13 chicken firms fined $26.9m for price fixing

The suppliers of over 90% of fresh chicken products here had also entered into non-compete deals.

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

After four years of investigations, 13 firms, comprising distributors and suppliers of fresh chicken products, have been fined a record $26.9m for price fixing and non-competitive agreements.

The number of supplier deals moved out by the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) in this case to date is, it said, in issuing its infringement decision yesterday.

Between 2007 and 2014, the suppliers met to discuss prices, and coordinated them with each other, bringing up the high consumption of chicken and the market share of the suppliers, the commission said.

For the first time, the companies also made an agreement not to compete with each other.

Chickens were commonly consumed in Singapore, with more than 90% of fresh chicken supplied here for restaurants, supermarkets, hotels and wet market stalls.

They coordinated price increases for customers, including supermarkets and restaurants, at least seven times from 2007 to 2014.

The commission said the total turnover of the suppliers is about $2 billion dollars a year.

It conducted further investigations after new evidence came to light, prompting four firms – Tong Huat Group, Sinmah, Lee Say and Hy-Fresh – to apply for lenient treatment, the commission said in December 2017.

Under the CCCS’ Leniency Programme, parties that provide information on their cartel activities can be granted immunity or have their fines cut by up to 100 per cent.

The highest fine of $9,094,065 was imposed on four firms under investigation by Tong Huat Group, which owned $3,580,415, and Lee Say Poultry, with $1,800,060.

The commission said it arrived at the amount of fines after considering the turnover of the companies, the nature and duration of the anti-competitive activities, and mitigating factors.

The four firms have also been directed to provide information on their cartel activities to the antitrust authorities.

“Price fixing and market sharing are considered some of the most harmful types of anti-competitive conduct,” the commission said.

The firms found were sought not only for 2007 to 2014 but also for prior years.

The CCCS, the government agency that monitors and enforces competition law in Singapore, has also been actively pursuing the cartel, the commission said.

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