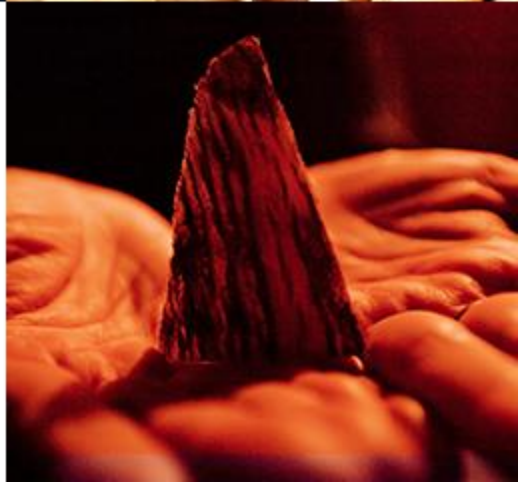


# POACHING AND TRADE IN SOUTH AFRICAN ABALONE

*Markus Burgener – Programme Coordinator*



**TRAFFIC**  
the wildlife trade monitoring network







**TRAFFIC**

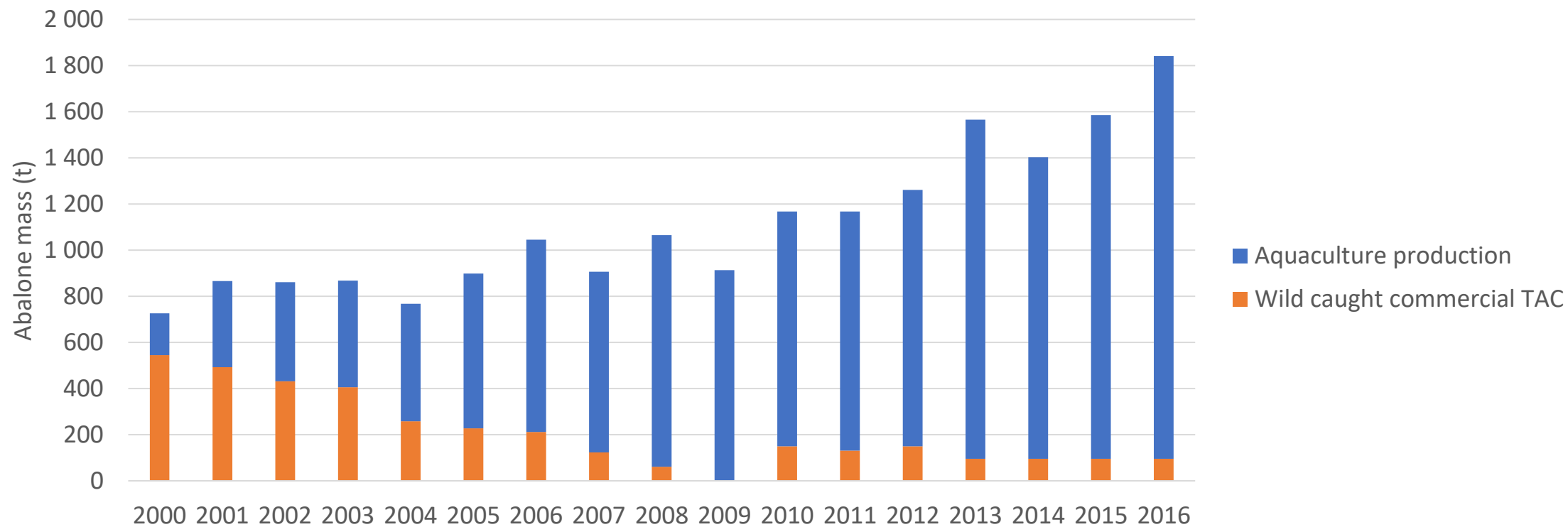


