

Traveller sentenced to imprisonment for smuggling incense tree wood chips (with photo)

A traveller who illegally exported incense tree wood chips has been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment at Fanling Magistrates' Courts today (June 7).

A spokesman of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that Customs officers intercepted an outbound male passenger, aged 25, at Shenzhen Bay Control Point and seized about 1.57 kilograms of incense tree (*Aquilaria sinensis*) wood chips from his backpack on June 5. The estimated market value was about \$125,600. Upon investigation by the AFCD, the man was charged with illegal export of endangered species, and was convicted and sentenced to two months' imprisonment at Fanling Magistrates' Courts today.

All *Aquilaria* species, including the native incense tree, are listed in Appendix II to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. They are regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance.

The import, export, re-export or possession of specimens of scheduled species not in accordance with the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance is an offence. The Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Ordinance 2018 (Amendment Ordinance) came into effect on May 1, and the increase in penalties under the Amendment Ordinance also came into effect on the same day. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. The specimens will also be forfeited upon conviction.

The spokesman also pointed out that according to the Forests and Countryside Ordinance, felling of trees on government land without permission is an offence. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for one year.

The spokesman appealed to the public not to defy the law by smuggling agarwood or illegally felling incense trees. To enquire about the importation or exportation of endangered species and to report illegal imports or exports, the public can call the AFCD at 1823 or visit the website www.cites.hk.

