Fishy excuse

Abalone poachers fined for beach raid

Jon Andrews

THREE abalone poachers have been hit with big fines after they were caught stealing precious shellfish from a Mornington beach in the dead of night.

The thieving trio were nabbed by rangers on Boxing Day last year, and tried to explain their fishy exploits by saying they wanted the molluscs for a New Year's Day feast.

Cao Chung Nguyen, 44, Huy Tran, 41, and Trung Than Nguyen, 43, all pleaded guilty to six charges including obstructing officers and taking commercial quantities of abalone at Dromana Magistrates' Court on Thursday morning.

A fourth offender was a visiting family friend, who has now gone back to Vietnam.

The court heard at around 11pm on December 26 last year the four of them poached the prized shellfish from rocks in very shallow water near the beach before filling two bags and walking back towards their car.

But at 1.10am a pair of fisheries officers came across the thieves. One ran off into the water and the other two hid in scrub, but all four were soon caught.

Inside two bags was 125 abalone, of which 54 were under the minimum size.

The bag limit per person is just five, and abalone can't be taken in less than 2m of water, nor at night.

In court their defence lawyer said the men, all of Vietnamese origin and without any related priors, weren't aware of the strict requirements.

Magistrate Gerard Lethbridge said people had been jailed for similar poaching crimes, and warned the trio any repeat would mean prison time. They were convicted and fined $3500.

Jimmy's Foundation and YMCA participants are pretty happy about the funding boost.
Picture: WAYNE TAYLOR

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

A SANCTUARY for teens will open in Rosebud at the end of the year courtesy of $1.2 million federal funding.

Jimmy's Foundation aims to help the region's youth strengthen their mental, physical and emotional health.

"When my own son, James, died six years ago, his sister, Missy, and I decided that we would like to fund a purpose-built facility for the YPYS in his honour," Jimmy's founder Sarah Darling said. "On one hand, James' life would be celebrated, on the other, Missy and I hoped that by doing this we might, in some way, help prevent similar tragedies happening to another family."

Jimmy's will be managed by YMCA Peninsula Youth Services (YPYS).

YPYS manager Jeanette Horsley said the centre would offer a safe and nurturing environment for young people to "hang out with their peers, share stories and meet new people".

She said Jimmy's would offer programs to help build resilience and develop the skills needed to "break generational cycles of disadvantage". "Young people attending our programs are often living in difficult family circumstances," she said.

Donations to Jimmy's Foundation will cover the cost of building the centre.

Ms Horsely said government funding, recently announced by Flinders federal Liberal MP Greg Hunt, was the missing piece of the puzzle.

Mr Hunt said the funding would help provide long lasting mental health services to the region. "The strength of both Sarah and Missy to turn such a deeply personal family tragedy into an instrument of change in their community is to be commended," he said.