

Man sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for illegal import of endangered shark fins (with photo)

A man was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for 12 months at the District Court today (July 24) for illegally importing fins of endangered sharks.

The 36-year-old male passenger arrived in Hong Kong from Brazil via Ethiopia on November 24 last year. Upon interception and referral by Customs, officers of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) inspected his 15 pieces of checked-in baggage and found dried fins regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586). The person did not possess any valid Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) documents. AFCD officers seized over 450 kilograms of dried fins from the baggage for further investigation. Upon detailed examination, those dried fins were confirmed to belong to several species, among which about 113 kilograms were from silky sharks and hammerhead sharks, which are CITES Appendix II species and valued at about \$620,000. Charges were laid against the man by the AFCD for the illegal import of endangered species. The man was convicted at the District Court today and the court adopted a starting point of 18 months' imprisonment for sentencing. A one-third reduction was given for his guilty plea and the defendant was sentenced to imprisonment for 12 months.

A spokesman for the AFCD said, "The rest of the seized fins also consisted of CITES-listed species. However, those species were not yet regulated under CITES or the Ordinance at the time. Given that the criminal act also involved such fins, the AFCD applied to the Court to forfeit those fins in accordance with the Ordinance. The application was approved."

CITES Appendix II species are regulated under the Ordinance in Hong Kong. Unless exempted or otherwise specified, the import, export, re-export, introduction from the sea, or possession of scheduled species, including their parts and/or derivatives, is subject to control under a licensing system. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years upon conviction with the specimens forfeited.

The spokesman noted that more shark species have been regulated under the Ordinance since December last year to reflect the latest regulations of CITES. Members of the public are reminded to observe the law.

Recently, crime syndicates have not only attempted to use invalid documents, but have also sourced specimens that were not regulated and mixed them with scheduled ones in an effort to make detection more difficult. The AFCD will continue to work closely with Customs to combat illegal activities involving endangered species.

For information on the regulation of endangered species under the Ordinance, visit www.cites.hk. Members of the public may report any suspected irregularities to the AFCD by calling 1823.

