

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

Progress Report of CITES Work

1/10/2019 – 31/3/2021

Purpose

This paper is to give a progress report on the work of implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2021 for the information of members.

Enforcement

2. The table below shows the number of inspections and enforcement actions taken during the reporting period:

Comparison with the same period last year

	1/10/2018 – 1/3/2020	1/10/2019 – 31/3/2021	Variation
Consignment inspection (import, export, transit)	40 357	29 939	-25.8%
Local inspection	3 758	2 899	-22.9%
No. of investigation	1 154	655	-43.2%
No. of seizure	1 122	593	-47.1%
No. of prosecution	280	91	-67.5%

3. The majority of cases involved illegal import of endangered species. The major cases are summarised below:

Case No.	Description	CITES document available	Date of Incident	Results/Remarks
677/2019	Illegal import of 16 kg rhino horn (App.I) from South Africa	No	19/10/2019	Acting on intelligence, Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) intercepted a female passenger from South Africa and found in her baggage 16 kg (7 cut pieces) of rhino horn. The offender was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced for 24 months imprisonment at District Court.

746/2019	Illegal import of 224 pieces of saiga antelope horn (App.II) from Russia	No	29/11/2019	C&ED intercepted a male passenger that arrived Hong Kong Airport from Moscow, Russia and found in his check-in baggage 224 pieces of saiga antelope horn. The offender was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced for 20 months imprisonment at District Court.
209/2020 371/2020	Suspected illegal import of 2 air consignments of a total of about 274 kg of frozen swim bladder of Totoaba (App.I) from United States and Mexico respectively.	No	4/6/2020 27/10/2020	C&ED intercepted 2 air consignments through risk assessment and found in the declared frozen seafood 160 kg and 114 kg of frozen swim bladder of Totoaba respectively. Arrests were made in both cases and investigation by C&ED was on-going.
123/2020 194/2020 220/2020	Suspected illegal export of 3 shipments of American ginseng (App.II) that summed up to about 46 tonnes.	No	19/2/2020 7/5/2020 10/6/2020	C&ED and Marine Police found in fishing vessels off Lantau Island 3.3 tonnes, 33 tonnes and 10 tonnes of American ginseng, suspected to be smuggled out of Hong Kong. The cases were under investigation by C&ED.
568/2019	Illegal possession of about 55 kg elephant ivory (App. I)	No	23/9/2019	Acting on intelligence, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) officers disguised as buyers and subsequently located a unit in an industrial building of To Kwa Wan 20 kg of worked ivory and 35 kg of raw tusk. The owner was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to an imprisonment of 24 months at District Court.
428/2020	Suspected illegal possession of	No	30/12/2020	In AFCD's surprise inspection, an ivory shop at Sheung Wan that has been issued with Licence to Possess (PL) was found to have 2 ivory tusks of dubious source and were not covered by the PL of the keeping premises. The two tusks were subsequently seized and the case was under investigation.

Licensing

4. The number of licences and certificates issued during the reporting period is tabulated below:

Comparison with the same period last year

	1/10/2018 – 31/3/2020	1/10/2019 – 31/3/2021	Variation
Import Licence	661	682	+3.2%
Export/Re-export Licence	25884	18 061	-30.2%
Possession Licence	149	165	+10.7%
Re-export Certificate	1785	1 227	-31.3%
Special Export / Import Licence	3	3	0%

Disposal of seized specimens

5. AFCD endeavours to maximise uses of seized specimens for conservation, education or scientific purposes according to the guidelines of CITES. The following items were disposed of during the reporting period following the above principle:

(a) Local schools / institutes

A total of 35 local schools and 5 institutes have received specimens seized from the enforcement operations or local stray cases.

Some live specimens, including 5 Reeves' turtles, 4 Chinese three-striped box turtles, 1 elongated tortoise and 1 leopard tortoise were donated to the local schools / institutes.

For dead specimens, we have donated the following items: 8 kg agarwood, 1 kg Honduras rosewood, 0.5 kg Malagasy rosewood, 8 kg red sandalwood, 139 crocodile skin / products, 58 lizard skin / products, 57 snake skin / products, 105 turtle shells / plastrons, 159 sea turtle scales / products, 25 stuffed specimens / carcasses of turtle, 13 cheetah skin, 2 Argentine grey fox skin, 1 fishing cat skin, 3 margay skin, 169 worked ivories, 4 ivory scraps, 2 ivory cut pieces, 3 ivory tusks, 60 hornbill beaks, 11 saiga horns, 1 rhino horn, 4 hippo teeth, 14 kg pangolin scales, 1 pc and 330 kg pangolin carcasses, 2 mounted specimens of butterfly, 85 coral skeleton / products, 146 giant clam shells, 1 box American ginseng roots, 0.005 kg bear bile powder, 0.2 kg peacock feathers and 0.1 kg shark fins.

(b) Other local organisations and government departments

Live specimens donated to other local organizations and government departments included 2 grey parrots, 1 Malaysian box turtle, 1 monitor lizard, and 1 river stingray.

