

AFCD follows up on whale appearing in Sai Kung waters

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (July 27) continued to follow up on the whale appearing in Sai Kung waters and discussed with experts of the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong (OPCFHK) and conservation groups on the current conditions of the whale and exchanged views on appropriate and feasible measures to further protect it.

The AFCD notes opinions to set up some restricted areas to protect the whale. Since the emergence of the whale are sporadic in this large stretch of waters, the area that needs special management will have to be adjusted according to actual circumstances, it is not feasible to implement such a measure without affecting other marine users. The AFCD will step up patrols together with the Hong Kong Police Force and the Marine Department. Whenever the whale surfaces to feed and in case some vessels are getting too close to it, government officers will take appropriate action immediately, including instructing nearby vessels to keep a distance and take enforcement action if the concerned person refuses to cooperate, so as to ensure the whale is free from disturbance of whale-watching vessels.

The AFCD, experts of the OPCFHK and other conservation groups all agreed that the wounds on the back of the whale were not caused by recent injuries. As the whale is in a stable condition, capable of feeding and swimming while the wounds are healing without any behavioural signs of being sick and stranded, there is currently no need for medical help or other intervening action.

As to the suggestion of guiding the whale out to the open seas, no feasible concrete options that are safe and secure have been revealed after discussing with the experts of the OPCFHK and other conservation groups. The AFCD will continue to explore appropriate and effective methods with the experts.

The AFCD reiterates that all cetaceans are protected by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). Irresponsible whale watching behaviour may constitute an act of wilful disturbance of protected wild animals. Offenders are liable to one year's imprisonment and a fine of \$100,000 upon conviction.

For the sake of personal safety, members of the public should avoid close encounters with the whale. The AFCD will continue to step up patrols of the waters where the whale has appeared and at places including the Sai Kung Public Pier, distribute leaflets and urge public not to go on boat trips to watch the whale. They should also avoid disturbing the whale appearing in the vicinity when engaging in water sports.