

Red tide sighted

A red tide has been sighted over the past week, an inter-departmental red tide working group reported today (January 25).

The red tide was spotted by staff of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) at Hoi Ha Wan on January 23.

The red tide has dissipated and no associated death of fish has been reported.

A spokesman for the working group said, "The red tide was formed by *Akashiwo sanguinea*, which is commonly found in Hong Kong waters and is non-toxic."

The AFCD urged mariculturists at Tap Mun, Kau Lau Wan and Sham Wan to monitor the situation closely and increase aeration where necessary.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon. The AFCD's proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme will continue monitoring red tide occurrences to minimise the impact on the mariculture industry and the public.

Woman fined for operating unlicensed guesthouse

A woman was fined \$10,000 at the Tuen Mun Magistrates' Courts today (January 25) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in September last year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), Home Affairs Department, inspected a suspected unlicensed guesthouse on Sha Tsui Road in Tsuen Wan. The OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented a room in the guesthouse on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, the guesthouse did not possess a licence under the Ordinance on the day of inspection. The woman responsible for operating the premises was charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and will lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaenq@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

Import of poultry meat and products from Banka district, Bihar state, India, suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (January 25) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Banka district, Bihar state, India, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the district with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said Hong Kong currently has an established protocol with India for import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. In the first nine months of last year, no poultry eggs were imported into Hong Kong from India.

"The CFS has contacted the Indian authorities over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE on avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

Hong Kong rated as world's freest economy for 25 consecutive years

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government today (January 25) welcomed the Heritage Foundation's high regard for Hong Kong as the world's freest economy for the 25th consecutive year.

In this year's Index of Economic Freedom report, Hong Kong's overall score remained at 90.2. This makes Hong Kong once again the only economy attaining an overall score higher than 90.

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, said, "This achievement reaffirms the Government's steadfast commitment in upholding the free market principles over the years."

The Foundation continued to recognise Hong Kong's economic resilience, high-quality legal framework, low tolerance for corruption, high degree of government transparency, efficient regulatory framework and openness to global commerce.

He added, "The free market principles have long been the cornerstone of the Hong Kong economy. The Government will continue to uphold Hong Kong's fine tradition of the rule of law, maintain a simple and low tax system, improve government efficiency, safeguard the open and free trade regime and build a level playing field for all, so as to create a favourable environment for businesses in Hong Kong and promote Hong Kong's economic growth."

The 2019 Index of Economic Freedom report was released by the Heritage Foundation on January 25 in Washington, DC. Hong Kong has been ranked the world's freest economy since the Index was first published in 1995. Hong Kong's overall score in this year's report, at 90.2 (out of 100), was well above the global average of 60.8. Among the 12 components adopted for measuring economic freedom in the report, Hong Kong achieved high scores of 90 or above in eight components.

Contractor for Wan Chai commercial building redevelopment project convicted for causing noise nuisance

CR Construction Company Limited, the contractor for the redevelopment project of commercial building One Hennessy in Wan Chai, repeatedly contravened the Noise Control Ordinance (NCO) and caused noise nuisance to nearby residents. The contractor was convicted and fined a total of \$33,000 at Eastern Magistrates' Courts on October 10, 2018 and today (January 25).

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) received a complaint from a member of the public in November 2017 about the noise generated by the construction work at One Hennessy, 1 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai on a Sunday. Upon investigation by EPD staff, it was confirmed that unapproved prescribed construction work, which involved loading, unloading and handling of steel bars, was carried out at the construction site on a Sunday (i.e. restricted hours), which violated the requirements of the construction noise permit (CNP). The EPD immediately revoked the CNP of the construction site and initiated prosecution against the contractor.

In January 2018, EPD officers re-inspected the site at night-time and

found that although its CNP had been revoked, construction work was carried out after 7pm with the use of powered mechanical equipment. After evidence collection, the EPD again prosecuted the contractor and construction workers for violation of the NCO.

The EPD has requested the contractor concerned to step up its site management to ensure that construction work is conducted legally. Subsequently, EPD staff conducted various follow-up inspections at the site concerned and no violation of the NCO was detected.

The NCO aims to protect the public from disturbance of rest. The EPD spokesman stressed that construction work should be carried out during daytime and non-general holidays as far as possible to minimise disturbance to the nearby residents. If prescribed construction work (such as erection or dismantling of formwork or scaffolding; loading, unloading or handling of rubble, wooden boards, steel bars, wood or scaffolding material and hammering) or use of powered mechanical equipment has to be conducted during restricted hours (between 7pm and 7am on the following day, or at any time on a general holiday), a permit must be obtained from the EPD. The construction work must be carried out in accordance with the permit conditions, including the implementation of noise mitigation measures, to minimise noise impact, otherwise it constitutes an offence. First-time offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000. A maximum fine of \$200,000 may be imposed on second or subsequent convictions.