

Implementation of new fisheries management strategy in marine parks gazetted

The Government gazetted today (December 13) the Marine Parks and Marine Reserves (Amendment) Regulation 2019 for implementation of the new fisheries management strategy in marine parks.

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that to protect coral communities and enhance overall fisheries resources in Hong Kong, commercial fishing will be banned in the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park (HHWMP), Yan Chau Tong Marine Park (YCTMP) and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park (TPCMP) in the eastern waters and the Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau Marine Park (SCLKCMP) in the western waters under the new fisheries management strategy in marine parks. In addition, commercial fishing by registered local fishing vessels will be allowed to continue in The Brothers Marine Park and the new marine parks to be designated in the western waters through the marine park fishing permit system.

The AFCD will provide a transitional period of two years for fishermen to adapt to the new strategy. The AFCD will not grant new fishing permits for the HHWMP, YCTMP, TPCMP and SCLKCMP with effect from April 1, 2020, onwards. Existing fishing permits already granted will not be renewed with a validity period beyond the transitional period, viz. March 31, 2022. The affected permit holders will be granted an ex-gratia allowance. The commercial fishing ban mentioned above will not apply to fishing permits granted to local residents.

The AFCD commissioned a consultancy study in 2017 to review the existing fisheries management system in marine parks with a view to identifying enhancement measures. The study findings indicated that fishing operations within and near marine parks were not the major threats to marine mammals in Hong Kong. Rather, such fishing operations had relatively larger implications on the coral communities. The study also showed that coral communities are the major targets of conservation in marine parks in the eastern waters, whereas marine parks in the western waters are focused on conservation of marine mammals. The SCLKCMP in the western waters is also an important fish spawning and nursery ground. To meet the different conservation needs of different waters, the AFCD will implement the new fisheries management strategy mentioned above to better achieve the conservation objectives of individual marine parks.

In addition, the AFCD will implement other fisheries enhancement measures in marine parks such as artificial reefs and fish fry restocking, with a view to increasing fisheries resources within and near marine parks to facilitate rehabilitation of the ecosystem. The AFCD will also step up law enforcement to combat illegal fishing activities.

The spokesman said, "The commercial fishing ban in the HHWMP, YCTMP, TPCMP and SCLKCMP will enhance the protection of the coral communities as well as fish spawning and nursery grounds in marine parks. In the long run, the new strategy will contribute to a sustainable marine environment, increase fisheries resources and promote sustainable development of the fisheries industry."

The Marine Parks and Marine Reserves (Amendment) Regulation 2019 will be tabled at the Legislative Council on December 18 for negative vetting and come into effect on April 1, 2020.