

## **Illegal Fish Imports Bring Indictment July 26, 2002**

**Release from:**

**PORTLAND, Oregon, July 26, 2002 (ENS)**

A California man has been indicted for importing endangered Asian fish into Oregon. Lloyd Gomez is scheduled to face trial this September on charges related to the illegal import and sale of Asian arowana, a unique, colorful fish native to Malaysia and Indonesia. The fish, which can sell for as much as \$10,000 each, is listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The trial was scheduled after Gomez, 25, pleaded not guilty on July 19, before U.S. District Judge Dennis Hubel. A federal indictment alleges that Gomez and Joe Lian Ho Luah of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, conspired to import and sell the endangered fish, illegally transported them into the United States in violation of the Endangered Species Act, and falsified documents in an attempt to pass through U.S. Customs.

The men also face one count of wire fraud, which charges them with using the Internet to communicate illegal activities via email. Gomez faces an additional charge of making false statements to law enforcement officials.

Each of the charges carries a maximum penalty of \$250,000 and/or five years imprisonment. Gomez is free on personal recognizance pending trial, while Luah remains in Canada.

The indictment alleges that Luah established a tropical fish business called Emperor Pond in Canada, where it is legal to import and sell captive bred Asian arowana, and used that business to smuggle the fish to Gomez for illegal sale to customers in the United States. The indictment charges that Luah consigned a shipment of 11 Asian arowana to Gomez on September 9, 2001, from Edmonton, Alberta to Portland, Oregon, and falsely identified them as cichlids, tropical fish that are legal to import.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents determined that the fish were Asian arowana, popular among aquarium hobbyists because of their vibrant colors and unique shape. The fish has large scales and barbels, which resemble horns, giving them the nickname "dragonfish." Asian arowana are believed to symbolize luck, wealth, prosperity and strength.

Wild populations of Asian arowana have declined, causing them to be listed as an Appendix I species under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Trading of the wild fish is illegal. However, 23 CITES registered breeding facilities in Asia are producing fish that can be exported for sale. These fish are legal to export to Canada and elsewhere, but not to the United States, where they are protected and the importation of either captive bred or wild Asian arowana is prohibited.

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