

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1292/20-21
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/EA

Panel on Environmental Affairs

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 28 June 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 2 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, BBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP

Members absent : Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, GBS, JP
Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming, SBS, JP
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP

Public Officers attending : **For item IV**

Mr TSE Chin-wan, BBS, JP
Under Secretary for the Environment

Ms Bella MUI
Assistant Director (Nature Conservation)
Environmental Protection Department

Mr Simon CHAN
Assistant Director (Conservation)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr CHEUNG Ka-shing
Senior Wetland and Fauna Conservation Officer
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

For item V

Mr TSE Chin-wan, BBS, JP
Under Secretary for the Environment

Ms Bella MUI
Assistant Director (Nature Conservation)
Environmental Protection Department

Mr Simon CHAN
Assistant Director (Conservation)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Eric LIU
Senior Conservation Officer (Technical Services) (Acting)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Clerk in attendance : Ms Angel SHEK
Chief Council Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Ms Ada LAU
Senior Council Secretary (1)7

Miss Bowie LAM
Council Secretary (1)1

Miss Mandy POON
Legislative Assistant (1)1

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I. Confirmation of minutes

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1027/ — Minutes of the meeting held on
20-21 26 April 2021)

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The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2021 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since last meeting

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting:

LC Paper No. CB(1)929/ — Submission dated 14 May 2021 from
20-21(01) Tuen Mun District Council on West
New Territories landfill extension and
potential development of a waste-to-
energy facility in Tuen Mun (Chinese
version only)

LC Paper No. CB(1)1029/ — Information paper on "Cleaner
20-21(01) Production Partnership Programme
Progress Report for 2020-21" provided
by the Administration

III. Schedule of regular meetings for July to September 2021 and items for discussion at the next meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — List of follow-up actions
20-21(01)

LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — List of outstanding items for discussion)
20-21(02)

3. Members agreed that three regular Panel meetings be held in the remainder of the 2020-2021 session, with the meetings in August and September 2021 be held on the fourth Mondays at 2:30 pm, and that in July be held on Monday, 19 July 2021 at 4:30 pm.

(Post-meeting note: The meeting schedule was circulated to members on 28 June 2021, vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1064/20-21.)

4. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the meeting on 19 July 2021:

(a) Clean Air Plan for Hong Kong 2035; and

(b) Phase IV of Mandatory Energy Efficiency Labelling Scheme.

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5. The Chairman pointed out that some members had suggested to him that a duty visit be conducted to facilities managed by the Environmental Protection Department ("EPD") to enrich members' understanding of the latest waste reduction and recycling initiatives. The Chairman was discussing the arrangements with the Administration.

(Post-meeting note: The Chairman subsequently directed that a visit to O·PARK1, T·PARK and GREEN@TUEN MUN be conducted on 17 August 2021. The circular inviting Members to join the visit was issued on 12 July 2021, vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1109/20-21. The itinerary of the visit had later been revised to include an additional facility "Y·PARK".)

IV. Progress of implementation of management plan for wild pigs

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — Administration's paper
20-21(03)

LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — Updated background brief on
20-21(04) "Management of wild pigs in Hong
Kong" prepared by the Legislative
Council Secretariat)

Briefing by the Administration

6. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Assistant Director (Conservation), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AD(C)/AFCD") briefed the Panel on the progress of implementation of the Administration's enhanced management measures for wild pigs.

(Post-meeting note: The PowerPoint presentation materials were circulated to members on 28 June 2021, vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1062/20-21(01).)

Discussion

Management measures for wild pigs

Policy objectives

7. Mr Tony TSE and Mr KWOK Wai-keung enquired about the policy objectives of the management measures for wild pigs. Noting that according to the preliminary study launched by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

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Department ("AFCD") in 2019 ("the preliminary study"), it was estimated that there were about 1 800 to 3 300 wild pigs in the countryside in Hong Kong, Mr TSE and Mr KWOK queried whether and how, based on such broad-brush estimation, the Administration had set any quantifiable targets for the management measures (e.g. target for controlling the local wild pig population) and assessment of their effectiveness. Referring to the reported sighting of a wild piglet in an MTR train compartment on 18 June 2021, Mr Steven HO pointed out that wild pigs could move around in an extensive area and expressed concern about the areas covered by the preliminary study and reliability of the estimate with infrared camera traps or other means/devices which might be deployed at certain spots only.

