

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

Summary Progress Report of CITES Work

1/7/2022 – 30/9/2023

Purpose

This paper provides a summary progress report on the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from 1 July 2022 to 30 September 2023 for the information of members.

Enforcement

2. The table below shows the number of inspections and enforcement actions taken by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) for the implementation of CITES during the reporting period:

Comparison with same period in the previous year

	1/7/2021 – 30/9/2022	1/7/2022 – 30/9/2023	Variation
Consignment inspection (import, export, transit)	24 195	25 197	+4.1%
Local inspection	891	1 896	+112.8%
No. of investigation	542	596	+10.0%
No. of seizure	452	515	+13.9%
No. of prosecution	66	75	+13.6%

3. Apart from routine inspection and investigation, AFCD also assisted the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) in the inspection of high-risk consignments suspected to be of scheduled species. During the period between 1 July 2022 and 30 September 2023, 145 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
245/2022	Suspected illegal import of 6 540 kg of timber of <i>Pterocarpus santalinus</i> (App. II) from UAE	No	02/09/2022	A container arriving from Dubai, UAE, declared to contain 6 530 kg of “Decoration wooden material” and consigned to a company in Taiwan, China, was found to contain 6 540 kg of <i>Pterocarpus santalinus</i> upon inspection. The specimens were seized as no CITES permit could be produced. Forfeiture procedure has been initiated.
280/2023	Suspected illegal import of 31 emperor scorpions (27 live and 4 dead; App. II) from Ghana	No	20/07/2023	C&ED found 31 emperor scorpions in a parcel from Ghana to Hong Kong at Air Mail Centre. The scorpions were packed in plastic boxes and four were found dead upon examination. The specimens were seized and a court order will be applied to forfeit the scorpions to the Government.
204/2023	Suspected illegal import of 21 heads of live reptiles of scheduled species (App. I & App. II) from Thailand	No	14/05/2023	An incoming Thai male passenger from Bangkok, Thailand, was intercepted by C&ED at the Hong Kong International Airport. Upon searching, 21 heads of live reptiles were found packed around his outer thighs. The suspect was charged with cruelty to animals in addition to illegal import of scheduled species. The suspect has pleaded guilty at the District Court and is expected to be sentenced in December 2023.

Case No.	Description	CITES document available	Date of Incident	Results/Remarks
93/2023 108/2023	Suspected attempt to export agarwood (App. II)	No	12/03/2023 13/03/2023	The suspects in the two cases were intercepted by the C&ED at Shenzhen Bay Control Point. They were found to be carrying 4.2 kg and 9 kg of agarwood, respectively. The suspects have pleaded guilty at the District Court and are expected to be sentenced in early 2024. Legal advice has been sought and application will be made to the court for enhancement of sentence under the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance, Cap. 455.
186/2023	Suspected illegal possession of a live crocodile (App. I)	No	30/04/2023	A member of the public reported a sighting of a crocodile in Yuen Long to the Police. AFCD was summoned to the scene to capture the crocodile. As the crocodile was found on a private lot, investigation was conducted in the direction of suspected illegal possession of endangered species. Legal advice is being sought.
269/2023	Suspected illegal possession of 26 live turtles of scheduled species (App. I & App. II)	No	19/07/2023	Upon investigation and intelligence collection by the Police on the suspect, a joint-operation was mounted between the Police and AFCD to raid the suspected keeping premises of the turtles of the suspect. Among the 29 live turtles found at scene, 26 were Appendix I or Appendix II species, including 14 critically endangered big-headed turtles (<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>). All of them were seized for suspected illegal possession. The case is now under investigation.

5. In addition to our prosecution cases, AFCD also handled a forfeiture hearing case during the reporting period. The case involved 3.3 tonnes of dried fins of scheduled giant guitarfish/wedgefish species that had been illegally imported into Hong Kong in June 2021. Upon advice from the Department of Justice, no prosecution was pursued due to insufficiency of evidence. AFCD then proceeded to apply for an order from the court to forfeit the fins to the Government pursuant to the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, Cap. 586. The purported owner of the shipment contested the Department's application, alleging that he was an innocent owner who did not in any way participate in or

facilitate the contravention. The hearing was held in the High Court on 26 September 2023 and is now pending the Court's decision.

Licensing

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

Comparison with the same period last year

	1/4/2021 – 30/6/2022	1/4/2022 – 30/6/2023	Variation
Import Licence	633	286	-54.8%
Export/Re-export Licence	14 232	15 877	+11.6%
Possession Licence	78	70	-10.3%
Re-export Certificate	583	570	-2.2%
Special Export/Import Licence	9	3	-66.7%

Disposal of seized specimens

7. 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 34 local schools have received specimens confiscated from enforcement operations.

Some live specimens, including 1 head of sun conure, 1 head of moustached parakeet and 1 head of African spurred tortoise were donated to local schools.

