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# **Plant Protection Today: A Florida Couple is Successfully Prosecuted for Lacey Act Violations**

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**PPQ's Lacey Act Declaration Data Helps Build the Case for Illegal Plywood**

*By April Dawson*

Last month, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the successful criminal prosecution and sentencing of a Florida couple and their employee in violation of the Lacey Act and customs law. Noel and Kelsy Hernandez Quintana pleaded guilty and were both sentenced to close to 5 years in prison for illegally importing and selling between \$25 million and up to \$65 million worth of plywood products.

They were ordered to pay approximately \$42 million in forfeitures and an additional \$1.6 million to cover storage costs incurred by the government when the Quintanas declined to abandon seized illegal wood, thus forcing the government to maintain the wood in storage pending resolution of the case. The couple's employee, Marta Angelbello, was also detained and sentenced in relation to the case, receiving 3 years of probation with 90 days of home detention and a fine of \$3,000.

The Lacey Act Team was first enacted in 1900, to combat trafficking of illegally taken wildlife, fish, or plants. In 2008, Farm Bill brought about amendments that strengthen protections to a broader range of plants and plant products, making it unlawful to import certain products without an declaration. This might be considered one of the harshest judgments since the Act was amended. After the prison sentence, the Quintanas are required to serve three years of supervised release following their prison sentences, during which time they are prohibited in engaging in businesses importing or exporting products protected under the Lacey Act.

The Lacey Act Team, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program, supported the investigation and prosecution. They provided Lacey Act declaration data related to these imports and subject matter expertise on declaration interpretation to both the DOJ and to U.S. Department of Homeland Security investigators. The declarations provided the evidence pattern of the case, showing the illegality of the plywood and the intent to circumvent the Lacey Act and customs laws.

"The Lacey Act declaration is an important document that supports legal trade of timber and plant species," said Karen L. Williams, Lacey Act Compliance Specialist. "In fact, the illegal timber trade is a \$150 billion a year global problem and the third largest international crime. Compliance with the Lacey Act is good for the environment and good for law-abiding U.S. businesses. We are happy to share declaration information with our enforcement partners in support of investigations of

illegal harvest or false declarations.”

Lacey Act importations are required for formal entries of all types of wood and products containing plant material, including plywood, charcoal, musical instruments, and essential oils. Learn more about the Lacey Act and how it relates to plants and plant products by visiting [PPQ's website](#). For further questions, please contact APHIS Lacey Act program staff at [lacey.act.declaration@usda.gov](mailto:lacey.act.declaration@usda.gov). To find out which plants and plant products require a declaration, go to the [Lacey Act website](#) and select Implementation Schedule.

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