

Reptile smuggling attempt foiled

Customs officers in Victoria have intercepted an attempt to smuggle five lizards and two snakes into Australia from the Netherlands.

The reptiles were inside a parcel mailed to a suburban post office in the Geelong area.

Customs arranged for the parcel to be taken to a Customs examination facility and X-rayed. The X-ray confirmed it contained a number of live reptiles. The parcel was then returned to the post office to await collection. A man was arrested when he went to the post office to pick up the package.

The parcel was subsequently opened. Inside were found four banana geckos, one leopard gecko and two venomous western diamond rattlesnakes. The lizards, which are not rare, were put down and retained for evidence purposes. The snakes were held for a time by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service pending possible acceptance by a zoo, but were eventually put down.

It was the second such detection in a couple of weeks. An incident in Sydney involved 30 snakes and four iguanas in a package sent from Britain.

Apart from the obvious cruelty of sending live reptiles through the post, people who attempt to smuggle animals into Australia are threatening our country's unique environment because of the risk of introducing exotic diseases to which our native animals have no resistance.

For this reason, under the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Imports and Exports) Act*, it is an offence to import reptiles into Australia without a permit from Environment Australia. The offence carries a penalty of up to \$110,000 and 10 years' jail or both.

A man pleaded guilty in Geelong Magistrates Court and was fined \$1500.

A reptile expert from the Royal Melbourne Zoo examines the lizards.

