

Government gazettes expansion of restricted area at Sham Wan, Lamma Island, and extension of restricted period

The Government gazetted today (December 11) the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 6) Notice 2020 (the Amendment Notice) to expand the restricted area at Sham Wan, Lamma Island (Sham Wan Restricted Area), and to extend the restricted period for strengthening the protection of green turtles.

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that the green turtle is one of the species listed as "endangered" under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. It is also the only sea turtle species that nests in Hong Kong. The sandy beach at Sham Wan on Lamma Island is the only site in Hong Kong and one of the few sites in the South China Sea at which green turtles nest from time to time. In order to minimise disturbances to nesting green turtles, the beach is designated as a restricted area between June 1 and October 31 each year, restricting public access.

The spokesman said, "Green turtles are known to stay in waters adjacent to their natal beaches before and during their nesting. During this period, breeding green turtles are particularly sensitive to human disturbance, which may frighten them and cause them to abandon nesting. To strengthen the protection of breeding green turtles, there is a genuine need to include the sea inlet adjoining the beach into the Sham Wan Restricted Area to restrict access, so as to minimise human disturbance in this area."

After the expansion, the Sham Wan Restricted Area will extend from the existing 0.5-hectare beach to the sea inlet adjoining the beach (about 98.2 hectares of waters) at Sham Wan. The restricted period will also be extended from five months (i.e. from June 1 to October 31) to seven months (i.e. from April 1 to October 31) each year. On the other hand, activities like recreational boating and commercial fishing can still take place outside the restricted period (i.e. from November 1 to March 31) in order to strike a balance between the protection of green turtles and the livelihood of fishermen.

The spokesman said, "The expansion of the restricted area and extension of the restricted period are expected to greatly reduce the human disturbance to green turtles during the breeding period. These new measures will increase the area of protected marine habitat significantly, which will help strengthen protection of endangered green turtles and their important breeding ground, as well as bring about a positive impact for the survival of green turtles in the long run."

The map of the expanded Sham Wan Restricted Area has been deposited in the Land Registry and the headquarters of the AFCD. Copies of the map are also available for inspection at all District Offices in the New Territories.

The Amendment Notice will be tabled at the Legislative Council on December 16 for negative vetting and come into effect on April 1, 2021.