WWF uses fake Singapore ivory store in awareness campaign

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An apparent online ivory store which caused a furore in Singapore has been exposed as a hoax set up by environmental group WWF to highlight perceived shortcomings in local laws.

The outlet called Ivory Lane purportedly offered items including earrings and necklaces for sale and had a well-produced website, including a price list and images of women modelling the jewellery.

The hoax shop, which appeared online last week, insisted its products were made from ivory obtained before 1990, when an international ban on the trade came into force. It is still legal to sell pre-1990 items in Singapore.

But consumers in the city-state reacted with outrage at the website, flooding its Facebook page with angry comments and accusing the shop of supporting the slaughter of elephants. Some media including Agence France-Presse reported on the growing furore.

After a few days, a post from someone claiming to be the store's owner appeared and insisted all the products were "completely legal" in Singapore.

But in a statement late Tuesday, WWF admitted it had set up the online shop, and said the hoax was aimed at highlighting shortcomings in local wildlife laws.

The group said that by continuing to allow the sale of ivory obtained before 1990, recently poached ivory could be disguised as vintage ivory.

"It is not easy to understand wildlife laws and what is legal and not, a reality that is often misused by illegal traders," said Elaine Tan, chief executive of WWF-Singapore.

The WWF said setting up Ivory Lane had sparked a heated debate and generated over 65,000 reactions. It was part of a broader investigation by the group, which found more than 40 shops in Singapore selling ivory products.
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Tan said there was a need for strong legislation to address the issue in Singapore, a major hub for the illegal wildlife trade due to its status as a global trading hub.

Singapore's Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority said the government was considering a domestic ban on the sale of ivory.