



## THE ISSUE

As a major trading hub and consumption-driven city, Hong Kong handles millions of wildlife trade products every day, used in food, fashion, construction, traditional medicine and remedies, and a range of luxury products. To ensure our demand does not threaten specific plants and animals' survival in the wild, Hong Kong is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). CITES classifies over 30,000 endangered species of animals and plants into three Appendices. Appendix I includes over 800 highly endangered species threatened with extinction. Commercial trade in specimens of these species is prohibited, for example elephant and pangolins. For species listed on Appendix II and III, such as shark fin, trade is allowed but subject to licensing controls or permits/certificates of origin. The Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (the Ordinance), Cap. 586, is the local legislation that gives effect to CITES in Hong Kong.

Though regulated by domestic law, the huge profit brought by wildlife products is driving illegal wildlife trade. Common smuggled wildlife products in Hong Kong include elephant ivory, pangolin scales, rhino horn, seahorse, fish maw, live tortoises and reptiles, wild-caught birds, shark fin, eel, groupers, red sandalwood, agarwood, and American ginseng.

In 2018, there were 745 illegal wildlife seizure cases found in Hong Kong with a value of over HK\$73 million. The seized products were transported from all over the world, including the United Arab Emirates, Mozambique, China, Spain, Nigeria, and South Africa. These statistics highlight the transnational nature of Hong Kong's wildlife crime, and reveal that some of the cases are organized and serious, in terms of the scale and value involved. A container seized in February 2019 in Hong Kong, contained over 1,000 tusks and several tonnes of pangolin scales. These shipments are not organized by small-time operators, they are part of a well-organized crime organization.

Hong Kong is the world's busiest airport for international cargo, as a top 10 busiest container port, and is the key gateway to mainland China. Hong Kong's external merchandise trade value is over HK\$8 trillion. Hong Kong is clearly an important trading hub for wildlife products, both legal and illegal.

According to a report released in 2019, there were 2,011 wildlife seizures from 2013-2017. In terms of cases, air passengers are the most frequent smuggling transport mode, followed by sea cargo containers, air parcels, and air cargo from 2013-2017. The important role of the logistic sector to combat illegal wildlife trade is doubtless.

Wildlife crime is not purely an environmental issue. The scale of the trade and the people involved already make this a threat to national security and stability. And the port facilities simply do not have the capacity or mandate to adequately monitor illegal or dangerous products passing through their facilities. Other nations, such as the United States, may view the presence of containers filled with illegal wildlife products as an indicator that port security is compromised and prohibit vessels originating from Hong Kong ports from entering its international shipping ports in the future. This would result in huge negative economic impacts for many sectors of society.

Stakeholders must join force to tackle wildlife crime. Carriers, airlines, couriers should understand their unique role to stop illegal wildlife trade. WWF and TRAFFIC, as well as other conservation partners, continue to work with Customs, AFCD, and the transport industry to prevent illegal wildlife transport.

## **OUR ASK**

WWF-Hong Kong urges the Hong Kong government to take wildlife crime as a serious crime. Wildlife smuggling should be included under Schedule 1 of the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO) to further deter transnational criminal enterprises that use Hong Kong as a major port and transportation hub for illegal wildlife trade. The government must strictly implement CITES, ensuring that the relevant regulations are effectively and comprehensively enforced in ports and in businesses. We must do more by treating wildlife crime as a predicate offence for money laundering and use Anti-Money Laundering (AML) tools in the prosecution of wildlife crime offences, in compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 30.

We also urge the government to lift entry/exit reporting exemption for Class III (a) carrier vessels under the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) Ordinance Cap 548 and amend the exemption of “fishing craft” to submit customs declarations under Hong Kong’s Import and Export Ordinance (Cap 60E) Regulation 3 to mitigate the risk of IUU seafood smuggling to Hong Kong and devastating impacts to regional fisheries.

Customs, AFCD, parcel shippers, and the Airport Authority are increasingly taking the issue of transporting illegal wildlife products more seriously. WWF welcomes that trend and supports strengthened efforts to end the transport and trade.