## Legal fishery and abalone farming



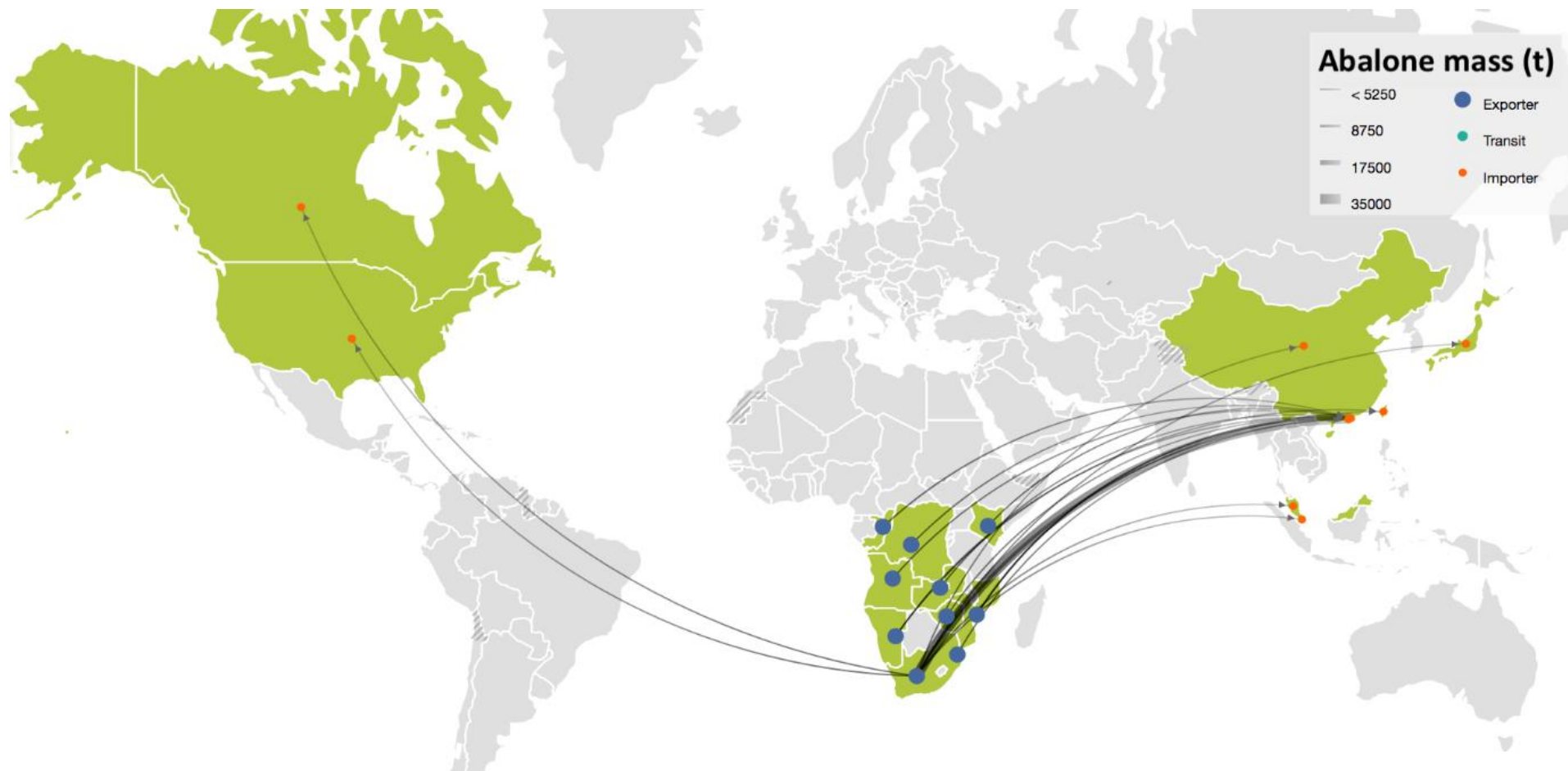


## The legal production of *H. midae* in South Africa, from aquaculture and the wild-caught commercial fishery, 2000–2016





