

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

Progress Report of CITES Work

1/4/2021 – 30/6/2022

Purpose

This paper is to give a summary progress report on the work of implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2022 for members' information.

Enforcement

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

Comparison with same period in the previous year

	1/4/2020 – 30/6/2021	1/4/2021 – 30/6/2022	Variation
Consignment inspection (import, export, transit)	24 307	25 068	+3.1%
Local inspection	2 627	1 799	-31.5%
No. of investigation	444	510	+14.9%
No. of seizure	344	408	+18.6%
No. of prosecution	23	30	+30.4%

3. Apart from our routine inspection and investigation, we also assisted the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) in the inspection of high risk consignments suspected to be of scheduled species. In the period of 1 June 2021 to 30 June 2022, 328 of such inspections were carried out.

4. 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
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110/2021	Suspected illegal import of 210.6 tonnes of timber of suspected <i>Dalbergia oliveri</i> (App. II) from Vietnam	Yes	29/04/2021	An importer furnished copies of 11 Export Permits from Vietnam covering 169.7m ³ sawn wood of pre-Convention <i>Dalbergia oliveri</i> originated from Laos and requested for inspection of the consignment. The Export Permits were found to lack endorsement date. Upon verification with the Management Authority of Vietnam, it was confirmed that the permits were authentic but the shipment had not been cleared by the Vietnamese Customs. It was suspected that the shipment had been shipped from somewhere else other than Vietnam using the Vietnamese permits and the timber was not the lot covered by the Vietnamese permits. The shipment was intercepted by C&ED. Upon inspection, the timber in the consignment was also found to be in the form of logs instead of sawn wood as claimed. The seven containers were subsequently seized for further investigation.
101/2022	Suspected illegal import of five green tree python (three live and two dead; App. II) from Indonesia	No	30/04/2022	C&ED detected some snakes in a parcel declared to be "Computer components & parts" from Indonesia. Three live juvenile green tree pythons and two snake carcasses were found concealed in a computer upon inspection. The live snakes were seized and a court order is being applied to forfeit the snakes to the Government.

304/2021	Attempting to export 226 tails of Asiatic bony tongue (App. I)	No	17/09/2021	During a joint anti-smuggling operation conducted by C&ED and the Marine Police, a speed boat suspected of smuggling activity was intercepted in the waters off Lau Fau Shan. A total of 226 tails of Asiatic bony tongues were found on board among with other goods. Two Mainland males were arrested. The case was investigated by C&ED. With respect to Cap. 586 Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586), the two offenders were sentenced to an imprisonment of 6 months for attempting to export specimens of App. I species without licence.
316/2021	Suspected attempt to export scheduled live plants (App. I & App. II) and suspected shark fins (App. II)	No	29/09/2021	In a joint operation between C&ED and the Marine Police, a suspected speedboat smuggling case was detected at a seashore in Lung Kwu Tan. A storehouse in the vicinity was raided. A total of four lorries suspected to be connected with the case and a large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including 97 live plants of App. I, 5 481 live plants of App. II and over 9 600 kg of suspected shark fins of App. II were seized. The case is under investigation by C&ED.
162/2021	Illegal possession of 6 tails of Hong Kong newt (App. II)	No	20/06/2021	Acting on intelligence, a decoy operation was conducted in Mong Kok dawn market. Six tails of Hong Kong newts were seized. The offender was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to a fine of \$2,000.

391/2020	Suspected illegal possession of 32 live and dead turtles of scheduled species (App. I & App. II)	No	17/05/2022	Acting on intelligence, a decoy operation was conducted against an alleged turtle trader and poacher. One head of live big-headed turtle was seized. A further joint operation was mounted with the police, which resulted in a further seizure of 31 heads of live and dead turtles, as well as some suspected hunting tools from the car and premises of the person. The case is now under investigation for offences under Cap. 170 Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap.170) and Cap. 586.
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Licensing

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

Comparison with the same period last year

	1/4/2020 – 30/6/2021	1/4/2021 – 30/6/2022	Variation
Import Licence	772	565	-26.8%
Export/Re-export Licence	12 867	11 503	-10.6%
Possession Licence	139	61	-56.1%
Re-export Certificate	914	468	-48.8%
Special Export / Import Licence	0	0	N/A

Disposal of seized specimens

6. The Department 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 22 local schools and 3 institutes have received specimens confiscated from enforcement operations.

Some live specimens, including 2 Chinese stripe-necked turtles, 2 common box turtles and

2 yellow pond turtles, were donated to the local schools.