8. AD(C)/AFCD responded that since wild pigs were generally solitary, secretive and wary of humans, it was difficult to precisely estimate their number in the territory. In order to gather more information for monitoring the population and movement of wild pigs, AFCD conducted the preliminary study using infrared camera traps and statistical modelling to estimate the number of wild pigs in the countryside. While wild pigs were more common in the countryside areas, some wild pigs were accustomed to wandering and foraging in busy urban or public areas due to intentional feeding, thereby causing nuisance and/or dangers to members of the public. As such, AFCD had been adopting a multipronged approach of managing wild pigs, with a view to alleviating the nuisance problem, especially in urban or public areas. Such measures included management of wild pig populations by the Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme ("CCRP"). Under CCRP, AFCD would vaccinate or sterilize captive wild pigs for contraception when conditions permitted and then relocate the wild pigs to remote countryside far away from residential areas. It was noteworthy that Hong Kong was the first city in the world to apply contraceptive vaccine or sterilization surgery to wild pigs causing nuisance problems. AD(C)/AFCD further said that AFCD had extended the scope of the population study in 2020 to cover more sites and different seasons so as to collect further data about wild pigs. The study was expected to be completed by the end of 2021. AFCD would then discuss with the Wild Pig Management Advisory Group ("the Advisory Group") on the strategy to further control the population of wild pigs, including whether a target number should be set.

9. Mr Tony TSE expressed disappointment that the Administration did not have any clear-cut policy, objectives and implementation timetable on its management plan for wild pigs in Hong Kong.

Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme

10. The Chairman pointed out that compared to 2016, complaints and injury reports related to wild pigs received by AFCD had almost doubled in 2020.

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Referring to the Administration's successful strategy in controlling the populations of monkeys in Hong Kong, the Chairman asked why the number of wild pigs vaccinated or sterilized remained small. He suggested the Administration step up its efforts in implementing CCRP by allocating more manpower resources and set target numbers of wild pigs to be handled under the programme in the future.

11. AD(C)/AFCD advised that the Administration had adopted a strategy to control the population of wild pigs similar to that for monkeys. However, due to their much larger size and scattered habitats, it was much more difficult and time-consuming and took more resources to catch and vaccinate/sterilize wild pigs in each CCRP operation. That said, since the launch of CCRP in 2017, more manpower resources had been allocated to enhance its operations and the number of wild pigs captured and vaccinated/sterilized had been on the rise, with some 300 wild pigs captured and vaccinated/sterilized in 2020-2021.

12. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired about the administering method and effective period of the contraceptive vaccines (i.e. GonaCon™) on wild pigs and how the Administration identified and tracked the relocated wild pigs after vaccination.

13. AD(C)/AFCD advised that wild pigs had to be captured for administration of contraceptive vaccines by injection. AFCD had conducted analysis on the serum samples of wild pigs administered with GonaCon™ and the results indicated that 91% of those wild pigs did not get pregnant after such vaccination. According to overseas study, GonaCon™ had been found to be effective for at least four to six years on captive wild pigs. AD(C)/AFCD supplemented that a microchip would be implanted in each wild pig captured under CCRP for monitoring their movements and assessing the effectiveness of contraceptive vaccines (if administered).

Statutes related to prohibition of hunting or feeding wild animals

14. In response to members' enquiries, AD(C)/AFCD explained that under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170):

- (a) wild pigs were not protected wild animals;
- (b) a person would contravene Cap. 170 if the person hunted wild pigs (or other wild animals) by certain means without the relevant permit from the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation;
- (c) currently, Kam Shan, Lion Rock and Shing Mun Country Parks, part of Tai Mo Shan Country Park, Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, a

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section of Tai Po Road along Caldecott Road and Piper's Hill section of Tai Po Road were feeding ban areas under Cap. 170. While implementation of the feeding ban was originally targeted at monkeys, feeding of other wild animals including wild pigs was also prohibited in the feeding ban areas. Any person feeding wild animals in the feeding ban areas was liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000; and

- (d) for feeding of wild animals outside the feed ban areas, a fine of \$1,500 was imposable under the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness and Obstruction) Ordinance (Cap. 570) if the feeding gave rise to hygiene problems.

