



PRESS RELEASE

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“Customs and the Environment: Protecting our Natural Heritage”

Every year hundreds of millions of plant and animal species worth billions of dollars are traded internationally. As a result of this intense trade and exploitation and the destructive consequences of deforestation and pollution, some of these animals and plants are either extinct or near extinction. If this generation of mankind continues on this devastating path, his selfish desires and sometimes, zealous need for progress will mean a Tomorrow devoid of a habitat filled with the God given plants and animals that we now enjoy.

As a result the World Customs Organization (WCO) and its 174 members, this International Customs Day, are focusing on *“Customs and the Environment: Protecting our Natural Heritage”*. In anticipation of today and as a member of WCO, the Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority (FIRCA), has since last year conducted several operations within its areas of operations. These included Parcel Post, Suva Wharf, Nausori Airport, Airfreight stations and the International section.

Consequently a parcel was received at the Parcel Post from the Australian Customs Service (ACS) who removed two (2) Tabua from a passenger who had not obtained the necessary documents needed to take the tabua out of the country. The tabua were detained by ACS for

breaching CITES* regulations and returned to Fiji. In addition, an operation was organized by the International section that involved a compliance check on a locally owned company that exports 'live rock' used in aquariums, to the United States of America. The company had obtained all the necessary documents and completed them accurately thus two (2) container loads of live rock departed Fiji's shores on Sunday 17th January 2009.

Customs administrations around the world are in an influential position to combat illegal trafficking of endangered plant and animal species listed in the CITES appendices as their primary goal is to protect and manage the border. However we can not shoulder this colossal responsibility on our own. As a result the FIRCA is committed to working with the Department of Environment, the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) and the Fiji Ports Corporation Ltd (FPCL) in ensuring that all in and outbound cargo of CITES listed plant and animal species are covered by the necessary documents because it believes in the need to protect our natural heritage for future generations.

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