For dead specimens, we have donated the following items: 1 hawk stuffed specimen, 5 pieces of cheetah skins, 7.4 kg of agarwood or its products, 28 pieces of boa/python skins or products, 5 crocodilian stuffed specimens, 80 pieces of crocodilian skins or products, 21 pieces of turtle plastron, 2 hawkbill turtle stuffed specimens, 11 pieces of hawkbill turtle ornaments or shells, 23.9 kg of Malagasy rosewood, 16.5 kg of ivory tusks, 7.3 kg of ivory cut pieces, 2.7 kg of stony coral skeletons, 0.4 kg of black coral skeletons, 1.3 kg of blue coral necklaces, 0.8 kg of dried seahorses, 1.9 kg of hippo teeth, 6 pieces of felid skins, 0.1 kg of devil ray gill plates, 1.3 kg of orchids, 1.8 kg of American ginseng roots, 54 pieces of Indian peafowl feathers, 2.5 kg

of red sandalwood, 4 pieces of helmeted hornbill beaks, 10.8 kg of saiga horns, 2 pieces of totoaba fish maws and 3.6 kg of giant clam shells.

(b) Other local organisations and government departments

Live specimens donated to other local organisations and government departments included 1 head of African spurred tortoise, 2 heads of spotted turtle, 3 heads of Chinese three-striped box turtle, 6 heads of Chinese three-keeled pond turtle, 49 heads of box turtle, 1 head of chameleon, 1 head of ball python, 1 head of common water monitor, 1 head of Cuban rock iguana, 6 heads of Fischer's lovebird, 3 heads of black-masked lovebird, 2 heads of blue-fronted amazon parrot, 1 head of yellow crowned amazon parrot, 2 heads of Hahn's macaw, 2 heads of celestial parrotlet, 1 head of Bali myna, 1 head of hill myna, 6 heads of monk parakeet, 1 head of common Alexandrine parakeet, 1 head of moustached parakeet, 1 head of Senegal parrot, 3 heads of green-cheeked conure, 4 heads of sun conure, 2 heads of black-headed caique, 1 head of white-bellied caique, 1 head of Java sparrow and 5 heads of rainbow lorikeet.

Publicity and Education

8. During the initial half of the reporting period, our publicity and education work was partly disrupted by the COVID-19 situation. Our priority was given to maintaining social distance to prevent the spread of the disease. Nevertheless, efforts were made to promote our legislative control and educate the public on endangered species protection and trade regulation where possible. As the situation improved and restrictions were lifted in the second half of the reporting period, we continued our efforts in publicity and education, demonstrating our commitment in these important initiatives.

9. In view of the resumption of travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland in early 2023, we carried out promotion campaigns to enhance travellers' awareness on the relevant control of popular items (e.g. American ginseng, dendrobium and dried seahorse etc.) through leaflet distribution at various boundary control points before Lunar New Year, short video and poster advertisement on LED/TV panels at control points, advertisements on bus bodies and Facebook post.

10. The Endangered Species Resource Centre (ESRC) resumed normal operation in early 2023 after temporary closure for maintenance and suspension of school and public programme due to COVID-19 in the first half of the reporting period. ESRC received 4 253 visitors in 96 tours and 53 Open Days from July 2022 to September 2023. We delivered 106 education

talks on endangered species protection for students, elderly citizens and local enforcement agencies. A total of 18 exhibitions were held at schools and public venues.

11. 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 the Department's Facebook page and mass 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 19 Facebook posts and 7 press releases were issued during the reporting period.

12. To inform the public and traders about the upcoming legislative amendment of the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) which will be effective from 15 December 2023, a series of publicity work have been planned to publicise the amendments. Commencing in October 2023 after the publication of the amendment order in the gazette, several publicity strategies have been used/planned to disseminate information about the amendments, including circular letters, Facebook posts, press release, posters, trader seminars, broadcasting and advertisements across websites and mobile applications.

International and Local Liaison and Meeting

13. We endeavoured to maintain close contact with other CITES Parties and international organisations. During the reporting period, we participated in various CITES meetings, including the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP19), the 32nd meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and the 26th meeting of the CITES Plants Committee. Also, we participated in two CITES workshops on seahorses and electronic permitting systems, as well as three international enforcement meetings led by INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Training

14. The Department places great emphasis on providing adequate training to frontline enforcement staff to ensure that the legislative control of the Cap. 586 is duly implemented. A timber identification training course was arranged with China CITES Management Authority and the Research Institute of Wood Industry, Chinese Academy of Forestry in Beijing from 11 to 15 September 2023. A total of five staff members (one professional and four technical grade) participated in this training course.

15. We will organise training courses regarding the legislative amendments to Cap. 586 following CoP19 for the frontline staff of the Department and the C&ED in December 2023.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
December 2023