Some live animals of common pet species were donated to Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Hong Kong Society of Herpetology Foundation for rehoming,

including 21 African spurred tortoises, 1 blue-and-gold macaw, 1 blue-fronted amazon, 1 boa constrictor, 1 Chinese three-keeled pond turtle, 19 common box turtles, 1 giant Asian pond turtle, 1 greater sulphur-crested cockatoo, 4 green-cheeked conures, 1 Jardine's parrot, 1 Java sparrow, 3 grey-breasted parakeets, 1 red-bellied macaw and 1 tegu lizard.

Dead specimens donated included 4 kg agarwood, 80,457 kg Malagasy rosewood, 1,431 kg Thailand rosewood, 20,633 kg Honduras rosewood, 79 kg red sandalwood, 29 worked ivories, 1 mounted specimen of butterfly and 1 big-headed turtle carcass.

(c) Organisations overseas / in the Mainland China

Live animals donated to overseas organisations included 13 elongated tortoises, 1 false gharial, 1 green tree python, 2 humphead wrasses, 3 Indochinese box turtles and 2 monitor lizards.

For dead specimen, 79,234 kg red sandalwood, 29,194 kg Malagasy rosewood, 29,452 kg Honduras rosewood and 0.005 kg ivory scraps were donated.

Publicity and Education

6. Our publicity and education work were largely disrupted by the pandemic, which took hold early on during the reporting period. Priority had been given to maintaining social distance to prevent the spread of the disease over our routine publicity and education work. Nevertheless, efforts were made to promote our legislative control and educate the public on endangered species protection and trade regulation where possible.

7. From October 2019 to January 2020, we delivered 24 education talks on endangered species protection for students, elderly citizens and local enforcement agencies. During the same period, the Endangered Species Resource Centre received 4,506 visitors in 95 tours and 17 open days, and 10 exhibitions were held at various venues, including a booth exhibition at the Flower, Bird, Insect and Fish Show 2019 at North District.

8. To enhance the awareness and vigilance of travellers about the licensing control over the import, export, re-export and possession of endangered species, a TV advertisement on the control of endangered species in Hong Kong was broadcast at six Shenzhen immigration control points (Shenzhen Bay, Lo Wu Port, Huang Gang Port, Wenjindu Port, Shatoujiao Port and Fu Tian Port). A publicity event was arranged at all land control points during the period from 6 to 17 January 2020 to set up exhibition

panels, and distribute pamphlets and leaflets to travellers to remind them of the licensing requirements of endangered species, especially orchids. Reminders in the form of a press release and a Facebook post were published on 17 and 20 January 2020 respectively. In addition, our TV API was broadcasted on the Bus Information Panel of buses of the Kowloon Motor Bus Co. and Long Win Bus Company Limited, covering routes to and from the airport in January 2020.

9. Since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, the majority of our face-to-face publicity and education work, such as education talks and ESRC guided visits, had been suspended in view of the social distancing policy. During the occasional windows where our services were resumed, we received 327 visitors at ESRC and delivered 19 education talks, which included 5 online talks to schools and institutions.

10. During the reporting period, we also continued to make use of AFCD's Facebook page to provide updates on recent cases, remind the public of relevant issues and our legislative control, and encourage the public to report suspected illegal trade in endangered species. A total of nine Facebook posts were published.

11. To update traders on the results of the 18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP18) held in August in Geneva, Switzerland, as well as to stocktake the pre-Convention stocks of newly listed species, a circular letter was issued on 1 November 2019 to relevant trades. Following up on that and subsequent to the gazettal of the corresponding legislative amendments, another circular letter was issued on 5 March 2021 to inform traders of the changes to the list of scheduled species and the commencement date of the new control. Three briefing sessions targeted at traders of different trades were held on 22 March 2021.

International and Local Liaison and Meeting

12. The annual meeting among the CITES Management Authorities of the Central Government, Macau SAR and Hong Kong SAR was held in Macau from 25 to 28 November 2019. The Management Authorities updated each other on their CITES implementation work and discussed issues of common concerns, such as trade and regulatory control in endangered species, major enforcement operation and joint publicity work. Four officers from AFCD and two officers from the C&ED attended the meeting.

13. To better understand the agarwood trade and the agarwood market in the Mainland, two officers from AFCD attended an exchange meeting with government officials and researchers of the Mainland, and visited several agarwood plantations and

an agarwood market in Guangzhou and Dongguan.

14. As long term partners in the implementation of the control of the Ordinance, AFCD also maintains close contact and constant exchange of information with C&ED. A train-the-trainers training session was held specifically for C&ED officers on 8 October 2019 and further training talks were delivered to frontline C&ED staff at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau-Bridge (HKZMB) Control Point on 3 and 17 February 2021.

Training

15. The Department places great emphasis on providing adequate training to frontline enforcement staff to ensure that the legislative control of the Ordinance is duly implemented. To prepare enforcement staff for the implementation of CoP18 amendments, an internal training session was conducted on 8 October 2019, before the amendments came into effect internationally. Three identical training sessions on the identification of shark fins and sea cucumbers were held on 20 – 22 January 2020, where frontline staff of C&ED were also invited to join. To equip our staff with knowledge of the daily operation of customs control points, a visit to the HKZMB Control Point was held on 3 February 2021.

16. Further overseas training on timber identification, wildlife crime investigation and implementation of CITES had been planned for the rest of 2020, but were subsequently cancelled in view of the pandemic.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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