Imports of all  
forms of *H. midae*  
from sub-Saharan  
Africa as reported  
by all importing  
countries, 2000 –  
2016







# Abalone poaching and illegal trade

- South African abalone (*Haliotis midae*) is an endemic species – only occurs in South Africa. A high value product, easy to access and found along an extensive area of the South African coastline.
- Syndicated Asian criminal networks are involved with links to drug trade, South African gangs, tax evasion, corruption and money laundering
- Coastal communities are characterised by poverty, unemployment and high levels of crime. Involvement in illegal harvest and trade is almost institutionalised in many of these communities. Illegal trade is causing terrible social problems within coastal communities.
- Massive loss of revenue to South Africa – unknown, but estimates of value of illegally traded abalone range from ZAR500 million to ZAR1 billion (USD 60 -120 million) per annum.



# EMPTY SHELLS

INSIDE THE ILLEGAL ABALONE TRADE

## MARINE MOLLUSC

South African Abalone *Haliotis midae* is a highly sought-after endemic marine mollusc harvested both legally and illegally



**96 MILLION**

are estimated to have been poached since 2000 with 90% of legal and illegal exports destined for **Hong Kong SAR**



**ZAR628 MILLION**

is the annual average value of poached abalone, equivalent to approximately USD60 million



**1 SEIZURE A DAY**

involving abalone was made on average by South African law enforcement since 2000



**CRYSTAL METH**

is regularly used as currency by **Chinese criminal syndicates** to pay local poachers

