

# Media Release

**The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP**

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change  
Minister for Solar Homes



**DELIVERING  
FOR ALL VICTORIANS**

Thursday, 7 March 2019

## ILLEGAL REPTILE SMUGGLING SYNDICATE BUSTED IN MELBOURNE

Raids have been carried out across Melbourne this morning busting an illegal reptile smuggling ring attempting to sell Australian lizards on the black market overseas.

More than 150 lizards have been seized since the brazen operation was discovered in June 2018 by Australia Post and Australian Border Force – with a total estimated street value of more than \$550,000.

Minister for Environment Lily D'Ambrosio said the joint operation was one of Australia's biggest investigations into illegal wildlife trafficking – leading to search warrants across the state and multiple arrests.

The smuggling syndicate was attempting to send the wildlife to China and Hong Kong, concealed inside toys, chip containers, powdered chocolate tins, deep-fryers and rice cookers.

Most of the reptiles have already been rehoused to local sanctuaries, schools and zoos. Some will be sent to the Australian Museum to help develop tools to detect these animals being trafficked out of Australia in the future.

Sadly, 12 of the smuggled reptiles died following their ordeal, either from suffocation or trauma.

The three search warrants, carried out this morning in Narre Warren, Oakleigh and Clayton, were the result of a lengthy investigation by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, with the Australian Border Force and the Federal Department of the Environment and Energy.

In the past month, an additional three warrants were executed in Melbourne and Werribee with two people arrested and charged for alleged illegal possession and disposal of protected wildlife.

Under the *Wildlife Act 1975* there are various penalties associated with taking, disposing of or being in possession of protected wildlife, with a maximum penalty of \$38,685 and/or 24 months imprisonment. Under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* the maximum penalty for cruelty is \$40,297.50 and/or 12 months imprisonment.

To report any information, contact Crime Stoppers anonymously by calling 1800 333 000, or online at [crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime](http://crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime).

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Environment Lily D'Ambrosio

*"This is a very disturbing case, where reptiles have been taken from the wild and treated completely inhumanely – all in the pursuit of financial gain by a gang of criminals."*

*"Such sickening abuse of animals will not be tolerated in Victoria and I commend all the agencies involved for detecting this cruel and illegal activity and taking strong action against the perpetrators."*

*"Taking, keeping, and trading unlawfully obtained wildlife is a serious offence and we are calling on the community to help us with any further information that could assist this case or others."*