Hong Kong seizes 7.2 tonnes of ivory

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Customs officers in Hong Kong have seized more than seven tonnes of ivory with an estimated market value of US$9 million, the city's largest bust for three decades

More than seven tonnes of ivory worth over US$9 million was seized in Hong Kong, officials said Thursday, the largest bust of its kind in the city in three decades.

The 7,200 kilogramme (16,000 pound) haul was hidden underneath frozen fish and raised suspicions because of the high transportation fees

listed on the bill of import.

Customs officials in the southern Chinese city said the cargo had come from Malaysia and was believed to have been the work of a major smuggling ring.

Three people—one man and two women—have been arrested in connection with the find, customs official Wan Hing-chuen said, warning there could be more detentions.

Hong Kong is a major hub for ivory import and processing, but launched a landmark bill last month to phase out the trade by 2021.

Critics say the city's authorities are lagging behind mainland China, where officials have pledged to completely ban ivory trading by the end of 2017.

The global trade in elephant ivory, with rare exceptions, has been outlawed since 1989 after populations of the African giants dropped from millions in the mid-20th century to around 600,000 by the end of the 1980s.

There are now believed to be some 415,000, with 30,000 illegally killed each year.

Ivory is highly sought-after in China, where elephant tusks are used in traditional medicine or to make ornaments. Prices for a kilogramme (2.2 pounds) reach as high as $1,100.

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