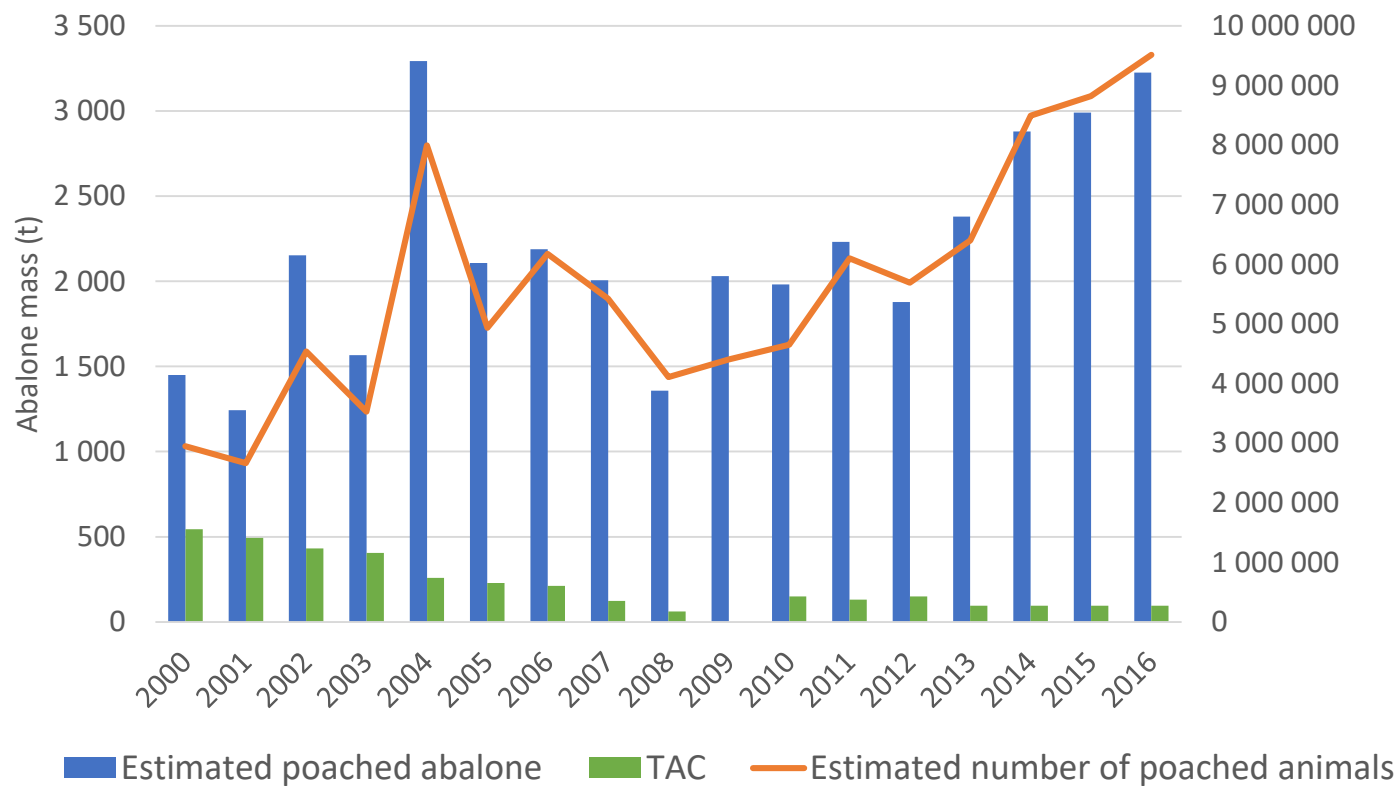


**50% OF ILLEGAL HARVEST**

is being exported through neighbouring African nations

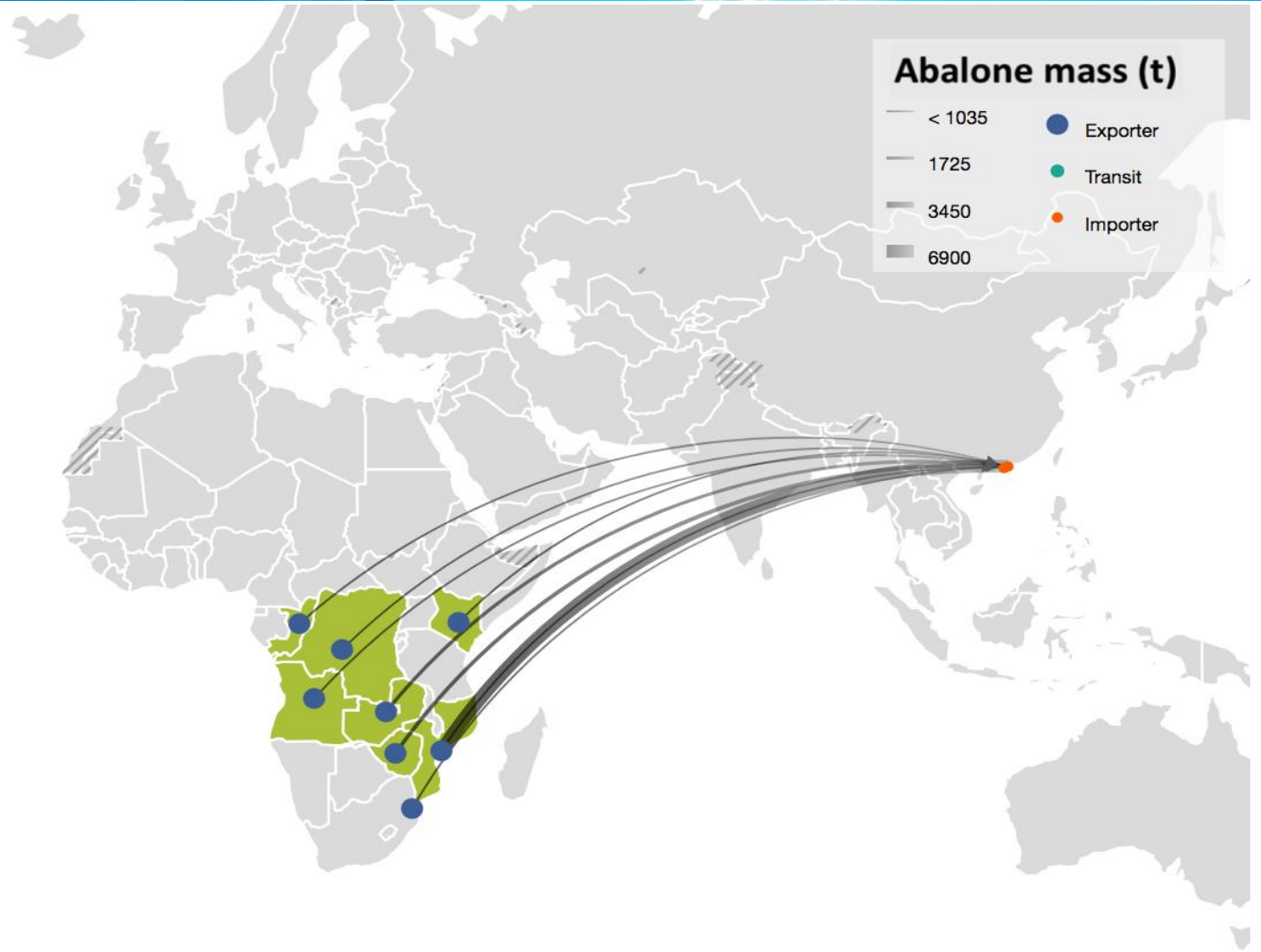


## Estimated poaching levels: South African abalone





Imports of dried *H. midae* from sub-Saharan Africa as reported by all importing countries from non abalone producing countries, 2000 – 2016

