

Travellers jailed for smuggling European eels

Two men who smuggled European eels were convicted for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, and were sentenced to imprisonment.

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that a 24-year-old local man and a 60-year-old Austrian male passenger arrived on December 1, 2018, from Lisbon, Portugal, via Moscow, Russia. A total of about 30 kilograms of European eels were found in their check-in suitcases by Customs officers.

During follow-up investigations, AFCD officers applied real-time polymerase chain reaction analysis and confirmed all the test samples came from European eels. The AFCD then charged both men with the illegal import of a listed species in Appendix II to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The 60-year-old male was convicted at the District Court on June 11. With 12 months' imprisonment as the starting point for sentencing, he was sentenced to eight months behind bars after reduction because he pleaded guilty. The 24-year-old male was also convicted at the District Court today (June 13). With 12 months' imprisonment as the starting point for sentencing, he was sentenced to six months behind bars after reduction due to his background and his guilty plea.

European eels are listed in Appendix II to the CITES and regulated under the Ordinance in Hong Kong. The penalties under the Ordinance have been amended and increased since May 1 last year. Any person importing, exporting or possessing specimens of endangered species not in accordance with the Ordinance will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. The specimens will also be forfeited upon conviction. Members of the public are urged not to break the law.

To enquire about the control of endangered species or to report suspected irregularities, the public can call the AFCD on 1823 or visit the website www.cites.hk.