For dead specimens, we have donated the following items: 79 crocodile skin/ products, 4.154 kg agarwood, 5 boxes of American ginseng root, 2 fox skin, 7 blue coral products, 2 stony coral skeletons, 41 sea turtle products, 0.314 kg sea turtle scale/ shells, 11 box turtle plastrons, 2 green sea turtle stuffed specimens, 1 hawksbill turtle stuffed specimen, 8 Indian roofed turtle plastrons, 2 cheetah skin, 4 cobra skin, 1 common rat snake skin, 25 dried shark fins, 94 dried seahorses, 64 giant clam shells, 6 helmeted hornbill beaks, 6 hippo teeth, 6.676 kg ivory cut pieces, 17.511 kg ivory tusks, 4.455 kg worked ivories, 1 leopard skin, 13 lizard skin/ products, 2 boxes of orchid stem, 1.264 kg pangolin scales, 5 peacock feathers, 28 python skin/ products, 1.232 kg red sandalwood, 1 rhino horn, 2.492 kg saiga horns, 1 seal skin and 1 tiger skin.

(b) Other local organisations and government departments

Live specimens donated to other local organizations and government departments included 1 chameleon, 1 common Alexandrine parakeet, 1 common water monitor, 1 Cuban rock iguana, 1 eastern rosella, 2 green-cheeked conures, 3 monk parakeets and 1 rainbow lory.

Dead specimens donated included 0.071 kg agarwood wood, 13 kg pangolin scales, 8 265 kg Malagasy rosewood and 8 671.9 kg red sandalwood.

(c) Overseas institutes / organisations

Live animals donated to overseas institutes / organizations included 1 Angonoka tortoise, 4 big-headed turtles, 9 Chinese box turtles, 1 Chinese broad-headed pond turtle, 4 Galapagos giant tortoises, 12 Malaysian box turtles, 40 radiated tortoises and 49 three-keeled land tortoises.

For dead specimen, 109 567 kg Malagasy rosewood log, 9 900 kg other rosewood log, 4 963 kg red sandalwood log, 3.716 kg ivory scraps and 0.5 kg pangolin scales were donated.

Publicity and Education

7. Our publicity and education work was largely disrupted by the COVID-19 situation over 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.

8. From April 2021 to June 2022, we delivered 117 education talks on endangered species protection for students, elderly citizens and local enforcement agencies. During the same period, the Endangered Species Resource Centre received 1,261 visitors in 3 tours and 47 Open Days, and 10 exhibitions were held at schools or public venues.

9 To enhance the awareness and vigilance of the public about the licensing control over the import, export, re-export and possession of endangered species, we continued to make use of AFCD's Facebook page and media 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 20 Facebook posts and 7 press releases were issued.

10. To inform the public and traders of the fully implemented local elephant ivory trade ban on 31 December 2021, a 4-month education and publicity campaign was organised from early November 2021 to the end of February 2022. Several advertising strategies were used, including circular letters, education visits to relevant shops, Facebook posts, press releases, posters and advertisements across bus, MTR and tram networks, as well as e-panels in restaurants, with emphasis placed at five ivory shop hotspots: Sheung Wan, Tsim Sha Tsui, Jordan, Yau Ma Tei, and Mong Kok.

International and Local Liaison and Meeting

11. Despite the travelling restrictions around the globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we endeavoured to maintain close contact with other CITES parties and international organisations and participated in various online international meetings, including the 31st meeting of the CITES Animals Committee, the 25th meeting of the CITES Plants Committee, the 73rd and 74th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, as well as two workshops organized by the CITES Secretariat on totoaba trades and timber inspections, and a meeting organized by the Interpol Secretariat on wildlife crimes.

Training

12. The Department places great emphasis on providing adequate training to frontline enforcement staff to ensure that the legislative control of Cap. 586 is duly implemented. On 23 September and 18 October 2021, two identical training sessions on the implications of incorporating certain offences under Cap. 586 into the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO), Cap. 455, were arranged with C&ED for enforcement staff of AFCD to learn from the experiences of customs officers and their skills in handling OSCO-related cases.

13. Further overseas training on timber identification, wildlife crime investigation and implementation of CITES had been planned during the reporting period, but were subsequently cancelled in view of the COVID-19 situation. Nevertheless, two online courses organised by the University of Florida on the application of DNA technology and investigation of cybercrime were provided for two frontline enforcement officers, respectively.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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