises that there are many other abalone species in international trade and that implementation of the listing poses challenges to these countries, in particular the key consumer States. South Africa is committed to working proactively with all exporting, re-exporting and importing countries in meeting these challenges.

A comprehensive set of identification and information materials has been developed which South Africa is happy to share with all CITES Parties. Parties are encouraged to contact the South African CITES Management Authority in this regard.