

'Pressure' may have led to export of huge cycad collection from SA

By Jane Conyngham

PROGRESSIVE Federal Party environmental spokesman Rupert Lorimer — who is conducting investigations into cycad deals — said this week he had information that pressure was put on the Cape Nature Conservation Department "at the highest level" to issue a permit to Johannesburg businessman Joe Berardo for a shipment of 698 cycads to Madeira last year.

Mr Lorimer intends asking further questions in Parliament about why the Cape Nature Conser-

vation Department allowed the huge consignment of full-grown cycads to be shipped out in "blatant contravention" of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Madeiran-born Mr Berardo, chairman of Johannesburg Mining and Finance Corporation, and a National Party supporter, bought the cycads from the Berendt family in East London because, he said, he wished to donate them to the Madeira Botanical Gardens.

Last week the Sunday Tribune reported that two

large consignments of cycads — one to Nice, in France, in 1986, and the other to Madeira last August — were shipped from Durban.

Mr Lorimer is investigating information that the shipment to France might have been connected with attempts to promote a French rugby tour to South Africa.

In terms of the CITES agreement, signed by South Africa in 1975, cycads may not be exported unless they are nursery-grown seedlings or form part of a cultural exchange between two botanical institutions.

Dr Johan van Zyl, deputy director of the Cape Nature Conservation Department, said a permit granted for the shipments because the plants were legally collected before all South African cycads were classified as endangered.

Meanwhile, Trevor Berendt, the East London nurseryman named as the seller of the cycads to Mr Berardo, said this week the cycads were sold by his sons, GA Berendt and PD Berendt, and that the price was considerably less than the R452 000 stated by Mr Lorimer.

Explanation over cycads accepted

By JANE CONYNGHAM

PROGRESSIVE Federal Party MP Rupert Lorimer, investigating illegal cycad dealing, met Department of Foreign Affairs officials this week over a consignment of South African cycads shipped to Nice in 1986.

Mr Lorimer said after the meeting he was "totally satisfied" that while the Department of Foreign Affairs had supported the export of cycads to Jean-Pierre Selavo of Nice, they had done so in good

faith "and did not exert any undue pressure for the deal to go ahead".

Mr Lorimer said he would continue investigations into why provincial nature departments issued permits for overseas cycad deals when these had contravened the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species.

Mr Lorimer is also investigating illegal rhino horn smuggling from South Africa to the Far East. He expects a breakthrough "any time now".

NPB's numbers

Pietermaritzburg Bureau
THE Natal Parks Board reminds that the telephone numbers at the NPB head office in Pietermaritzburg have changed.

The number for general inquiries is now (0331) 471961 and the reservations office 471981.

BY GEORGE!



"Oh, I picked it up at the florist — they've got a bargain lot in from Madeira."

Nutty con trick wins forgiveness

Crime Reporter

A CHRISTMAS conman found to his relief yesterday that even security officers have the festive spirit. The con artist hacked a cone of cycad seeds from the Durban City Hall gardens and tried to sell them as hazel-nuts to holiday-makers.

He was spotted by a member of the Durban Corporation security section while trying to convince a woman, his first customer, that the "hazel-nuts" were absolutely fresh. When the security officer approached, the woman — a foreigner — wanted to know why the nuts tasted so bitter.

"We arrested the man but later decided to release him because it is the festive season and it is a time to forgive and forget," said the officer.