

Multi-disciplinary team seizes R15.7m in illegal abalone

NEARLY 100 000 units of illegal abalone worth more than R15.7 million have been confiscated since the start of the year following an intensified operation by a multi-disciplinary team led by the Hawks to clamp down on abalone poaching and smuggling.

The team, including the police and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has made arrests and seized assets including cash.

Since January, authorities have bagged 57 244 units of dried abalone worth more than R10.7m, 26 269 units of wet abalone to the value of R4.1m and 11 201 units of cooked abalone worth R935 500.

Hawks spokesman Lloyd Ramovha said: "Small holding farms seem to be where most of this illegal abalone processing facilities are prevalent.

"We have adopted a zero tolerance stance in protecting our precious marine resources and constant arrests in this

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regard are indicative of our positive inroads in winning the war.

"We would also like to urge members of the public to continue being our eyes and ears as we could achieve more with their involvement."

Illegal abalone poaching has had a devastating effect on local coastal communities, said DA standing committee chairwoman on economic opportunities, tourism and agriculture in the Western Cape legislature, Beverley Schäfer.

Schäfer said the committee held a briefing last week which afforded the DAFF a second chance to present on what was described as a "transnational crime and threat to national security".

"The department holds the responsibility as they are the main custodians and implementing department to combat illegal abalone poaching," Schäfer said.

"For the second time the department gave notice at the very last minute that they would not present themselves to the standing committee, and we have been left with no other option but to issue a summons for the department to appear at a special committee meeting on October 25."

Schäfer said abalone poaching meant the province's coastal communities were being held hostage by gangsters and crime syndicates, and the affected communities "are crying for help".

In the latest incident, two foreign nationals were arrested and charged with contravening sections of the Living Marine Resources Act after more than R4.5m worth of abalone was found in their possession.

The Hawks, the police's K9 unit and

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the DAFF made the arrest on Tuesday in Gordon's Bay.

The two men, a Chinese national, 23,

and a Zimbabwean, 28, were found in a house the Hawks believed was used as an illegal abalone processing facility.

Authorities seized equipment and more than 26 000 units of abalone worth millions of rands.

"We shall continue to dismantle laboratories in intensified endeavours to rid our coastlines of this scourge," Ramovha said.

Last month, the police arrested two men transporting more than R800 000 worth of abalone.

Also last month, harsh sentences were handed down to two Chinese nationals who were sentenced to 18 months imprisonment and fined R500 000 at the Khayelitsha Priority Crimes court for smuggling abalone and cultivating dagga.

They were arrested this year for operating an abalone farm on a small holding on the outskirts of Langebaan.

They were also accused of running a processing facility.

The painful life of Abigail Brookes

The teen who is battling various illnesses is also prone to infection

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FIFTEEN years ago, on August 11, and at 36-and-a-half weeks, Abigail Brookes was born – at Constantiaberg Medidclinic.

But immediately, Abigail, now 15, stopped breathing. The lack of oxygen damaged the bottom right hand side of her brain, impacting on her future learning abilities and health.

She has battled various illnesses since her birth and is still prone to infection almost monthly.

Abigail crawled late, walked late and even talked late due to unknown illnesses.

According to her mother, Barbara, she was a "floppy baby" who required assistance to sit up until she was well over a year old.

Abigail was diagnosed as chronic asthmatic when she was nine months old and was hospitalised with pneumonia every three weeks in her early childhood.

"She had extremely low muscle tone and when she started walking at two years old, she wore splints to aid her walking."

Abigail has been to five different schools because she struggled to find one that suited her needs.

Now she attends Vista Nova Primary school and is in the multi-grade class. She has also struggled with social interaction.

"I always struggled to make friends because they did not understand me and that really hurt me," Abigail said, sitting close to her brother and mother.

Her childhood had been spent trying to determine what was wrong with her.

Three years ago, she was diagnosed with Marfan syndrome.

"Receiving her diagnosis was a relief because for 12 years we left no stone unturned and finally we had some answers. "Finally we could understand what to expect of her and why," Brookes said.

Marfan syndrome is a disorder that affects the connective tissue which holds all the body's cells and organs together.

Because connective tissue is found throughout the body, Marfan affects many different parts of the body, namely the heart, lungs, eyes, skeletal and nervous systems. Abigail's heart has been affected and she has an escalated heart rate.

Her skeletal system has also been affected and, as a result, she suffers from a mild form of scoliosis and flat feet.



LIFE-LONG CONDITION: Abigail Brookes, 15, at home with her parents, Barbara, and Shane. Abigail suffers from Marfan syndrome. PICTURE: DAVID RITCHIE

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SHE HAD SURGERY ON HER FEET IN 2013 TO CORRECT THE FLAT FEET AND IN SO DOING ASSISTED IN THE PREVENTION OF THE WORSENING OF HER SCOLIOSIS

"She had surgery on her feet in 2013 to correct the flat feet and in so doing assist in the prevention of the worsening of her scoliosis. Because of the weak connective

tissue she is prone to bunions and this makes wearing shoes an uncomfortable experience for her."

