

Endangered Species Advisory Committee (ESAC)
Minutes of Meeting

Date : 28 October 2025 (Tuesday)
Time : 3 p.m.
Format : Conference Room 701, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
(AFCD) Headquarters

Present

Chairman

Professor WONG Kam-bo

Members Attending in Person

Ms. CHAN Kwan-ye, Kelly

Dr. HUI Tin-yan, Tommy

Ms. SHIU Yin-ning, Elaine

Ms. WONG Lai-mei, Josephine

Ms. ZHU Huiling

Mr. LAI Kin-ming, Mickey, JP Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Mr. CHAN Kin-fung, Simon Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and
Conservation (Conservation)

Members Attending via Video Conferencing

Ms. CHAN Nga-chi, Angela

Dr. SIN Yung-wa, Simon

Mr. WONG Cho-hang, Stanley

Ms. CHIANG Yi-lee Assistant Commissioner of Customs and Excise (Boundary
and Ports), Customs and Excise Department (C&ED)

Ms. TSANG Ka-yi Carmen Assistant Secretary for Environment & Ecology (Nature
Conservation)2

Secretary

Ms. CHEUNG Man-lee, Lily Assistant Secretary (Boards)1, Agriculture, Fisheries
and Conservation Department (AFCD)

In Attendance

AFCD

Mr. LAM Fung-ngai, Timothy Senior Endangered Species Protection Officer

Mr. CHAN Hon-ki, Ken Endangered Species Protection Officer (Enforcement)

Dr. HO King-yan, Kevin Endangered Species Protection Officer (Licensing)1

Dr. LAU Yuen-yung, Jenny Endangered Species Protection Officer (Licensing) 2

Mr. YU Ka-ching, Barry Endangered Species Protection Officer (Inspection)

C&ED

Mr. WONG Kei-cheung, Alex Divisional Commander (Cargo Research)

Absent with Apologies

Mr. CHAN Chun-pang

Ms. KO Lai-fong, Rose

Ms. SO On-man, Cammy

Mr. YANG Jianhuan

Mr. YAU Yik-chung, Henry

Ms. YEUNG Shuk-fun, Fanny

OPENING REMARKS

1/25 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2/25 The Chairman stated that recording would be made during the meeting to facilitate the taking of minutes. The recording will be destroyed after the minutes have been confirmed.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

Destruction of Confiscated Ivory (Para 34/24)

3/25 Mr. Barry YU of the AFCDD reported that between May and October 2025, the AFCDD conducted four incineration exercises at the Environmental Protection Department's Chemical Waste Treatment Centre, disposing a total of approximately 10.6 tonnes of confiscated ivory. Aside from a small portion retained for purposes permitted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), such as donations to schools and organisations for education, conservation, and research, the entire stockpile of ivory had been destroyed. Members noted the report.

II. Proposals at the 20th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Committee Paper : CP/ESAC/1/2025)

4/25 With a powerpoint presentation, Dr. Kevin HO and Dr. Jenny LAU of the AFCDD gave a briefing on the proposals at the 20th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES.

5/25 A Member enquired about the major eel species sold in the Hong Kong market. He asked whether the AFCDD anticipated an increase in regulatory workload and the number of licence applications if all eels were listed in Appendix II. He also enquired whether sea cucumber species, other than the two proposed for inclusion in Appendix II, were common and if the AFCDD encountered difficulties in identifying dried sea cucumber specimens.

6/25 Mr. Timothy LAM of the AFCDD responded that currently, only the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) was listed under Appendix II. Although the Japanese eel (*Anguilla japonica*) was endangered, it was not yet listed in the CITES Appendices. He noted that identifying eels, eel fry and eel products had always been a challenge. However, if the proposal was adopted and all eel species were listed in Appendix II, distinguishing between specific species would no longer be necessary; confirmation that a specimen was an eel would suffice, thereby making enforcement more efficient. He expected that the number of licence applications would inevitably increase. Currently, the majority of eel fry on the market were American eels, mainly exported from Central and North America. As for sea cucumbers, Mr. LAM said that while live specimens were relatively easy to identify, dried specimens often lack distinguishing morphological features. If the proposal concerning sea cucumbers was adopted, research institutions or CITES might provide identifiable references for consideration.

7/25 The Chairman asked how to distinguish between wild and cultivated American ginseng.

8/25 Mr. Timothy LAM replied that it was difficult to distinguish them with the naked eye. Wild American ginseng on the market was mainly produced in the United States and Canada. Since its market value was higher than that of cultivated ones, it was theoretically unlikely to be sold as cultivated ginseng.

