

NPP urges immigration changes

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New Power Party Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang, second left, speaks at a news conference at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei on Monday.

Photo: Lin Cheng-kung, Taipei Times

The New Power Party (NPP) yesterday said that it would promote amendments to immigration laws to require foreign travelers caught carrying agricultural products from disease-affected areas to pay the full fine before entering the nation.

The amendments are “necessary” considering that only 1.46 percent, or about NT\$100,000 (US\$3,246), of fines totaling NT\$7.4 million imposed on foreigners were collected last year, NPP Executive Chairman Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) told a news conference at the party’s caucus office.

To prevent the spread of African swine fever into the nation, since Tuesday last week foreign travelers caught carrying pork products from areas affected by the disease risk fines of between NT\$200,000 and NT\$1 million.

Huang questioned a statement by the Council of Agriculture on Monday that it had collected 80 percent of fines from foreigners caught carrying illegal agricultural products.

The council has issued 17 NT\$50,000 fines and 11 NT\$200,000 fines for pork products illegally carried into the nation, he said.

However, it has collected only two NT\$50,000 fines and no NT\$200,000 fines, he added.

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In other words, of a total of NT\$3.05 million in issued fines, the council has collected only NT\$100,000, Huang said, adding: “I do not know what is wrong with the math of council officials.”

The National Immigration Agency and the council have differing views on whether foreigners caught carrying agricultural products from areas affected by disease can be banned from entering the nation under current laws.

The Immigration Act (移民法) and the Act on Permission for Entrance of People of the Mainland Area into the Taiwan Area (兩岸人民關係條例) stipulate that travelers from China and other nations can be banned from entering Taiwan if caught carrying contraband, but the agencies have opposing positions on whether agricultural products from disease-affected areas — which vary over time — count as contraband.

Huang said that he had asked the agency and council to discuss the issue and decide on a consistent legal interpretation by Monday evening, but they have yet to make an announcement.

To quickly and effectively enhance protection against African swine fever, the party has proposed draft amendments to the two laws that would require travelers from China and other nations caught carrying agricultural products from areas affected by disease to pay the full fine before entering Taiwan, he said.

The draft amendments stipulate that foreigners who owe the government taxes and fines would also be required to pay the remainder before entering the nation, he added.

“We welcome travelers from around the world to visit Taiwan, but if anyone breaks the law, they must be held responsible,” Huang said.

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