

Hong Kong Customs detects largest hairy crabs smuggling case on record (with photo)

The Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) mounted an anti-smuggling operation at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point yesterday (October 22) and seized about 48 000 suspected smuggled hairy crabs, weighing about 10.8 tonnes, with a total estimated market value of about \$7.2 million. This is the largest on record among similar cases detected by the C&ED in terms of both quantity and weight of the seizure.

Based on risk assessment, Customs officers yesterday intercepted an incoming goods vehicle declared as carrying 307 cartons of electronic products at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point. Upon inspection, the batch of suspected smuggled hairy crabs was found inside the cargo compartment of the vehicle.

The seized hairy crabs did not come with health certificates issued by the relevant authorities of the exporting economies, and failed to comply with the requirements of the Shell Fish (Hairy Crab) Permit.

An investigation is ongoing. A 57-year-old male goods vehicle driver is assisting the investigation.

To combat illegal importing of hairy crabs at sea, land and air control points, the C&ED and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) have commenced a three-month joint operation this September 1. As of yesterday, the C&ED has referred 41 cases to the CFS for follow-up action. Among which, 18 cases, involving about 55 800 hairy crabs with a total weight of about 12.2 tonnes, were not covered by any health certificates.

Customs reminds members of the public that smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Customs also reminds the trade not to import or put on sale hairy crabs with an unknown origin, and consumers should make purchases at reputable shops with the Shell Fish (Hairy Crab) Permit or relevant written permission granted by the FEHD.

According to the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, all food available for sale in Hong Kong, locally produced or imported, should be fit for human consumption. An offender is subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months upon conviction. Moreover, under the Food Safety Ordinance, any person who, without reasonable excuse, does not register but carries on a food importation or distribution business commits

an offence and is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Customs will continue to take stringent enforcement action against cross-boundary smuggling activities through risk assessment and intelligence analysis.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eforms.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).