15. The Chairman enquired about the rationale for designating only some areas as feeding ban areas. Mr Steven HO suggested that the feeding ban be expanded to cover the entire territory such that feeding wild animals in urban areas would also be liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000 under Cap. 170; (b) more manpower resources be deployed to step up enforcement of the feeding ban; and (c) additional fixed penalty tickets be issued under Cap. 570 if the offender refused to cease the act of feeding at the scene.

16. The Chairman and Mr KWOK Wai-keung shared the observation that the numbers of prosecutions and successful prosecutions against illegal feeding of wild animals (including wild pigs) over the past three years (i.e. 2018-2019 to 2020-2021) had been low (e.g. 48 and 31 cases respectively in 2020-2021). Mr KWOK enquired about the re-offending rate as it could reflect the deterrent effect of the penalty under Cap. 170. Ms Elizabeth QUAT held the view that the fine of \$1,500 under Cap. 570 did not have much deterrent effect. She suggested the Administration review the penalty for illegal feeding of wild animals in feeding ban areas, and/or the penalty for feeding of wild animals in other areas which had given rise to hygiene problems ("the penalties"), with a view to imposing a heavier fine and/or imprisonment for more serious or repeated offences. Sharing Ms QUAT's views, the Chairman also urged the Administration to review the penalties.

17. AD(C)/AFCD said that in considering the suggestion of a territory-wide feeding ban, a host of factors had to be taken into account including enforcement scope, strategy and manpower, as well as the collection and establishment of evidence. The Administration had discussed related issues with the Advisory Group and took the view that it might not be practicable and effective to enforce a territory-wide feeding ban. The Administration considered it more appropriate to educate the public and promote the message of no-feeding of wild animals.

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18. AD(C)/AFCD further said that publicity, education and enforcement together had yielded results in enhancing public awareness of the impacts of feeding on wildlife and the environment, and driving behavioural change. Noting that some members of the public continued to feed wild animals including wild pigs, AFCD launched a consultancy study in 2021 to analyze the motivation of feeding wild pigs by some members of the public. It was anticipated that the study would be completed by the end of 2022. Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern about the long time to be taken for completing the study, which might delay the Administration's review on its strategy to manage wild pigs and on the penalties. AD(C)/AFCD and the Under Secretary for the Environment ("USEN") said that the Environmental Protection Department ("EPD") would review the penalties with AFCD.

Improving the design of rubbish bins and litter containers

19. Ms Elizabeth QUAT observed that there was a drop in the number of complaints about wild pigs received by her office after introduction of the newly designed rubbish bins and litter containers at sites frequently disturbed by wild animals to reduce nuisance of wild animals scavenging these facilities. Given the proven effectiveness, Ms QUAT called on the Administration to deploy more such facilities at appropriate locations.

20. USEN said that the newly designed rubbish bins and litter containers could make it difficult for wild animals to forage from those facilities. Currently, all locations with such newly designed facilities were black spots with relatively serious wild pig nuisance and a larger number of complaints. Relevant departments (including AFCD, EPD and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department) would continue to deploy the newly designed rubbish bins and litter containers at black spots identified.

Public education

21. Mr KWOK Wai-keung commented that the Administration should enhance public awareness that feeding wild pigs would not only pose potential risks to the safety of members of the public but also put the wild pigs at greater risk of being captured. Mr Steven HO said that the publicity programme should stress that minimizing human-wild pig contacts and intentional feeding could help deter the latter from foraging in urban or public areas. The Administration took note of the members' views.

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Other measure to manage wild pigs

22. Mr Steven HO observed that wild pigs were generally categorized as pests in most other parts of the world (e.g. Australia) and suggested that the Administration should be more forward looking in managing wild pigs, including considering the resumption of hunting operations on wild pigs (which had been terminated in Hong Kong in 2019) when necessary. AD(C)/AFCD advised that, compared to hunting where an average of less than one wild pig was hunted per operation, CCRP had a higher capture efficiency, i.e. several wild pigs could be captured on average in each operation by using tranquilizer dart guns.

Damage to farms and country parks

23. Mr Steven HO expressed disappointment that the Administration had not accorded serious consideration to assessing the economic loss caused to farmers by wild pig raids on crops. He pointed out that relocating captured wild pigs to remote countryside areas (where most farmland was located) under CCRP might aggravate the problem of wild pig nuisance to farmers. He suggested the Administration conduct surveys with farmers and/or provide a hotline for farmers to report incidents related to wild pigs and the resulting crop/property losses if any, so that the Administration could better gauge the economic loss and assess the effectiveness of CCRP. Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed similar concern.

