

# NATIVE LIZARDS SAVED FROM ILLEGAL EXPORT

Customs officers in Sydney saved over 50 native animals from being illegally and cruelly exported from Australia.

The reptiles were found inside ten separate postal packages, destined for Japan. The contents had been declared as Australian souvenirs such as t-shirts, books and boomerangs.

Officers at the mail-handling unit at Sydney Airport first became suspicious about the packages.

Investigators established that the packages contained 50 shingleback lizards, one inland bearded dragon and one eastern long-necked turtle. The reptiles were wrapped tightly in socks and towels and ranged in age from juvenile to adult.

Regional Director NSW David Collins said the concealment demonstrated the heartless nature of wildlife smugglers who ignored the health and wellbeing of fauna.

"Wildlife collectors pay high prices for our native wildlife because it is unique, but the reality is that many animals die before reaching overseas," he said.

"Customs takes wildlife crime very seriously and our officers work hard to ensure that Australian wildlife does not end up in the hands of cruel smugglers."

It is a serious offence to take animals from the wild without authority. The maximum penalty for offences under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* is ten years in jail, \$110,000 fine or both.

The reptiles were held at the Veterinary and Quarantine Centre at Taronga Zoo in Sydney while their future was determined.

The community can help Customs to stop illegal wildlife traders in their tracks. Report suspicious activity, such as poachers' equipment and unusual activity in bushland, to the Customs Hotline on 1800 06 1800.

