

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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ONTARIO FISH DEALER CHARGED WITH LACEY ACT VIOLATION

BUFFALO, N.Y.—U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Jim Ip, a/k/a Muk Leung Ip, 49, of Scarborough, Ontario, was charged by Criminal Complaint with violating the Lacey Act by trafficking in prohibited wildlife. The Lacey Act charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron J. Mango, who is handling the case, stated that according to the Complaint, between May 5, 2011 and July 12, 2011, the defendant arranged for the export, transport, and sale of Giant Snakehead fish from Ontario, Canada to the United States. The Giant Snakehead fish (*Channa micropeltes*) is a predatory freshwater fish that is native to Southeast Asia and can grow to over 3 feet in length. It feeds voraciously, primarily on other fish, but it also eats frogs and other aquatic insects. Giant Snakeheads have sharp teeth, and due to their ability to breath air through their gills, they can live in a variety of lakes and streams. Giant Snakeheads are highly invasive and have the potential to disrupt recreational and commercial fishing in the Great Lakes should they get released into the wild.

According to the Complaint, on July 12, 2011, the defendant sent a shipment containing 26 Giant Snakehead fish from Ontario to Amherst to a Special Agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who was working in an undercover capacity. The Complaint further states that on December 4, 2011, the defendant sold 154 Giant Snakehead fish to the undercover agent, knowing that the fish were to be smuggled into the United States.

“Some species of wildlife – such as the Giant Snakehead in this case – can be dangerous to the indigenous life forms and ecosystems we have here in Western New York,” said U.S. Attorney Hochul. “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – working with our Office - serves the important role of protecting what is best about our area, while simultaneously defending the area’s recreational and commercial fishing industries.”

The Criminal Complaint is the culmination of an investigation on the part of Special Agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under the direction Sal Amato, Special Agent-in-Charge, Environmental Conservation Officers of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation under the direction of Acting Captain Frank Lauricella, and officers from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Canada.

The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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