

## Hong Kong Customs teams up with Mainland law enforcement agencies to combat lobster smuggling activities (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs and law enforcement agencies of the Mainland mounted a joint anti-smuggling operation codenamed "JL" from July to September this year to vigorously combat cross-boundary lobster smuggling activities. During the operation, law enforcement officers in Hong Kong and the Mainland detected three lobster sea smuggling cases and arrested 13 persons suspected to be connected with the cases. A total of about 5 300 kilograms of suspected smuggled lobsters from Australia with an estimated market value of about \$4.2 million were seized.

Hong Kong Customs noticed that the import volume of Australian lobsters into Hong Kong has surged recently and therefore set up a dedicated team to step up intelligence exchanges with law enforcement agencies of the Mainland. Joint in-depth intelligence analyses and risk assessments have been conducted with the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, the Guangdong Coast Guard, the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of Shenzhen Customs and the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of Gongbei Customs.

The Mainland law enforcement agencies first detected a suspected sea smuggling case of lobsters in July. The law enforcement officers intercepted two fishing vessels in Mainland waters and seized on board a total of about 2 200kg of suspected smuggled Australian lobsters with an estimated market value of about \$1.7 million. Seven people were arrested and the two fishing vessels were also seized.

Hong Kong Customs then detected two suspected sea smuggling cases of lobsters in Hong Kong waters in August and September, and seized a total of about 3 100kg of suspected smuggled Australian lobsters with an estimated market value of about \$2.5 million. During the operations, six people were arrested and a fishing vessel was seized.

In addition, after an in-depth investigation, Hong Kong Customs found that some local lobster importers were suspected of intentionally making inaccurate or incomplete import declarations, or failing to lodge import declarations regarding the import volume of Australian lobsters. An enforcement action was taken on October 12 and various lobster importers suspected of smuggling Australian lobsters were raided across the territory. A total of seven suspected masterminds were arrested. The total weight of undeclared Australian lobsters involved in the cases has reached 228 tonnes with an estimated market value of about \$180 million.

Hong Kong Customs is conducting an investigation into the above-mentioned two suspected sea smuggling cases of lobsters and cases involving

the lobster importers. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Hong Kong Customs has always been fiercely combating cross-boundary smuggling activities and will continue working closely and collaborating with Mainland law enforcement agencies through intelligence exchanges and special joint operations, with a view to further enhancing the effectiveness of law enforcement in the anti-smuggling realm by Mainland and Hong Kong enforcement agencies.

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.

Under the Import and Export (Registration) Regulations, any person found guilty of failing to lodge with the Commissioner of Customs and Excise an accurate and complete import declaration within 14 days after the importation of an article is liable on summary conviction to a maximum fine of \$10,000.

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](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).

