



**Press Release**

**17/3/2023**

Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has arrested Villayutham, a smuggler based out of Rameswaram, who is consistently indulged in smuggling of Sea cucumbers, a marine species protected under schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. Villayutham was produced before the Hon'ble Special Court for PMLA, Madurai and the Hon'ble Court has granted ED custody for 8 days.

It is pertinent to note that Sea cucumbers are crucial to the marine ecosystem as they consume decomposing organic matter and convert it into recyclable nutrients for other marine life.

ED had initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of multiple FIRs registered by Tamil Nadu Police and Wildlife Authorities under various sections of Wildlife Protection Act. The PMLA investigation has revealed that Villayutham had, over the years, been using the business entities floated by him viz. M/s. VVN Sea Foods, M/s. VV Agency, M/s Hotel Raamajayam, M/s. VV Sea Shell Mart, M/s VVI Dry Fish Process and M/s Hotel Raamajayam Restaurant as a front for projecting the proceeds obtained from the illegal smuggling activities as legal business income. He had deposited the proceeds of smuggling activities in the form of cash, amounting to multiple Crore, in the bank accounts maintained in the names of himself, his wife, his children and various business entities operated by them. The proceeds of crime was utilized by Villayutham to repay loans amounting to multiple Crore taken for various purposes including the loans availed in the names of his business entities, to purchase multiple movable and immovable properties including a Hotel, to pay exorbitant fees for his childrens' medical college education and to run his business entities.

Further investigation is under progress.