9/25 The Chairman asked whether the public might unknowingly violate the law if they purchase wild American ginseng overseas.

10/25 Mr. Timothy LAM pointed out that if current control on American ginseng was relaxed, sliced American ginseng brought into Hong Kong by travellers would not be regulated. The AFCD devoted substantial resources each year to promotion and education to alert the public of items subject to control.

11/25 The Chairman opined that the public should be clearly reminded not to purchase whole, wild American ginseng overseas.

12/25 Dr. Jenny LAU of the AFCD supplemented that wild American ginseng was usually sold whole and had a higher value, whereas sliced American ginseng was generally cultivated.

II. Progress Report of CITES Work (Committee Paper : CP/ESAC/2/2025)

13/25 With a powerpoint presentation, Mr. Ken CHAN and Dr. Jenny LAU of the AFCD gave a briefing on the progress of CITES work from October 2024 to August 2025.

14/25 Ms. CHIANG Yi-li of the C&ED noted that due to frequent exchanges between Hong Kong and the Mainland, some inbound travellers smuggled endangered species or controlled items using various methods, therefore, there was a need to strengthen public education. The C&ED participated twice in travel expositions organised by the Hong Kong Tourism Board this year to raising awareness of controlled items among the public and travellers. These efforts also aimed to deter potential offenders by citing court judgments and sentencing results from recent convictions. She suggested that future education and publicity initiatives could be carried out in collaboration with the AFCD.

15/25 A Member asked how the AFCD managed the simultaneous seizure of large number of confiscated live animals and enquired about their condition at the time of confiscation.

16/25 Mr. Timothy LAM responded that smuggled animals were generally in poor condition when seized, and some died at the time of seizure or shortly after. The AFCD's Animal Management Centre was responsible for the care of confiscated animals, and the department also sought assistance from institutions with animal housing facilities, such as Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, Ocean Park, and the Hong Kong Society of Herpetology

Foundation, for temporary care. While the department strived to provide temporary shelter, humane dispatch may be adopted if the number of seized animals exceeds the capacity of the AFCD and its partner institutions. If the confiscated animals belonged to Appendix II species and their health condition, ascertained by veterinarians from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong) and the Hong Kong Society of Herpetology Foundation, permitted, they might be made available for public adoption.

17/25 A Member asked why the number of prosecutions was less than one-tenth of the total number of seizures and enquired whether cooperation with The International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) could help intercept the export of endangered species at the source.

18/25 Mr. Timothy LAM explained that prosecution depended on the availability of sufficient evidence. In cargo-related cases, it was necessary to identify the actual consignee and prove they arranged the import into Hong Kong. Since Hong Kong often was merely a transit point, importers or traders might not be identifiable, making prosecution unfeasible. Conversely, the prosecution rate for traveller-related cases was higher because offenders were caught in direct possession of illegal goods. He added that the AFCD had established a notification mechanism with INTERPOL. For major cases, information was shared with exporting countries via the INTERPOL platform. There were also ongoing intelligence exchange and close communications among various jurisdictions.

19/25 A Member pointed out that smuggling via mail and parcels might be a more serious issue smuggling by travellers. He asked whether the AFCD had developed countermeasures and if the deterrent effect of existing legislation could be strengthened.

20/25 Mr. Timothy LAM replied that there had been a surge in smuggling via postal parcels in recent months, with most originating from the United States. The AFCD had proactively contacted relevant US authorities to intercept such shipments through enforcement at the source of export.

21/25 A Member enquired whether most confiscated turtles were intended for re-export rather than local sale. She suggested that the AFCD conduct educational seminars for the pet trade industry to enhance deterrent effect.

22/25 Mr. Timothy LAM responded that it was not possible to confirm whether the confiscated turtles were intended for re-export or the local market. He said that the AFCD maintained communication with the pet trade industry and issued circulars from time to time. Should the frequency or severity of smuggling increased, the department would explore additional publicity and education channels targeting pet traders.

23/25 A Member asked whether seized live animals could be returned to their place of origin if their condition permitted. She also enquired whether the AFCD would consider releasing native species or those suitable for the local habitat locally and if a notification mechanism could be established with CITES members to protect animals returned to their

origin. Finally, she asked whether the AFCD frontline officers utilised technology, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, or data analysis, to improve the accuracy of species identification and enforcement efficiency.

