

(English translation prepared
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9 October 2000

Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee
Chairman of the House Committee
Legislative Council
Hong Kong

Dear Mrs CHOW,

**Proposal to set up a new panel
to monitor matters relating to food safety and environmental hygiene**

After the dissolution of the two former Municipal Councils, the decision-making functions relating to environmental hygiene matters have been transferred to the new Environment and Food Bureau, which has also policy responsibility for food safety. In view of this, the House Committee of the Legislative Council had discussed this matter in the last term. A motion moved by Dr LEONG Che-hung, the then Chairman of the House Committee, was passed on 26 January 2000 to amend the terms of reference of the related panels, so that the work of the new policy bureau would be subject to monitoring by the Legislative Council. The Panel on Health Services and the Panel on Environmental Affairs subsequently took up the responsibilities for monitoring matters relating to food safety and those relating to environmental hygiene respectively. A Subcommittee was formed under the Panel on Environmental Affairs later to assume the responsibility for monitoring matters relating to environmental hygiene.

At the Council meeting on 26 January 2000, I also moved an amendment proposing the formation of a new "Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene" to take up the responsibility for monitoring matters relating to food safety and environmental hygiene. In my opinion, as the purpose of setting up the new policy bureau was to avoid fragmentation of responsibilities for food safety and environmental hygiene, a new Panel should be formed by the Legislative Council with special responsibility for monitoring the work of this bureau and its executive arms. Such an arrangement will not only enhance the efficiency of panels, but also reduce the workload of the Panel on Environmental Affairs and the Panel on Health Services. Moreover, according to the organization chart of the Environment and Food Bureau, Division A is tasked with all the responsibilities of the two former Municipal Councils, including food premises licensing, hawker policy, hawker stall management, food inspection, food safety, livestock quarantine and livestock

protection. It would not be a satisfactory arrangement if the responsibility for monitoring matters in these areas was to be split between different panels of the Council.

In fact, some Members had also expressed their opinions after I had put forward my proposal. They were not opposed to the idea but held the view that as the first term of the Legislative Council would come to an end in less than six months, the establishment of a new panel was of no urgency. The matter had better be left to the next term of the Legislative Council to decide. My amendment to the original motion was subsequently put to vote. It was supported by a majority of Members returned by geographical constituencies and the Election Committee, but among Members returned by functional constituencies, 13 were in favour and 13 against. Failing to obtain a majority vote in both groups of Members, my amendment was rejected by a margin of only one vote.

I therefore propose this agenda item for the coming House Committee meeting and hope that Members will re-examine this matter.

(Fred LI Wah-ming)
Member of the Legislative Council