

LCQ17: Unauthorised display of items in country parks

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

From time to time in recent years, there have been people displaying large vertical banners on prominent cliff faces or posting slogans and painting graffiti on both sides of hiking trails within country parks for expressing political aspirations or publicising political messages. The Government has to spend public money and deploy manpower to remove such items and carry out clearance work. In recent months, there were again a spate of cases of displaying large vertical banners. Some members of the public are annoyed at this, and have expressed concern that the Government has all along been unable to curb such acts over the years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of reports received in each of the past five years on unauthorised (i) display of vertical banners and (ii) posting of slogans and painting of graffiti in country parks; the procedure, manpower and expenditure involved in the operations to remove or clear such items;

(2) of (i) the number of patrols conducted in country parks and special areas for combating unauthorised display of vertical banners, and (ii) the number of operations conducted during patrols to remove or clear such items, by government officers in each month of the past five years; the respective manpower, expenditure and time involved in such operations;

(3) of the respective current staffing establishment of those civil servants responsible for patrolling country parks and special areas;

(4) as the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations (Cap. 208A) provides that no person without permission shall, within a country park or special area, display any sign, notice, poster, banner or advertisement, of the respective numbers of persons prosecuted and convicted in each of the past five years for unauthorised display of large vertical banners within country parks, and the punishments imposed on those convicted; if there were no cases of prosecution and conviction, whether it has studied if this situation was due to insufficient efforts in combating such acts; and

(5) whether it will raise the relevant penalties and step up law enforcement efforts so as to curb this undesirable trend; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho is as follows:

(1) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) received three (2015), four (2016), three (2017), three (2018) and 17 (as at end September 2019) cases of illegal display of large vertical banners in country parks in the past five years. Besides, the number of cases of posting slogans and graffiti were three (2015), one (2016), one (2017) and zero (from 2018 to end September 2019).

Upon receipt of the relevant reports, the AFCD will conduct site inspection and investigation as soon as possible. Depending on situations, the AFCD will deploy staff to clean up or refer to the relevant government departments to follow up the cleaning action. For cases of large vertical banners which were located in difficult terrains, joint removal operation will be carried out by various government departments, including the Fire Services Department, Government Flying Service, Hong Kong Police Force and the AFCD. Detailed information about the number of officers and time involved for handling cases of large vertical banners, etc. is set out in the Annex. Relevant departments do not keep separate breakdowns on expenditure for handling this kind of cases.

(2) The number of patrols conducted in country parks and special areas by the AFCD in the past five years, as well as the number of officers and time involved for handling cases of large vertical banners are detailed in the Annex. Patrolling is part of the routine work of the AFCD and we have no separate breakdowns on the relevant expenditure.

(3) At present, a total of 149 frontline staff of the AFCD (including 123 civil servants and 26 contract staff) are responsible for patrolling in country parks and special areas, enforcing the Country Parks Ordinance and other relevant legislation, as well as providing visitor services and performing work on publicity and education.

(4) According to the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations (Cap. 208A) (the Regulations), it is an offence to display any sign, notice, poster, banner or advertisement in country parks or special areas without a permit granted by the Country and Marine Parks Authority. Contravention of the relevant regulations is liable to a maximum fine of \$2,000 and imprisonment for three months. In the past five years, there were two successful prosecutions against illegal display of banners in country parks under the Regulations and the fines were \$500 and \$700 respectively. The AFCD has investigated the cases of illegal display of large vertical banners as mentioned in part (1) above, however, no suspect could be identified after the investigation and hence no further action could be taken.

(5) The AFCD will continue to heighten patrols in country parks including the locations previously involved in illegal display of large vertical banners, review the patrol routes and frequency from time to time, and arrange special operations to deter activities contravening the Regulations as necessary. The AFCD will prosecute against the offenders if there is sufficient evidence

collected.