

In Attendance

AFCD

Mr. CHAN Yiu-keung	Senior Endangered Species Protection Officer
Mr. Alfred WONG Kwong-chiu	Endangered Species Protection Officer/Enforcement
Ms. Azaria WONG Kam-yan	Endangered Species Protection Officer/Licensing 1
Ms. Karrie WU Kar-yee	Endangered Species Protection Officer/Licensing 2

Customs and Excise Department

Mr. CHAN Chun-pong, Ricky	Senior Inspector
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Ocean Park, Hong Kong

Ms. Suzanne M. GENDRON	Executive Director, Zoological Operations & Education
Mr. Timothy NG	Director, Zoological Operations & Education
Mr. Grant ABEL	General Curator
Ms. Loretta HO	Registrar
Ms. Isabel LI	Education Manager

Absent with Apologies

Professor CHU Lee-man

Mrs. Justina LEUNG NGAI Mou-yin, J.P.

Mr. TSANG Kwok-keung

Mr. YU Koon-hing	Assistant Commissioner (Boundary and Ports), Customs & Excise Department
Ms. Vivien LI	Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation), Environmental Protection Department

OPENING REMARKS

65/11 The Chairman welcomed all members to the meeting, in particular, Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai, JP, Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Acting) and Mr. CHAN Chun-pong, Ricky, Senior Inspector of Customs and Excise Department, who attended the meeting for the first time.

66/11 The Chairman informed members that, as an established practice, to facilitate the taking of meeting minutes, sound recording would be made during the meeting. The audio records would be destroyed after the meeting minutes had been confirmed.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 14 January 2011

67/11 The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 January 2011 were confirmed without amendments.

II. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

(a) Updates on the Animal Acquisitions Plan of Ocean Park (Para. 4/11 to 21/11)

68/11 With members' consent, this item would be discussed together with Agenda Item III.

(b) Amendments to the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Para. 41/11)

69/11 Mr. Alfred WONG reported that the legislative amendments had come into effect on 20 May 2011. To facilitate enforcement of the new control, the Department provided identification materials of the newly controlled endangered species to Customs and Excise Department and the Police.

(Mr. Thomas WONG Cheung-chi attended the meeting at this juncture)

(c) Placement of Pets of Endangered Species handed over to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) (Para. 42/11 to 50/11)

70/11 Mr. Alfred WONG reported that the Department conveyed members' suggestions on the scheme to SPCA. In its proposal submitted to the Department, SPCA had included the following measures: (1) selection of quality adopters with good attitude, adequate knowledge, sufficient resources and suitable accommodation; (2) adopters would be required to sign an

undertaking that did not allow the sale or transfer of the adopted animals to other persons; (3) SPCA had the rights to visit adopters' home before and after adoption; (4) rehomed animals would be micro-chipped as far as possible; and (5) monthly reports would be submitted to the Department. The scheme was planned for implementation in June 2011. [Post-meeting note: The scheme started on 1 June 2011.]

(d) Education and Publicity Work in 2010 (Para. 51/11 to 58/11)

71/11 Ms. Karrie WU Kar-ye reported the major publicity work from December 2010 to May 2011, including a thematic exhibition highlighting endangered fish at North District Flower Bird Insect and Fish Show 2010 in December 2010, a circular letter to inform traders and concerned parties of the amendments to Cap. 586 and its commencement date in April 2011, and Endangered Species Protection Photo Story Competition in April 2011.

72/11 Ms. WU supplemented that the Department would produce new computer games and set up a new endangered species database at Endangered Species Resource Centre for promulgation of endangered species protection to young people and students. The Department also planned to upload the computer games and the database onto its webpage.

73/11 Mr. CHAN Yiu-keung replied to a member's suggestion that the Department would consider the suitability of integrating the "Corporate Social Responsibility" concept into publicity programmes for promulgating endangered species protection to organizations.

III. Animal Acquisitions Plan of Ocean Park (Committee Paper: CP/ESAC/5/2011)

74/11 The Chairman declared that Ocean Park Conservation Fund Hong Kong had been sponsoring his study on horseshoe crabs. Members unanimously agreed that the Chairman shall continue to preside the meeting.

75/11 In response to a member's enquiry about the role of the Committee on Animal Acquisitions Plan of Ocean Park, Mr. CHAN Yiu-keung explained the Term of Reference of the Committee. In practical terms, the Department might consult the Committee on matters related to the issuance of licences, enforcement, disposal of confiscated specimens as well as the publicity and education work of the Department.

76/11 Mr. CHAN explained that for licence applications involving CITES Appendix I live specimens, the Department needed to refer such cases to the Committee for advice because they were highly endangered as in the case of the golden snub-nosed monkey. Their import required an export permit issued in the place of export and an import licence issued by the Department. According to the CITES Article pertaining to the regulation of trade in species included in Appendix I, an import permit shall only be granted if :

- (1) the import is not detrimental to the survival of the species involved;
- (2) the proposed recipient of a living specimen is suitably equipped to house and care for it, and
- (3) the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purpose.

