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# Live fish shipment busted in Palawan airport

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PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Philippines -- City enforcement authorities intercepted Monday an illegal shipment of 71 pieces of live red grouper fish at the Puerto Princesa International Airport.

Mayor Edward Hagedorn has suspended three personnel of the city government's Bantay Dagat tasked with monitoring illegal fishing activities, on suspicion of connivance with the trader, and cancelled the business permit of fish trader Manny Capinig, the cargo's registered owner.

Hagedorn also called for an investigation into the possible connivance of airport and airline personnel who were involved in handling the cargo.

"What if instead of live fish, the shipper smuggles liquid bomb? The security of PAL and airport officials is very lax and it is a major cause for concern," he told the Philippine Daily Inquirer, parent company of INQUIRER.net.

The pieces of live red grouper, estimated to cost over P200,000 in Manila, were stashed in three boxes mixed among a legal cargo of fresh dead fish.

Hagedorn also ordered the immediate release of the red groupers at the Puerto Princesa Bay.

Puerto Princesa City has imposed a total ban on live fish trading, although the practice is allowed in other parts of the province, particularly in Coron, northern Palawan which is currently the main transshipment area for live fish trading in Palawan.

Puerto's live fish ban is related to the phenomenon of cyanide fishing which is commonly practiced by illegal fishermen to catch live groupers.

Cyanide poisoning is a major cause of coral reef destruction.

Palawan's live fish industry is worth P1.2 billion annually, according to the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) that issues accreditation to live fish shippers.

Palawan supplies the bulk of the country's live fish exports to Hong Kong, Indonesia and Malaysia.

PCSD records showed that in 2005, the Philippine exported 1.7 million metric tons of live fish to the international markets.

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