

# Throw the book at wildlife smugglers

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WHILE the seizures of pangolin scales this year mark an enforcement achievement for the Customs Department, the news has caused anxiety among those who are concerned about wildlife conservation.

These seizures could be just the tip of the iceberg and it is heartbreaking to think about how many pangolins (*pic*) were killed just to get the 8,000kg of scales which were seized by customs officers at the Kota Kinabalu port recently, "Customs yet to decide how to charge smuggler" (*The Star*, Aug 22). It is estimated that 16,000 pangolins were killed to get this amount.

Malaysia and other member states of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) at its 17th meeting last year agreed to include all eight known pangolin species in Appendix I. (The Appendix lists



species threatened with extinction, and commercial trade in such species, including their parts and derivatives, is strictly prohibited.)

The move shows international acknowledgment of the present risk of pangolin extinction.

Malaysia has passed the International Trade in Endangered Species Act 2008 (*Intesa*) to implement the coun-

try's obligation under CITES. Our country has an obligation to enforce the legislation to protect pangolins and all other species listed in the CITES Appendices.

The seizure of the scales is clear evidence of the crime of international wildlife smuggling, thus calling for *Intesa* to be used.

*Intesa*, one of the best wildlife trade laws, is in some aspects actually stricter than provisions

under CITES. The penalties under *Intesa* are high and it does not matter where the pangolin scales originated as the legislation applies to both native and non-native pangolins.

Malaysia has been labelled a transit country for international wildlife smuggling, including pangolins. This is mainly due to its geographical position as it is located near the consuming countries like China and Vietnam.

However, Malaysia has also become a favoured transit point for many wildlife smugglers partly due to our weakness in implementing the laws. So, this is a time to show the international community that we will walk the talk by enforcing *Intesa* and bringing the culprits to court.

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