77/11 Mr. CHAN further elaborated that, for CITES Appendix II species, it was generally not necessary for the Department to consult the Committee because of their lesser conservation concern. CITES required that an export permit shall only be granted when the Scientific Authority of the place of export had advised that such export would not be detrimental to the survival of that Appendix II species. On the importing side, CITES only required the presentation of an export permit upon importation.

78/11 Mr. C. C. LAY supplemented that in Hong Kong, however, as a stricter domestic measure under Cap. 586, the import of live specimens of an Appendix II species of wild origin, e.g. beluga in the present case, required an import licence issued by the Department. Under normal circumstances, the Department would consider granting the import licence if the export permit presented was authentic and valid. Although beluga was an Appendix II species, the Department considered it prudent to consult the Committee in view of the considerable public concern over its proposed import.

79/11 The Chairman welcomed the following representatives of Ocean Park (OP) to attend the meeting:

Ms. Suzanne M. GENDRON	Executive Director, Zoological Operations and Education
Mr. Timothy NG	Director, Zoological Operations & Education
Mr. Grant ABEL	General Curator
Ms. Loretta HO	Registrar
Ms. Isabel LI	Education Manager

80/11 Mr. Alfred WONG presented Committee Paper CP/ESAC/5/2011. Members had no comment on the Paper.

Proposed Import of Golden Snub-nosed Monkey

81/11 Ms. Suzanne M. GENDRON informed members that OP entered into a 3-year loan agreement with the Chengdu Zoo for 4 captive bred golden snub-nosed monkeys (1 male and 3 females, offsprings of the second generation) for exhibition at OP commenced in December 2011. The monkeys were proposed to be displayed within the existing Giant Panda Habitat (GPH), together with An An and Jia Jia, with modification to a naturalistic environment. The OP planned to submit licence application for the import of the monkeys before November 2011.

82/11 Mr. Timothy NG replied to a member's enquiry about the OP's plan after the 3-year agreement that the objective of the agreement was to bring in golden snub-nosed monkey for education and conservation purposes. He added that the OP had the right to renew the loan agreement with the Chengdu Zoo after three years.

83/11 Mr. Grant ABEL addressed to the member's another enquiry about the sex ratio of monkeys that the animals were selected by the Chengdu Zoo from the population with the best genetic potential for breeding in Hong Kong and from compatible family groups.

84/11 Ms. GENDRON answered Mr. Alfred WONG's enquiries that the giant pandas would be relocated to other part of the GPH during renovation to minimize influence to their normal life. Besides, the Sichuan Forestry Department and Woolong Nature Reserve were in support to the cohabitation of giant pandas and golden snub-nosed monkeys.

Proposed Import of Beluga Whale

85/11 Ms. GENDRON informed members that OP planned to acquire belugas for the new Polar Adventure exhibit to open in June 2012 at Ocean Park. A viable option for acquisition was from the Okhotsk Sea, Russia for the Polar Adventure. OP had been exploring various sources for acquisition of captive-bred belugas but found that there were no surplus captive born beluga whales from other zoological facilities at this time. She briefed members that OP had participated in funding a four-year study on population assessment of the beluga stock in Amur-Sakhalin region of the Okhotsk Sea since 2007. The study concluded that a removal of (on average) 29 – 38 belugas each year was sustainable and would not be detrimental to the

population recovery. The study was reviewed by an independent panel of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Using a more conservative population recovery factor, the panel concurred that the annual potential biological removal of 29 belugas was sustainable. OP would consider to import five belugas (i.e. 2 females and 3 males) collected from the Okhotsk Sea should no captive born beluga whales become available prior to the opening of the exhibit.

[Post-meeting note: The Park has decided not to pursue the acquisition of the beluga whales directly from the wild. As per the Park's acquisition plan, they would continue to seek beluga whales born under human care.]

86/11 Ms. GENDRON replied to a member's enquiries that there were belugas acquired from the wild by zoological facilities in USA, Canada, Mainland China and Taiwan, as well as Russia and Japan.

87/11 Ms. GENDRON briefed members of the design of the Polar Adventure Northern Polar Region, back of house holding pools and Marine Mammal Breeding and Research Centre. Mr. ABEL introduced staff training for the beluga team and employment of a beluga whale consultant for the first two years.

88/11 Ms. GENDRON informed members that OP was in discussions with Georgia Aquarium of USA regarding a collaborative agreement for the loan of five more belugas, to be exhibited in Ocean Park's Northern Polar Region for 18 months to 2 years. These belugas were also collected from the Sea of Okhotsk in 2010 and would be imported directly from Russia should Ocean Park decide to import beluga whales.

