

LCQ15: Smuggling of shark fins

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 27):

Question:

It has been reported that the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) detected two smuggling cases of shark fins in April and May this year, which involved a total of 26 tonnes of fins from 38 500 sharks of controlled endangered species. Both the weight and value of the seizures have broken the past records, and the weight doubled that for the whole of 2019. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of smuggling cases of shark fins detected by C&ED in each of the past five years, and set out the following information on each case by the date on which it was detected:

- (i) total value of the cargo,
- (ii) cargo weight,
- (iii) shark species involved,
- (iv) mode of trade (i.e. import, export or re-export),
- (v) countries involved in the trade (including the place of origin and destination of the cargo),
- (vi) means of transport,
- (vii) number of persons prosecuted (if any), and
- (viii) penalties imposed on the convicted persons (if any); if it cannot provide such information, of the reasons for that; and

(2) whether it has studied the causes for the substantial increase in the quantity of smuggled shark fins seized in this year as compared with those in previous years; if so, of the details; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the measures currently adopted for combating the activities of smuggling shark fins; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Kenneth Leung is as follows:

(1) The number of cases and details of the annual seizures of controlled shark fin products in the past five years (2015-2019) are tabulated below:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Cases	6	4	11	8	28

Estimate of Value (\$ million)	0.38	0.65	1.92	0.52	20.7
Shark Species (Weight/kg)	Oceanic Whitetip Shark (283.5), Controlled Hammerhead Shark (215.4), Whale Shark (12)	Oceanic Whitetip Shark (0.3), Controlled Hammerhead Shark (1 035.4)	Oceanic Whitetip Shark (1 263.1), Controlled Hammerhead Shark (1 382.7)	Oceanic Whitetip Shark (143.3), Controlled Hammerhead Shark (464.4)	Oceanic Whitetip Shark (604.2), Controlled Hammerhead Shark (2 143.2) Silky Shark (2 138) Thresher Shark (1 566.7)
Mode of Trade	Import	Import	Import	Import	Import
Countries Involved (Number of Cases)	Seychelles (1) Panama (1) Nicaragua (1) United Arab Emirates (UAE) (1) Peru (1) Morocco (1)	Madagascar (1) Somalia (1) Panama (1) unknown(1)	India (1) Egypt (1) Kenya (1) Peru (2) Senegal (1) Guatemala (2) Indonesia (1) Somalia (1) UAE (1)	Peru (1) Indonesia (2) UAE (1) Madagascar(1) Kenya (1) Costa Rica (1) Sri Lanka (1)	Morocco (1) Mexico (9) Madagascar (1) Venezuela via Mainland China (1) Sri Lanka (4) Panama (1) Democratic Republic of the Congo (1) UAE (1) Somalia (1) Pakistan (1) Kenya (2) Senegal (1) Suriname (1) Philippines (3)
Mode of Transportation (No. of cases)	air (4), sea (2)	air (2), sea (2)	air (1), sea (10)	air (3), sea (5)	air (15), sea (12), land (1)
Number of Persons Prosecuted	0	0	0	0	5 (Note)
Fine (\$)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	6,000 and 8,000

Note: A total of five cases involving illegal import of controlled shark fins were prosecuted in 2019, two of which have been fined, and the remaining three cases will be tried at the District Court.

(2) The Government is committed to protecting endangered species and implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Hong Kong through the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) (the

Ordinance). The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has been working closely with the Customs and Excise Department to combat illegal import and export of endangered species, including controlled shark fins. The Government has stepped up efforts to combat smuggling activities in recent years, which resulted in an increase in the number of illegal shark fins seized. In addition, in line with the CITES, Hong Kong has added four shark species (i.e. three species of Thresher Sharks and Silky Shark) commonly seen in the trade for regulation under the Ordinance since November 1, 2018. The new control measures may also lead to more seizures of illegal shark fins in 2019 than in the past. Besides, the import of dried shark fins in Hong Kong has decreased from 2 805 tonnes in 2015 to 2 012 tonnes in 2019, which may partly reflect the effectiveness of conservation measures.