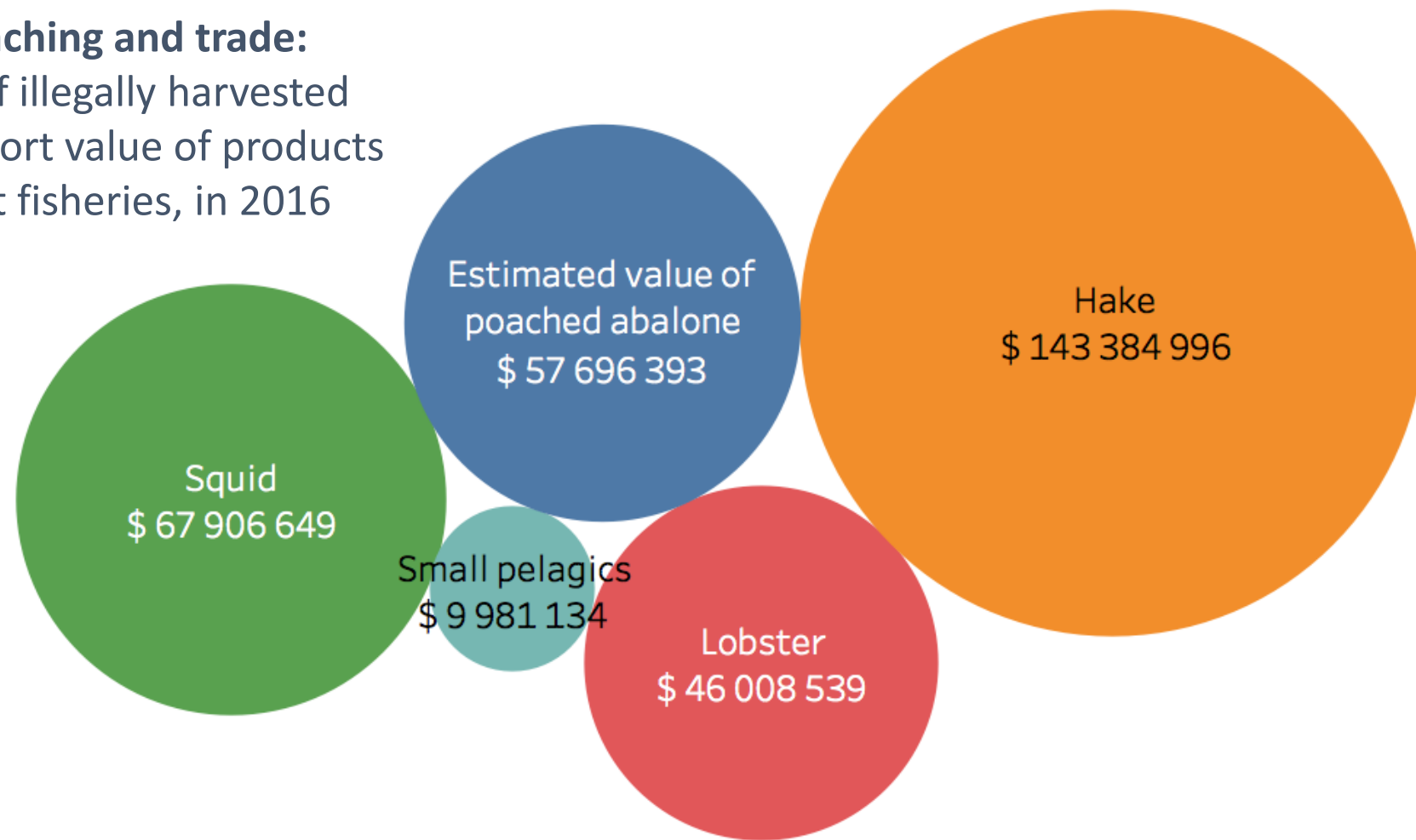






## Determining the value of poaching and trade:

The estimated import value of illegally harvested abalone compared to the import value of products from South Africa's top export fisheries, in 2016





# EVENTS AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS TIMELINE

potentially impacting on the trade in abalone, 1970–present



**1945**

commercial abalone fishery opens



**1985**

recreational abalone fishery institutes closed season

**1998**

**Operation Neptune instituted**

a multi-agency operation with the intention of combating illegal abalone catch and trade



**2004**

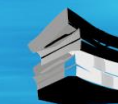
**Operation Trident**

Operation Neptune is closed and replaced by Operation Trident, a three-pronged initiative for combating illegal fishing



**2007**

abalone listed in Appendix III of CITES, issued by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT)



**2013**

**Chinese anti-corruption campaign**

President of China implements the Chinese Anti-Corruption Campaign, aimed at eliminating corruption and excessive spending by government officials on luxury goods

**2010**

**commercial abalone fishery reopens**

Abalone Recovery Strategy is implemented to help protect wild abalone populations

**1968**

catch restrictions in the form of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) implemented

**1990**

increase in illegal catch within the recreational fishery combined with an increase in illegal abalone catch



**1983**

recreational abalone fishery opens; limits on bag size apply



**2003**

**recreational fishery suspended**

recreational abalone fishing suspended due to difficulties in controlling and monitoring poaching as well as sustainability concerns

