

LCQ6: Restriction on carrying or posting dried seafood into the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 28):

Question:

According to the Catalogue of Animals and Plants, and Animal and Plant Products Prohibited from being Carried or Posted into the People's Republic of China (the Catalogue), aquatic animal products are prohibited from being carried or posted into the Mainland. It is learnt that business turnover of the local dried seafood industry has dropped in recent years, with the spending of Mainland travellers at local dried seafood shops during this year's National Day long holidays dropping by more than 30 per cent as compared with that in the same period of last year. This is reckoned to be related to the enforcement of the Catalogue at Mainland ports. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that dried seafood, being dried food that has gone through work processes such as sun-drying, oven-drying, cooking and dehydration, is completely different from fresh and live seafood in nature, whether the Government has gained an understanding from the Mainland authorities as to whether the Catalogue only restricts the entry of fresh and live seafood but not dried seafood;

(2) whether the Government discussed with the Mainland authorities in the past three years the setting up of a quarantine system to be implemented in Hong Kong which is recognised by the Mainland authorities, so that quarantine dried seafood sold in Hong Kong are exempted from the restrictions of the Catalogue; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as some members of the industry have pointed out that quite a lot of local dried seafood comes from the Mainland and is thus believed to be able to meet the Mainland quarantine and hygiene requirements without difficulties, whether the Government will discuss with the Mainland authorities allowing travellers to carry into the Mainland a reasonable quantity of dried seafood for personal use?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai is as follows:

(1) According to the Catalogue of Animals and Plants, and Animal and Plant Products Prohibited from being Carried or Posted into the People's Republic of China (the Catalogue) revised by the Mainland authorities in 2012, an array of animals and plants and their products are prohibited from being carried or posted into the Mainland. The Catalogue mainly covers three types of products, namely "animals and animal products", "plants and plant products" and "others". "Animals and animal products" include live animals (except cat and dog), bird's nests (except canned ones) and aquatic animal products, etc. We are given to understand that aquatic animal products prohibited from being carried or posted into the Mainland include dried seafood products.

The restriction laid down in the Catalogue aims at preventing animal and plant diseases and pests from spreading into the Mainland, and protecting the production of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery as well as public health and safety on the Mainland. The restriction applies to all exporting places, including Hong Kong.

(2) and (3) Over the years, local dried seafood industry has been exporting dried seafood products to the Mainland and other places. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has communicated with the relevant Mainland authorities regarding the carrying and posting of dried seafood products into the Mainland by travellers. Since dried seafood products involve various types of aquatic animal products, there is no common quarantine system applicable to all these products. Members of the industry may provide AFCD with specific details of those dried seafood products they intend to sell to travellers for carrying or posting into the Mainland, so as to facilitate AFCD's liaison with the Mainland authorities.

The local trade of bird's nests has also raised the concern that the Mainland authorities' inclusion of bird's nest in the Catalogue has caused certain impact on the trade. In this connection, we have been relaying to the relevant authorities the trade's appeal for exporting bird's nest products to the Mainland. The Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government and the Mainland have been following up on the arrangements on inspection and quarantine for the importation of bird nest products from Hong Kong, initialled last December. The formal signing of the agreement on the implementation of the above arrangements with the General Administration of Customs during my visit to Beijing at the end of October this year will foster the trading of bird's nests between the Mainland and the SAR.

We will continue to maintain liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities and the trade on this matter.