

LCQ13: Trading of animals

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 3):

Question:

From 2007 to 2018, the diversity of species imported into Hong Kong according to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora increased by 57%. As pointed out by a study conducted locally, this was likely due to an increasing demand for wildlife rather than the stepping up of law enforcement actions by the authorities. For the exotic pet trade alone, such period saw the import of four million live animals comprising at least 580 species, representing a nine-fold increase from 2007. Besides, the total number of animals imported in 2016 for the purpose of pet trading (excluding dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs) amounted to as vast as 1 108 000. Regarding the trading of animals, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current number of licensed animal traders (excluding traders of cats and dogs), broken down by the type of animals traded;
- (2) of the number of animals traded by licensed animal traders in each of the past 10 years, broken down by the type of animals;
- (3) of the number of pet birds traded by licensed animal traders in the past three years, broken down by the species to which the birds belonged; if such information is not available, of the reasons for that, and whether it will keep such statistics in future;
- (4) whether there were bulk imports of pet birds in the past three years; if so, of the number of birds involved on each occasion, and whether it knows the number of traders to which the imported birds were subsequently sold;
- (5) why the requirement for licensed animal traders to keep a detailed record of transactions is applicable only to pet birds and not other animals;
- (6) of the health screening measures put in place to contain the zoonotic risks posted by the trading of exotic pets;
- (7) whether the Government has set up a comprehensive database on the import and the trading of animals, including information such as the species, countries of origin and the purposes (such as for re-export and for sale locally); if it has, whether it will make public the database; if it has not, of the reasons for that, and whether it will consider doing so;
- (8) whether the Government will review if the current legislation and policies governing the trading of animals are sufficient; if not, of the

reasons for that; and

(9) whether the Government will consider banning the import of animal species that are captured illegally in their countries of origin; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Environment Bureau, I would like to reply to the question as follows:

(1) to (3) and (5) Under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Cap. 139B), a person must not carry on business as an animal trader unless with a licence (i.e. an Animal Trader Licence (ATL)) granted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). As at May 26, 2020, the number of valid ATLs in Hong Kong is tabulated below:

| Type of ATL | Number |
|---|--------|
| Small mammals (excluding dogs and cats) | 19 |
| Reptiles | 103 |
| Birds | 31 |
| Mixed* | 26 |

*These licensees are allowed to sell different types of animals at the premises concerned.

Currently, animal traders who sell dogs, cats and birds are required to provide the relevant transaction records for checking upon request from the AFCD for prevention and control of zoonotic diseases, such as rabies and avian influenza (AI). Apart from dogs, cats and birds, the AFCD does not keep statistics on other types of animals sold by licensed traders. The numbers of birds sold by licensed traders over the past three years are tabulated as follows:

| Year | Number of birds sold by licensed bird traders (head) |
|------|--|
| 2017 | 28 975 |
| 2018 | 29 015 |
| 2019 | 28 107 |

While the AFCD does not have the information on the breakdown of species of birds sold by the above traders, it has been closely monitoring the trading of birds in Hong Kong with a view to preventing and controlling AI. The AFCD will also continue to ensure that relevant traders comply with the

licensing conditions.

(4) A total of 21 licensed bird traders imported birds for sale in the past three years. The number of each consignment of birds imported by these traders during the period is in Annex.

(6), (8) & (9) Import and trading of live animals are mainly regulated for the prevention of introduction and transmission of zoonotic and animal diseases through enforcing the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap. 139) and the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421), as well as their regulations. Under the relevant legislation, a special or import permit should be obtained from the AFCD prior to the import of the animals. In consideration of an application for a special or import permit associated with species of animals new to Hong Kong, the AFCD will conduct assessments covering, for example, the animal disease situation of the importing country/place, the suitability of the species to be kept as a pet, protection of public health and safety, as well as potential impact on local biodiversity for the animal species. If the species are considered to be acceptable for importation into Hong Kong, the AFCD would impose relevant terms pertaining to health of the species to be imported, including requiring veterinary health certification from the importing country/place when issuing the permits, in order to minimise the risk of transmission of animal diseases into Hong Kong. No permit will be issued if that species is considered to be unsuitable for import into Hong Kong. The Government will continue to follow international practices on trading of animals when regulating the import of animals into Hong Kong.

Under Cap. 139B, all licensed animal traders have to comply with public health and animal health practices as stipulated in the licensing conditions. All licensed premises will be inspected by AFCD staff at least once every month to ensure animal health and welfare. Veterinary advice will also be provided to traders on how to improve and monitor animal health to minimise the possible risks of animal diseases. As far as pet birds are concerned, in addition to routine inspections, AFCD staff will also collect environmental samples at the licensed premises for testing of AI, which help monitor and determine the occurrence of AI at these premises.

In 2016, the Government amended Cap. 139B to better regulate animal trading, as well as dog breeding and trading activities with a view to further enhancing animal health and welfare. We will keep under review the effectiveness of the relevant regulation.

(7) The information on the import of animals into Hong Kong, such as the relevant quantity, type, and importing country/place, is available from the Census and Statistics Department's website (tradeids.censtatd.gov.hk/Index).