

Traveller jailed for smuggling dried seahorses (with photos)

A traveller who smuggled dried seahorses was convicted for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, and was sentenced to imprisonment today (March 27).

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that the 58-year-old female passenger arrived on August 6, 2018, from Maputo, Mozambique, via South Africa. About 20 kilograms of dried seahorses were found in the passenger's baggage by Customs officers.

Subsequent to follow-up investigations, the AFCD charged the woman with illegal import of specimens of listed species in Appendix II to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). She was convicted on March 11 at the District Court. Today, with six months' imprisonment as the starting point for sentencing, the defendant was sentenced to four months behind bars after a one-third reduction as she pleaded guilty.

Seahorses 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 drastically 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.