[Post-meeting note: Upon further discussions with Georgia Aquarium, the Park would continue to collaborate in research efforts with Georgia Aquarium to meet the greater conservation goals of both organizations.]

89/11 Ms. Isabel LI briefed members on the education and publicity programmes in connection with the conservation message conveyed by the Polar Adventure, including the beluga encounter programme.

90/11 A member enquired about how these belugas could help conserve its wild population. Ms. GENDRON advised that OP received over 5 million visitors annually. Through OP's conservation education programmes and contact with belugas, visitors would be

inspired to change their life styles which in turn would help reduce the carbon footprint, slow down climate change and promote a healthy environment for the polar animals. [Post-meeting note: A 2008 study by Professor R. Ballantyne of Queensland University (Australia) demonstrated that visitors were inspired to change attitudes and behaviours through the educational exhibits at Ocean Park. Ocean Park is delighted and willing to provide relevant information of the study to the Committee for reference if requested.]

(Mr. Thomas WONG Cheung-chi left the meeting at this juncture.)

91/11 A member requested for more information about the natural environment of belugas in the Okhotsk Sea and the migration behaviours of the species. Ms. GENDRON advised that she would provide the requested information to the Committee after the meeting.

[Post-meeting note: Information was provided. Beluga whales move between summer feeding / birthing grounds near the coast to under the ice in the central Sea of Okhotsk during the winter. In winter, they must avoid killer whales and in the summer they feed on the returning salmon. The new exhibit has been designed to provide changing environments for the animals. The exhibits are linked and can allow belugas to swim freely throughout the exhibit or in one or two pools during the day. This will provide changing scenery for the animals whilst the staff will also provide enrichment for the animals.]

92/11 A member expressed concern over the proposed import of belugas on the grounds of animal rights. He suggested that OP should either look for sources of captive-bred beluga or as an alternative way, broadcast 3D animation films of beluga instead of exhibiting live beluga.

93/11 Ms. GENDRON thanked for the member's opinions. She pointed out that conservation education through live animals could have much stronger impact on changing people's attitude than through video or film. This has been demonstrated through surveys in USA based marine mammal facilities (Harris Poll). She supplemented that OP had been striving to seek captive-bred animals from other zoological facilities and there were no surplus captive-bred animals at this time.

[Post meeting note: The Park has decided not to pursue the acquisition of the beluga whales directly from the wild. As per the Park's acquisition plan, they would continue to seek beluga whales born under human care.]

(Ms. Katherine MA Miu-wah left the meeting at this juncture.)

94/11 Ms. GENDRON briefed members on the acquisition of other CITES animals.

95/11 The Chairman thanked Ms. Suzanne M. GENDRON, Mr. Timothy NG, Mr. Grant ABEL, Ms. Loretta HO and Ms. Isabel LI for attending the meeting.

(Representatives of Ocean Park left the meeting at this juncture.)

96/11 In response to a member's views, Mr. C. C. LAY clarified that CITES did allow the trade in Appendix II species, including those collected from the wild. The key consideration would be non-detrimental findings. Given that the exporting country would issue a CITES export permit only when its Scientific Authority was satisfied with the non-detriment findings, the Department would issue an import licence when (1) the applicant produced a valid CITES export permit from the exporting country, and (2) the keeping facilities were proper. If the conditions could be fulfilled there was no justification on CITES ground for the Department to reject an application for import licence.

97/11 A member requested for information about the keeping facilities of belugas in major aquariums in the world, including the design, size and holding density, in order to assess the adequacy of those in OP.

98/11 The Chairman noted that there had been thorough discussion on the matter from various perspectives. He advised that members may need more time to further study the IUCN review report after the meeting, and requested the secretariat to convey any further questions from members to OP. [Post-meeting note: Further questions on the ecology of belugas, its keeping facilities and management in OP were received. The responses of OP to these questions, together with the information requested by members during the meeting, were relayed to members on 14 June 2011. No further comment was received from members.]

IV. Summary Progress Report of CITES Work (Committee Paper: CP/ESAC/6/2011)

99/11 Mr. Alfred WONG presented Committee Paper CP/ESAC/6/2011 on AFCD's work in relation to CITES implementation in Hong Kong from 1 December 2010 to 31 March

2011. He highlighted the significant cases involving import, possession and re-export of endangered species without licences. Members had no comment on the Paper.

V. Serving the Community – Service Standards Committee 32nd Monitoring Report (Committee Paper: CP/ESAC/7/2011)

100/11 Ms. Karrie WU presented Committee Paper CP/ESAC/7/2011 on AFCD's performance for the quarter ending December 2010 and March 2011. Members had no comment on the Paper.

VI. Any Other Business

101/11 There was no any other business to be discussed.

VII. Date of Next Meeting

102/11 The Chairman advised that members would be informed of the date of next meeting in due course.

103/11 The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

- End -