

LCQ14: Trading of live 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 (October 28):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council of the following information regarding the trading (including import and re-export) of live animals other than livestock, cats, dogs and poultry:

(1) the total number of live animals other than cats and dogs imported in each of the past five years by the pet trade, with a breakdown by the (i) classes (i.e. mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) and species to which such animals belonged, (ii) country/place of origin of such animals, and (iii) whether or not such animals belonged to species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (set out in a table);

(2) the total number of traders of pets other than cats and dogs holding an Animal Trader Licence (ATL) issued under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Cap. 139B) in each year from March 2017 (when Cap. 139B came into effect) to 2019, with a breakdown by the categories of animals traded (i.e. (i) small pet mammals, (ii) pet reptiles, (iii) pet birds, and (iv) other pet animals)(set out in a table);

(3) the respective total numbers of prosecutions instituted, in each year from March 2017 to 2019, in respect of trading of live animals other than cats and dogs allegedly (i) in breach of ATL's conditions, and (ii) without a valid ATL, as well as the respective numbers of convictions among such cases (set out in a table);

(4) the total number of licences for possession of live animals of endangered species issued in each of the past five years under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap.586), with a breakdown by the classes to which the animals belonged (i.e. (i) birds, (ii) reptiles, (iii) fishes, (iv) mammals, (v) amphibians, and (vi) other animals)(set out in a table);

(5) as some concern groups for animal rights have pointed out that in 80 per cent of the cases, no details on the purposes of import were given in the statistics on Hong Kong's import of live animals other than livestock, cats, dogs and poultry currently compiled by the Census and Statistics Department, whether the Government will consider setting up a comprehensive database on the trading of such live animals in Hong Kong, and making public such a database, so as to provide the public with details such as the species, countries/places of origin, and the purposes (e.g. for re-export or for sale in Hong Kong) of such imported live animals; if not, of the reasons for that;

and

(6) the specific measures taken by the Government (i) to ensure that those CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed animals on sale locally have not been taken illegally from the wild in Hong Kong or overseas, and (ii) to differentiate between those obtained legally from captive breeding and those taken illegally from the wild?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Environment Bureau, my reply to the question is as follows:

(1) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) implements control on the import of animals and birds in accordance with the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap. 139). To import any mammals, reptiles and birds into Hong Kong, a Special Permit must be obtained in advance from the AFCD. The number of imported animals belonging to species not listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for pet trade (Note 1) (live mammals other than cats and dogs, birds and reptiles) from 2015 to 2019, with breakdown for the top five species by import quantity, are tabulated in Annex A. The AFCD does not maintain statistics on imported non-CITES amphibians.

The import figures for CITES species, with breakdown for the top five species by import quantity from 2015 to 2019 (live mammals other than cats and dogs, birds, reptiles and amphibians) are at Annex B. CITES however does not distinguish whether an imported animal is for pet trade.

(2) The numbers of Animal Trader Licences (ATL) issued under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Cap. 139B) between March 2017 and 2019 (other than cats and dogs) are tabulated as follows:

Type of ATL	Number of ATLs issued		
	2017 (March to December)	2018	2019
(i) Small mammals (excluding dogs and cats)	17	20	21
(ii) Reptiles	44	48	50
(iii) Birds	21	30	26
(iv) Mixed (Note 2)	29	34	26
Total	111	132	123

(3) The number of prosecutions instituted, in each year from March 2017 to 2019, against breaches of ATL conditions, and trading of animals without a valid ATL, in respect of live animals other than cats and dogs, as well as the respective numbers of convictions among such cases are tabulated as follows:

Year	Breach of ATL conditions		Trading animals without a valid ATL (other than cats and dogs)	
	Prosecutions	Convictions	Prosecutions	Convictions
2017 (March to December)	0	0	1	1
2018	0	0	1	1
2019	2	2	1	1

(4) According to the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586), each premise for keeping live endangered species listed in Appendix I and II of Cap. 586 for commercial purposes requires a licence to possess. A licence to possess can cover more than one species/individual. The numbers of such licences issued from 2015-2019 are tabulated below:

Type of Animal	Number of Possession Licences				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Birds	4	2	14	6	1
Reptiles	24	26	28	14	6
Fish	15	18	47	17	13
Mammals	0	0	0	0	0
Amphibians	0	0	0	0	0
Other animals	11	8	6	4	7
More than one type of animal	3	1	6	5	3

(5) 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 (Note 3). In case further information is requested, the AFCD will endeavour to retrieve and provide information on import of animals, including information on species imported, their countries of origin and whether they are imported for pet trade purpose.

(6) 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 addition, the import of all CITES species into Hong Kong needs to be accompanied by a certifying document issued by the CITES Management Authority of the exporting place. The document is required to specify the source (e.g. wild origin or captive bred) of the animal and helps to verify the legality and the sustainability of the trade. Furthermore, the types of animals permitted to be sold (Note 4) by licensed animal traders are restricted by their licences. The AFCD will also conduct inspections from time to time to detect any irregularities.

Note 1: Animals and birds imported by traders with Animal Trader Licences under the Cap. 139B Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations not for food purpose.

Note 2: These licencees are allowed to sell different types of animals at the premises concerned.

Note 3: tradeids.censtatd.gov.hk/Index/

Note 4: Types of animals or birds allowed to be sold by a licensed animal trader include cats, dogs, chinchillas, domestic rabbits, domestic rats, gerbils, guinea pigs, hamsters, mice, some species of lizards, snakes, turtles and tortoises, and all birds (except chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons and turkeys).