24. AD(C)/AFCD responded that wild pigs captured under CCRP were relocated to remote countryside away from residential areas. To evaluate the effectiveness of CCRP, AFCD would continue to monitor the activities of those wild pigs after their relocation, including whether individual wild pigs might return to urban areas. AFCD would also be mindful of the receiving capacity of the areas where wild pigs were relocated to. AD(C)/AFCD further said that while the Administration had received complaints from farmers related to wild pigs from time to time, the relevant reports did not include information on the value of damaged crops/properties. AFCD would consider collecting such information in the future.

25. At the request of Mr Steven HO, the Administration would provide information/written response on:

- (a) how the number of wild pigs (i.e. 1 800 to 3 300) in the countryside in Hong Kong as estimated in the preliminary study was worked out; and
- (b) the concern raised by members about the economic loss caused by wild pig raids on crops.

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(*Post-meeting note*: The Administration's written response was circulated to members on 5 August 2021, vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1177/20-21(02).)

26. Mr KWOK Wai-keung expressed concern about the damages caused by wild pigs' rooting and grazing activities to the vegetation including tree seedlings in country parks and enquired whether AFCD would follow up by restoring or re-planting the vegetation/trees thereat. AD(C)/AFCD replied in the affirmative.

Public health concerns

27. Mr Tony TSE enquired about the possible diseases that wild pigs might spread in the community and the preventive actions taken by AFCD. AD(C)/AFCD replied that as wild pigs were mammals, diseases could be transmitted from wild pigs to humans and the public should avoid contacts with and/or feeding wild pigs. AFCD took blood samples randomly from captured wild pigs for screening of transmissible diseases by the University of Hong Kong. African Swine Fever testing would also be conducted by AFCD's Veterinary Laboratory for carcasses of wild pigs found.

Feral pigeon nuisance

28. Mr KWOK Wai-keung and Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern about the nuisance posed by feral pigeons to the public in districts such as Tseung Kwan O. Referring to feeding of feral pigeons by some members of the public in the vicinity of Hang Hau MTR Station, Ms QUAT observed that the problem had persisted despite enforcement actions taken. Members enquired about the Administration's measure to tackle feral pigeon nuisance. AD(C)/AFCD advised that AFCD was currently testing the effectiveness of using contraceptives to control the population of feral pigeons.

Conclusion

29. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman remarked that there was still room for improvement in the Administration's management measures for wild pigs. Among other issues, the Administration should set specific policy objectives for the measures and assess the economic loss caused by wild pig raids.

V. Implementation of the Incense Tree Species Action Plan

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — Administration's paper on
20-21(05) "Implementation of the Incense Tree
Species Action Plan"

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LC Paper No. CB(1)1030/ — Background brief on "Conservation of
20-21(06) Incense Tree" prepared by the
Legislative Council Secretariat)

Briefing by the Administration

30. USEN remarked that the Administration had consulted the Panel on measures for enhancing the protection of incense trees at the meetings in February and June 2016. Taking into account the views of Members and other stakeholders, AFCD then formulated the Incense Tree (*Aquilaria sinensis*) Species Action Plan 2018-2022 ("SAP") and started its implementation in 2018.

31. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, AD(C)/AFCD briefed members on the key measures for protecting incense trees set out in SAP.

(Post-meeting note: The PowerPoint presentation materials were circulated to members on 28 June 2021, vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1062/20-21(02).)

Discussion

Policy direction

32. Mr Tony TSE expressed support for the implementation of measures to enhance the conservation of incense trees and combat illegal felling activities.

33. As Incense Tree was native to Southern China and listed as an endangered species by the nation, Mr KWOK Wai-keung considered that Hong Kong had a duty to protect the species.

34. Mr Steven HO considered that enhancing the protection of incense trees was a right policy direction.

35. Ms Elizabeth QUAT observed that there had been improvement in the conservation of incense trees. As there were still cases of illegal felling of incense trees and illegal import/export of agarwood (i.e. fragrant, resinous wood from trees of the genus *Aquilaria*), she called on the Administration to continue to strengthen its efforts to protect incense trees.

