

Traveller sentenced to imprisonment for smuggling incense tree wood chips (with photos)

A traveller who illegally exported incense tree wood chips has been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for 24 months at the District Court today (January 22).

A spokesman of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said that Customs officers intercepted an outbound male passenger, aged 30, at Shenzhen Bay Control Point and seized about 2.6 kilograms of incense tree (*Aquilaria sinensis*) wood chips from his backpack on July 4, 2018. The estimated market value of the wood chips was about \$207,000.

Upon investigation by the AFCD, the man was charged with illegal export of endangered species. He was convicted at the court today. The court handed down 36-month imprisonment as the starting point for sentencing. The defendant was sentenced to 24 months behind bars after one-third reduction as he pleaded guilty.

All *Aquilaria* species, including the native incense tree, are listed in Appendix II to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. They are regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance.

The penalties under the Ordinance have been 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.

The spokesman also pointed out that according to the Forests and Countryside Ordinance, felling of trees on government land without permission is an offence. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for one year.

The spokesman appealed to the public not to defy the law by smuggling agarwood or illegally felling incense trees. To enquire about the importation or exportation of endangered species and to report illegal cases, the public can call the AFCD at 1823 or visit the website www.cites.hk.

