

# Abalone poacher sentenced to 20 years

The Eastern Cape Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (Hawks) has lauded the 20-year sentence the Port Elizabeth High Court handed down to convicted abalone poacher Morné Blignaut (48) on Wednesday.



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In June 2016, Blignaut was arrested and charged on two counts of racketeering and one count for operating a fishing establishment without a permit. He was arrested with Frederick Nance (22), William Nance (55), Petrus Smith (34), Jacobus Naumann (37) and Marshelle Blignaut (42) by the Hawks' Serious Organised Crime Investigation.

Between 2014 and 2016, the Hawks conducted a project driven investigation, into an abalone syndicate.

"Blignaut and his accomplices were the subject of this project driven investigation dubbed 'Little Rhino'. Investigations established that from the July 2013 to August 2014, the syndicate made a total of R30 million from their criminal activities," said Eastern Cape police spokesperson Captain Anelisa Feni.

Frederick and Nance, Smith, Naumann and Marshelle Blignaut pleaded guilty before the Port Elizabeth High court on the 22 August 2018. They are expected to be sentenced by the Port Elizabeth High Court on Thursday.

Welcoming the sentence, acting Eastern Cape Hawks head Brigadier Gopz Govender, warned that the plundering of abalone would not be taken lightly.

“This sentence should inform would be poachers that they are likely to face a similar imprisonment term after we arrest them,” he said.

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