**first environmental court established**

South Africa establishes its first environmental court in Hermanus, Western Cape

**2005**

**environmental court closes**

environmental court closes due to lack of government funding



**2008**

global financial crisis begins



**2010**

**abalone delisted from Appendix III of CITES**

South African government withdraws CITES Appendix III listing

**commercial abalone fishery closes**

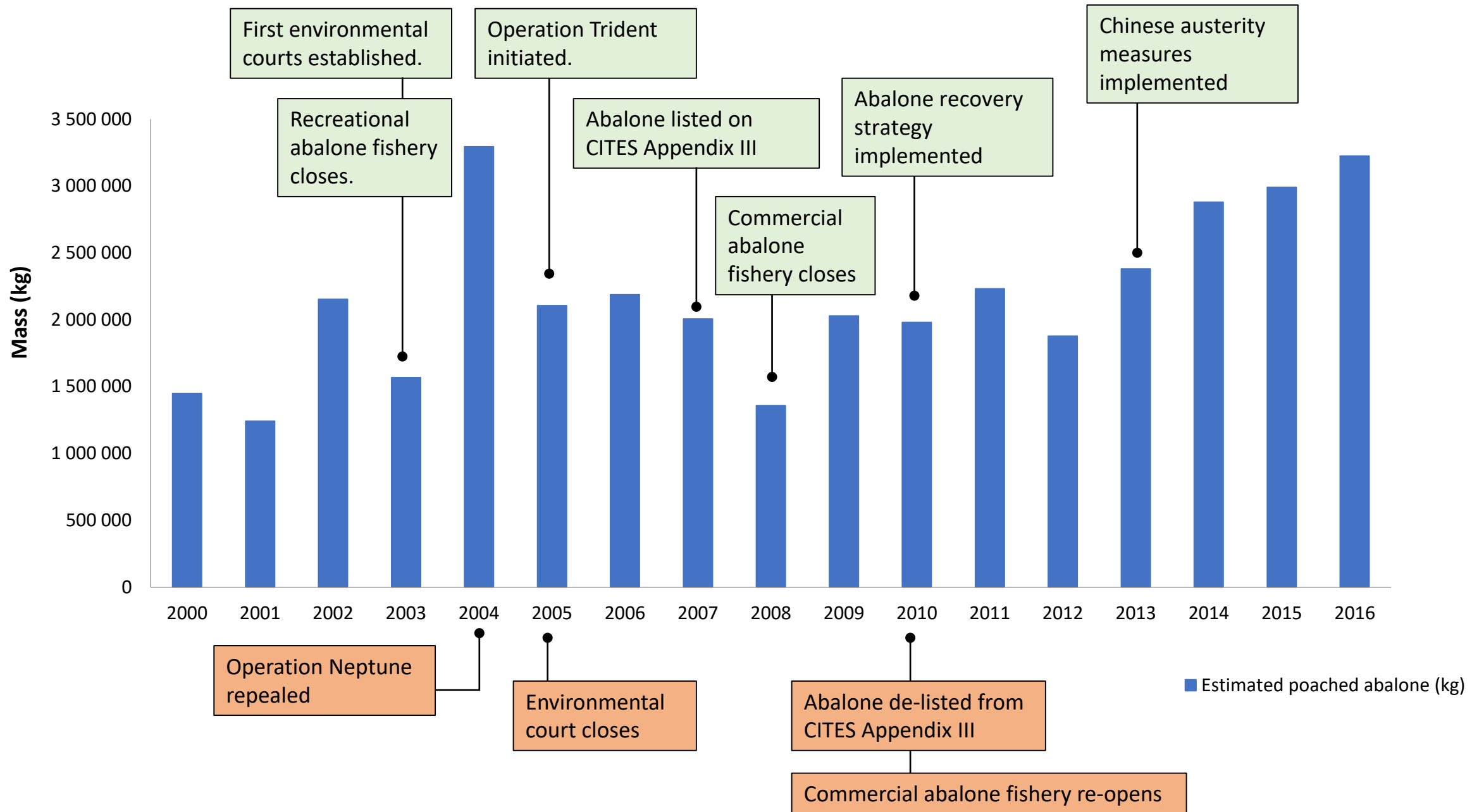
in an attempt to protect the remaining resource and ensure future stock protection

**2011**

global financial crisis ends









# Recommendations



## NATIONAL COLLABORATION

Local, multi-agency collaboration across social, economic, and environmental agencies to address complex factors influencing poaching and trade



## TRADE REGULATIONS

International trade controls in the form of a CITES listing



## REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Within sub-Saharan Africa to reduce exports of illegal harvest through South Africa's sub-Saharan states

## TRACEABILITY SYSTEMS

Legal abalone traders are encouraged to develop a robust traceability system for all abalone products exported from South Africa

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/empty-shells/>