

Global Positioning System tracker pilot scheme does not affect cattle's health and welfare

In response to concerns of some media regarding the situation of a cattle wearing a Global Positioning System (GPS) tracker for a pilot scheme, a spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (March 22) said that no adverse effects on the cattle's health and life had been found after continual surveillance. <

"The pilot scheme is a joint effort between the AFCD and Electrical and Mechanical Services Department by using of Internet of Things (IoT) technology to detect the location of the cattle in suburban areas. The scheme aims to help the AFCD to conduct a survey on the population and distribution of cattle and understand their movement patterns and places of stay so as to formulate relevant measures to reduce cattle related traffic accidents and safeguard the safety and welfare of cattle," the spokesman said.

Under the pilot scheme, a collar with GPS tracker has been attached to a cattle living in the Sai Kung Country Park area. The cattle tried on the collar in an operation centre of the AFCD for a certain period of time for it to get used to the device before returning it to the country park.

An expert and a veterinarian of the City University of Hong Kong noted that tracking animal movements with a GPS tracking collar helps provide useful data for studying animals, and is also a common practice in other countries for animal behaviour research. They also agreed that the collar has been fitted appropriately, leaving enough room for the cattle to eat and regurgitate, without affecting its normal life.

The spokesman for the AFCD added that the tracking collar makes use of IoT communication technology, which is low in battery consumption, and thus fit for use in long-term surveillance of animals in the wilderness. Regarding the application of animal microchips, the spokesman said the microchips currently used on animals cannot send out any GPS signal.

Regarding the concerns on the weight and size of the tracking collars, the spokesman said, "The weight of the tracking collar is not heavy for an adult cattle. Therefore it will not affect its normal live. The common pet tracking collars, which are smaller and lighter, do not have large battery capacity, so it is not good enough for related wild animal research."

AFCD staff will keep regular inspection of the cattle and its tracking collar in Sai Kung Country Park to ensure that the cattle's health remains unaffected and the collar works properly. The AFCD will complete data collection as soon as possible, and then remove the tracking collar from the cattle.