Her bunions returned and she is now scheduled for surgery on Wednesday to fuse the bones in her feet and, hopefully, prevent the bones from growing skew.

"I am very anxious and relieved about her next operation because she won't have to stress about her feet anymore.

"I have mixed emotions about her journey because I had to battle acceptance, frustration and seeing my daughter go through excruciating pain," said her father, Shane.

He said they often felt hopeless, but said her strength motivated them as parents.

Abigail's lungs are weak and she is prone to chest infection and pneumonia.

She is a shy, sensitive but loving and nurturing child who longs to be carefree and not be restricted.

She has a passion for children and animals and hopes to be either a child minder

or a veterinarian one day, her parents said.

Jamie, Abigail's younger brother, admitted while they often argued, he still became sad when he saw his sister in pain.

Her therapy sessions cost R770 per hour, with an additional psychiatrist's fee of R900 per hour.

Her medical aid savings for the year were depleted in February and, therefore, her parents had to pay for further consultation and medication themselves.

Her medical costs vary from year to year depending on her health, but ranges in the region of R20 000 to R70 000 a year.

Concerts to raise funds for Abigail's continued treatment are organised annually by Ann Siroky and Jillian Alexander, friends of the family who attend the same church.

The next concerts are scheduled for November 9, 11 and 13 at the Artscape.

● For more information, contact Siroky on 072 916 3331, Alexander on 083 715 0676, or Barbara on 074-1977151.

Man missing after swept off rocks near Wilderness

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TWO SIMILAR incidents where men went missing at sea had the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) teams busy at the weekend.

On Saturday morning, a crew from Wilderness responded to a call for assistance from the Oudtshoorn Police Academy after one of its members went missing.

It is believed a group of men were on the rocks at the shoreline below the Oubaai Golf Resort when one man was swept away by a wave.

On their arrival at the scene, the rescue team had started a search in the sea for a 29-year-old man from Gauteng, believed to be a police officer.

It was reported a friend of the victim lost sight of him after he had tried going into the sea to rescue him.

Despite an extensive search, the man is still believed to be missing.

Also over the weekend, a Hermanus crew responded to a call after a 50-year-old Pretoria man was reported to have gone missing at sea.

The man reportedly suffered a mechanical failure and was adrift off the coast of Hermanus.

On arrival on the scene, the man was found safe and a towline was rigged for him to be towed back into the Hermanus harbour without incident. He was reportedly sailing for Richards Bay and was expected to repair his yacht in Hermanus.

Suspects arrested for man's killing

THREE MEN have been arrested in connection with the death of a 24-year-old man in Luka outside Rustenburg, North West police said yesterday.

The three men, aged 68 and 76 and believed to be farmers, allegedly beat the man to death on Thursday, Lieutenant-Colonel Pelonomi Makau said.

The Phokeng stock theft unit attended to a complaint of stock theft at the Mogono section cattle post in Luka near Phokeng, she said.

"On their arrival, they found the 24-year-old deceased still unconscious after being severely beaten lying inside one of the suspects' vehicle with body injuries and his hands tied. He passed away at the clinic."

The three men were allegedly linked to the murder and arrested. They were expected to appear in the Bafokeng Magistrate's Court in Tlhabane today.

Also in North West, a 55-year-old man was killed in an apparent hit-and-run in Kareekuil near Ottosdal, said North West police. A vehicle failed to stop after hitting and instantly killing a pedestrian along the R507 between Delareyville and Ottosdal, near Kareekuil farm. Anyone with details may contact detective Heneck on 079 331 0495. – ANA

Code of silence claims State witness

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She recognised them because she had grown up with them, the court had heard.

Koopman had had a previous case of attempted murder where he was accused of shooting a rival gang member in the face. The case was later withdrawn.

Phillips told the court Theunis arrived at Jacobs's house and threatened her. He allegedly told her not to report anything to police and offered her money in exchange for her silence.

She had refused to stay in witness protection despite the danger she was in.

Phillips said the Ocean View community was so scared of some gang members,

residents refused to give statements to the police.

The community did not want the four men to be released and police reported a notable reduction in gang activity while they were being held in custody.

They were denied bail.

Jacobs's mother, a 51-year-old woman who refused to give her name even after the Cape Argus team assured her it would not be published, said her daughter had run away from witness protection after initially refusing to be placed in the programme.

"She said she did not want to be a victim anymore.

"She did not want to run all her life. She

wanted to be free, and now she is."

Jacobs had been in witness protection for two weeks. There had been several attempts on her life since she told police what she had seen.

But last Monday, her mother said, the hitmen didn't miss.

"I don't know who her killer is. If he had walked past me in the street, I would not know that he had shot my baby."

National Prosecuting Authority spokesman, Eric Ntabazalila, said prosecutors were not in a position to say how Jacobs's death would impact on the State's case against the four accused.

"We will only make that decision by the end of the week."



SHOT: Shireen Jacobs and her daughter, Charlize.