

Hong Kong Customs makes record seizure of suspected scheduled totoaba fish maws (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 160 kilograms of suspected scheduled totoaba fish maws with an estimated market value of about \$25 million at Hong Kong International Airport on June 4. The seizure broke the past records of totoaba fish maw seizures by both weight and value counted in a single case. It also surpassed the total seizure amount marked in Customs' records. This is the first seizure of fresh totoaba fish maws made by Customs while the totoaba fish maws seized in the past cases were all dried.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers inspected an air consignment, declared to be carrying fresh fish, arriving in Hong Kong from the United States on that day. Upon inspection, Customs officers found 20 styrofoam boxes labelled with Mexico as the origin. The batch of suspected scheduled fresh *Totoaba macdonaldi* fish maws mix-loaded with frozen fish fillets was found in 15 styrofoam boxes.

After follow-up investigation, Customs officers arrested two men, aged 36 and 40, suspected to be connected with the case at a warehouse in Yuen Long on June 5.

Customs officers then carried out further investigation and further arrested three men, aged between 38 and 57, suspected to be connected with the case at the same warehouse and in Fanling on June 6.

Investigation is ongoing and the five arrested men have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs has detected nine cases involving totoaba fish maws with a total seizure of about 37kg since records began in 2002.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

With the recent reduction in air passenger traffic, Customs has been stepping up enforcement against trafficking activities of prohibited and controlled items through air cargo, postal parcel and express courier channels.

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).

