

**Presentation by Acting Secretary for Environment and Food
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on Wednesday, 21 March 2001**

Mr Chairman,

Today, I would like to present to the Finance Committee the second budget of the Environment and Food Bureau. The provision on environment and food in the 2001-02 financial year is \$8.635 billion, representing an increase of approximately 7.1% in real terms over last year. The scope of work covers food supply and food safety, environmental hygiene, environmental protection and conservation.

Due to time constraints, I will only highlight the major targets and initiatives for the coming year.

Food Supply and Food Safety

Our aim under this policy area is to ensure that the supply of food is adequate and that food available for human consumption is safe. Over the past year, genetically modified food (GM food) has been an issue of public concern. In this regard, we have recently issued a consultation paper on labelling of GM food. In the coming financial year, after considering the outcome of the public consultation, we will come to a decision on the way forward for the labelling of GM food. In the next few months, we will also submit to the Legislative Council our proposals on the mechanism for mandatory food recall.

On the protection of public health, we propose to amend the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations to extend import control to animal products and animal feeds to prevent animal diseases.

Environmental Hygiene

To ensure a high standard of environmental hygiene in all parts of the territory is another major responsibility of this Bureau. We have launched, since the end of last year, a new 3-year "Clean Hong Kong" programme. We will in the coming year launch a large-scale cleansing exercise together with a publicity and educational programme.

To carry out greening work for beautifying the environment as highlighted by the Chief Executive in his 2000 Policy Address, we will co-ordinate the greening work of over ten departments in the coming year. We will identify suitable locations in the urban area for priority greening and will further promote the concept of greening.

Environmental Protection and Conservation

Our aim for this policy area is to improve Hong Kong's environment, reduce pollution and waste and conserve our natural heritage.

We are formulating a waste management strategy. In the coming year, we will focus on waste reduction, separation and recycling.

On the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme, subject to voting of funds by the Finance Committee, we plan to conduct trials and studies to assess the technical and economic feasibilities of the proposals recommended by the International Review Panel in its report issued by the end of last year. We will set up a monitoring group to closely assess the outcome of these trials and tests with a view to formulating an effective, economical and environmentally-friendly sewage treatment strategy. We welcome public opinions on the way forward for the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme.

In the last financial year, we made some progress in implementing the comprehensive programme to improve air quality through reducing motor vehicle emissions. Since the disbursement of the one-off grants to encourage owners of diesel taxis to replace their vehicles with LPG ones, almost 6 000 diesel taxis have been replaced. 1 in every 3 taxis now runs on LPG. About 12 000 pre-Euro light diesel vehicles have been retrofitted with particulate reduction devices with government financial assistance since the programme began last September, or 1 in every three such vehicles has been retrofitted.

Looking ahead, we will concentrate in the new financial year on implementing a programme to provide financial assistance for retrofitting 50 000 pre-Euro heavy diesel vehicles with suitable catalytic converters, mapping out a way forward for replacing diesel light buses with LPG or electric models and drawing up codes of practice in conjunction with the relevant parties on controlling idling engines.

On the other hand, data collection work for the joint HK-Guangdong Pearl River Delta Air Quality Study will be completed by the end of this month. We will concentrate our efforts on analyzing the data collected together with the Guangdong Environmental Protection Bureau and drawing up practicable measures for improving the regional air quality.

Turning to conservation, we plan to complete a review on the existing practices with a view to formulating a comprehensive conservation policy for public consultation.

With the support of Honourable Members, I hope that our policy proposals will be successfully implemented.

Chairman, should Honourable Members have any questions, my colleagues and I will be most willing to answer them. Thank you.