Combating illegal felling of incense trees

36. Mr Steven HO, Mr KWOK Wai-keung and Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired how the implemented measures (especially the installation of tree guards and Infrared Sensor Camera Traps ("IRSCTs")) could prevent illegal felling of

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incense trees. Mr Tony TSE, Mr HO, the Chairman and Ms QUAT sought explanation on why there were no prosecution case and only two arrested persons from 2018 to 2020 in relation to illegal felling of incense trees. Mr HO suggested that the Administration should study how to enhance its strategy for bringing illegal fellers to justice.

37. USEN and AD(C)/AFCD responded that one major reason for the reducing numbers of arrested persons and prosecution cases in relation to illegal felling of incense trees was the enhanced protection for high-risk specimens implemented under SAP, which made it more difficult for illegal fellers to fell trees. Those measures included installation of tree guards at locations with important Incense Tree specimens and the use of IRSCTs at strategic locations (i.e. sites with high density of incense trees or sites where illegal felling activities were more likely to happen). Another reason was that in the past, illegal fellers usually wounded the target trees first to induce resin formation and returned after some time to harvest agarwood. Nowadays, illegal fellers tended to indiscriminately cut down the trees to search for agarwood and would not go back to the sites afterwards, making it more difficult for the authorities to track them down and arrest them.

38. AD(C)/AFCD further explained that:

- (a) adequate space was maintained between a tree guard and a tree to prevent the tree guards from injuring the trunk or root systems of the trees. If any incense tree was found to be cut or wounded, AFCD's staff would apply antifungal paint on the wounds to suppress resin formation in order to reduce the incentive for illegal felling;
- (b) IRSCTs were triggered by heat sensors. Once moving heat objects (e.g. human activities) were detected, the systems' cameras would take pictures automatically, which would be sent to AFCD's security contractor immediately for round-the-clock instant inspection and screening. The security contractor would immediately report to AFCD and the Hong Kong Police Force ("HKPF") if suspected illegal felling activities were detected. In accordance with the joint operation protocol formulated by AFCD and HKPF, enforcement officers would arrive at the relevant sites as soon as possible upon detection of illegal activities by IRSCTs;
- (c) since 2017, AFCD had installed over 50 IRSCTs at various strategic locations. Over 30 cases of suspected illegal felling of incense trees had been detected by the systems; and

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- (d) tree guards and IRSCTs had been proved to be effective in deterring illegal felling of incense trees, as indicated by the significant reduction in the number of illegal felling cases. Nevertheless, there were still some illegal felling cases involving trees that were neither protected by tree guards nor covered by IRSCTs. AFCD would continue to install more tree guards and IRSCTs progressively to enhance protection of incense trees, and explore ways to monitor incense trees at remote countryside where there was no electricity supply or mobile network coverage.

39. The Chairman said that according to media reports, IRSCTs were overly sensitive and the cameras would take pictures in the absence of human activity within range; and enforcement officers only received the pictures in the daytime but illegal felling incidents generally happened at night, which meant that there would be delay in enforcement actions. He therefore expressed concern about the effectiveness of IRSCTs and tree guards in protecting incense trees from illegal felling. He asked whether the Administration would explore the use of other methods or technologies for protecting incense trees, such as a new kind of protective mesh with sensors recently invented by a local company.

40. AD(C)/AFCD said that the above claims in the media reports were unsubstantiated. He reassured members that IRSCTs would only be triggered by moving heat objects, and inspection and screening of pictures taken by the systems' cameras were conducted round the clock. The Administration would keep an eye on innovative methods for enhancing protection of incense trees. AFCD had been in touch with the company that had invented the said protective mesh, and would conduct a trial to test the product's effectiveness.

41. Mr Steven HO asked whether the Administration would consider conducting searches on hikers suspected of carrying tools for felling trees around strategic locations in the countryside.

42. AD(C)/AFCD responded that illegal fellers tended to set up camps in the countryside and fell trees at night. Normally they were not seen on hiking trails. AFCD had set up an Incense Tree Patrol Team to conduct patrols specifically at locations with important Incense Tree populations. Enforcement actions would be taken if suspicious persons/activities were identified by the team.

Combating illegal trade involving incense trees

43. Mr Tony TSE and Ms Elizabeth QUAT asked about the maximum penalty under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) ("PESAPO") for illegal import/export of incense trees, and whether the Administration considered that the penalty could provide sufficient deterrent.

