

AFCD seized endangered European eel fry (with photo)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) seized 53 kilograms of eel fry, including that of regulated species at Hong Kong International Airport yesterday (March 14).

Hong Kong Customs intercepted a shipment declared as 353 kilograms gross weight of the African longfin eel (*Anguilla mossambica*) from Mauritania to Hong Kong via Turkey. Upon examination by the AFCD, the shipment was found to be eel fry and the regulated European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) was found blended in the shipment. A total of 53 kilograms of eel fry was seized under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) for further investigation as a result.

The European eel is listed under the Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and its international trade is regulated through a licensing system. The Ordinance is the local legislation that gives effect to CITES in Hong Kong.

"The European eel begins its life as a larva in the ocean. It then metamorphoses into a glass eel and enters a freshwater habitat where it matures, and eventually migrates back to the ocean to spawn. It only breeds once throughout its lifetime and dies after spawning in the ocean. Overfishing is one of the biggest threats to the survival of the European eel. It is assessed to be critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature," an AFCD spokesman said.

Any person importing, exporting or possessing specimens of endangered species not in accordance with the Ordinance commits an offence and will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years upon conviction with the specimens forfeited.

The spokesman noted that the Government is committed to protecting endangered species. The AFCD and Customs will continue to work closely, remain vigilant, continue to monitor and combat illegal activities involving endangered species.

