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Hon. Tanya Chan
Chairperson, Panel on Environmental Affairs,
Legislative Council

May 25th, 2018

Dear Ms. Chan,

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you an opinion on two items, shark fin and turtle, to be raised in the upcoming Legco meeting. My apologies for the timing of this submission but I was called back to the UK for family matters unexpectedly and am only now able to make my submission ahead of this meeting. Both items, variously, are important issues for Hong Kong in relation to its commitments, including under BSAP and in relation to CITES.

Shark fin: Hong Kong is getting a global reputation, a bad one, as an international trade hub in threatened and endangered species and the shark fin trade is one of the more serious examples of this with the city accounting for about half of all international trade of which almost a third was recently determined to be in threatened species. These species are openly traded and sold as if traders feel no threat of being caught, while mislabelling easily masks illegal shipments because of limited enforcement. Given that DNA testing is now much easier than it once was and that we have grown excellent capacity to support such testing at the HKU Forensics Lab, we certainly have the capability to address the urgent need to step up enforcement. With increased penalties for illegal wildlife trade now in place, we must also work to ensure that prosecutions are successful and that investigations of the perpetrators of trade are conducted; it is no longer acceptable to only beat the messenger; the organizers of criminal wildlife trade need to be identified and stopped.

As a city, we treat cigarette smuggling more seriously than we do the devastating and hugely damaging trade in wildlife. This is no longer acceptable and remains a serious blight on the city's reputation. It is certainly past time to engage the Organised and Serious Crimes Ordinance (Cap 455) for wildlife-related crime, to send the message that we are, indeed, serious, about these crimes against the planet and do not just intend to profit from them.

Turtle: We are lucky to host one of the last remaining nesting beaches in China at ShamWan beach on Lamma Island. We have a long-standing commitment to protect this beach but, over the last decade, the number of nesting females has declined to just a pitiful few and there have been multiple deaths this year already in Hong Kong. Current protection is clearly inadequate and should include closure of the bay during and leading up to nesting and include the shallow waters down to 10 m depth to be effective, along with other stronger measures.

Yours sincerely,

Yvonne Sadovy
Professor, University of Hong Kong
Swire Institute of Marine Science