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Ms QUAT said that if the Member's Bill that she introduced (i.e. the Organized and Serious Crimes (Amendment) Bill 2021) was passed, the authorities' ability to combat illegal trade in endangered species would be enhanced.

44. AD(C)/AFCD advised that import, export or re-export of incense trees was regulated by PESAPO. A person who contravened relevant requirements was liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of \$1 million and to imprisonment for seven years. The heaviest penalty imposed by the court on relevant cases after the commencement of the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Ordinance 2018 (which increased the penalties under PESAPO for offences relating to endangered species) was imprisonment for 24 months.

45. USEN said that the Administration considered that the maximum penalty under PESAPO and the penalties imposed by the court could provide sufficient deterrent to illegal trade involving incense trees. Mr KWOK Wai-keung disagreed and commented that the penalties imposed by the court were too light to achieve the desired deterrent effect. He called on the Administration to relay his concern to the Judiciary.

46. Ms Elizabeth QUAT asked about the major destination(s) of illegal shipments of agarwood. Mr KWOK Wai-keung enquired about the Administration's communication and collaboration with Mainland authorities to combat illegal felling and smuggling of incense trees, and whether there had been any successful arrest of smugglers at or across the boundary.

47. AD(C)/AFCD responded that illegal shipments of incense trees of Hong Kong origin were generally intended to be sold in the Mainland. AFCD had been maintaining close contact and exchanging intelligence with relevant Mainland authorities to combat Incense Tree smuggling. In an Incense Tree Enforcement Training Workshop organized by AFCD in July 2018 and participated by Mainland government officials and enforcement staff, the two sides discussed how to strengthen collaboration to combat illegal felling and smuggling of incense trees. As the Administration had never issued any licence for the export of incense trees, any Incense Tree product claimed to be of Hong Kong origin for sale in the Mainland was likely illegal product. The Administration had given information on such products to the Mainland authorities, and all relevant advertisements on Mainland e-commerce sites had been taken off.

48. Regarding enforcement actions taken by the Administration, AD(C)/AFCD advised that AFCD conducted joint operations with the Customs and Excise Department ("C&ED") at export control points from time to time to combat smuggling activities of endangered species, including incense trees. As incense trees were fragrant, AFCD had trained and deployed detector dogs to

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assist in the detection of Incense Tree smuggling at control points. There had been successful interceptions of Incense Tree smuggling by C&ED.

Artificial propagation and planting

49. Mr Tony TSE noted that since 2009, about 10 000 Incense Tree seedlings had been produced and planted each year to assist the propagation of the species in Hong Kong's countryside. He asked about the long-term plan for this initiative and the Administration's collaboration with schools to plant Incense Tree seedlings/saplings on school premises.

50. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired about the growth rate of Incense Tree and the distribution of seedlings planted in country parks. She also asked whether planting of incense trees in country parks might stimulate illegal felling activities.

51. The Chairman noted that AFCD had been providing Incense Tree seedlings/saplings to the Urban Renewal Authority ("URA") from time to time for planting at public open spaces at URA's redevelopment sites for conservation and education purposes. He asked whether AFCD would also provide seedlings/saplings to other government departments or organizations, such as the Housing Department, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and tertiary institutions, for planting on their premises.

52. Mr KWOK Wai-keung enquired whether AFCD would consider planting incense trees at places such as the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens and theme parks, which had tighter security controls compared with country parks, for better protection of the trees.

53. USEN and AD(C)/AFCD responded that incense trees took more or less 20 years to mature. As young trees were unlikely to form resins, they were not illegal felling targets. The Administration would continue to plant about 10 000 seedlings each year on a long-term basis to support the species's propagation in Hong Kong. Incense Tree seedlings produced by AFCD were mostly planted at diverse locations in country parks, together with seedlings of other native tree species to form suitable woodland planting mixes. As AFCD conducted regular patrols in country parks, there was a certain degree of protection for those incense trees. In addition, some Incense Tree seedlings were planted in highly-protected places, the locations of which were not revealed to the public for security reasons. AFCD had been partnering with the Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium of The Chinese University of Hong Kong to organize the "Botany STEAM" education programme, through which Incense Tree seedlings were provided to some primary and secondary schools for planting on school premises. If other government departments or organizations were interested in planting incense trees on their premises with suitable planting environment and sufficient

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security control, AFCD could provide them with seedlings/saplings.

VI. Any other business

54. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:14 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 September 2021