24/25 Mr. Timothy LAM stated that one of the CITES guidelines was to return seized animals to their place of origin. The AFCD had successfully returned seized animals to their origins in the past. However, this was often limited by the difficulty of identifying an animal's exact origin and public health concerns in the receiving countries. Regarding local species, release into the wild would be considered after a veterinarian's assessment and a series of monitoring measures. Non-native species, however, would not be released into the local wild. As for technology, the AFCD had been collaborating with universities on genetic testing, rapid shark species testing and tests to determine if animals originated from the wild. Such technology assisted in species identification and enforcement, and the AFCD would continue to monitor relevant technological developments.

25/25 A Member asked whether leaflets were available for distribution to travellers or to the travel industry for dissemination.

26/25 Dr. Jenny LAU replied that the AFCD provided leaflets in both print and electronic formats.

27/25 The Chairman suggested providing QR codes for travellers.

28/25 A Member suggested providing leaflets in other languages, such as Thai and Arabic.

29/25 A Member asked whether the same regulations applied to bringing controlled items into Hong Kong from overseas as they do from Mainland China.

30/25 Mr. Timothy LAM confirmed that the regulations were the same. The Mainland had also legislation implementing CITES, and both the import and export of endangered species were regulated.

31/25 The Member remarked that the public frequently purchased various products in the Mainland to bring back to Hong Kong by land and might be unaware of these regulations. She expressed concern that if the government enforced the law too strictly, administrative costs might become excessive. She asked how this situation should be addressed.

32/25 Mr. Timothy LAM responded that all travellers entering Hong Kong, whether from overseas or the Mainland, must comply with The Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (the Ordinance), Cap. 586. Since the Mainland did not provide exemptions for tourist souvenirs, anyone carrying items subject to control across the border must hold a permit. The AFCD would continue to promote awareness and educate the public regarding the controlled items most commonly carried across borders.

33/25 Mr. Mickey LAI, JP of the AFCD stressed that despite the frequent exchanges between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the import and export of goods must comply with legal requirements, noting that no special arrangements would be made.

34/25 Ms. CHIANG Yi-li stated that the Import and Export Ordinance, Cap. 60, enforced by the C&ED applied to all travellers. In addition to enforcement, C&ED had strengthened education and publicity, including the provision of traveller tips. She noted that in some smuggling cases, live turtles were wrapped in socks or tied to the body, which constituted animal cruelty. The C&ED exchanged intelligence with the Mainland and also promoted on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Xiaohongshu to raise public awareness and enhance deterrence.

35/25 A Member asked which species were covered by export and re-export permits.

36/25 Mr. Timothy LAM responded that the majority of permits issued during the reporting period were re-export permits, mostly for leather products and medicines related to the orchids and American ginseng.

37/25 The Chairman asked whether it was possible to determine if smuggled goods were for re-export or for local sale, suggesting that public education might be ineffective if the goods were for re-export.

38/25 Mr. Mickey LAI, JP stated that large-scale smuggling cases involving thousands of animals were more likely to involve re-export, and combating such cases relied heavily on cooperation with international law enforcement agencies. The Ordinance was amended in 2018 to increase penalties. In 2021, certain offences under the Ordinance were included in Schedule 1 of the Organised and Serious Crimes Ordinance, allowing the AFCD to apply to the court for enhanced penalties for designated offences, thereby increasing the deterrent effect and further combating illegal wildlife trade. The AFCD would continue to cooperate with C&ED on enforcement and education while utilising technology to enhance efficiency.

IV. Serving the Community - Service Standards Committee 50th Monitoring Report (Committee Paper : CP/ESAC/3/2025)

39/25 Dr. Kevin HO briefed Members on the performance results concerning the licensing service of endangered species from October 2024 to June 2025. Members noted the report.

V. Any Other Business

(a) Others

40/25 A Member asked whether the rapid shark species testing technology could be utilised to identify sea cucumbers and other species.

41/25 Mr. Timothy LAM replied that the rapid test was currently used to identify shark species and European eels. He reckoned the technology had the potential for application to other species and stated that the AFCD would explore the possibility with the relevant university laboratories.

42/25 A Member opined that the public rarely download and read educational leaflets. She suggested organising popular science activities and producing short videos for platforms such as WeChat and Xiaohongshu to strengthen education and outreach for people in the Mainland.

43/25 The Chairman agreed that videos could reach a broader and more diverse audience.

(b) Appeal to Vote in the Legislative Council General Election on 7 December 2025

44/25 Mr. Mickey LAI, JP appealed to Members to vote actively in the Legislative Council General Election on 7 December 2025.

VI. Date of Next Meeting

45/25 The Chairman said that Members would be informed of the date of next meeting in due course.

46/25 The meeting was adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

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