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**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
and
LegCo Panel on Housing**
**Minutes of joint meeting
held on Monday, 18 June 2001 at 9:25 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members Present** : Members of Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
- * Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
 - * Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
 - * Hon Albert HO Chun-yan (Deputy Chairman of Panel on Housing)
 - * Hon James TO Kun-sun
 - * Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon LAU Kong-wah
 - * Hon SZETO Wah
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
 - * Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
 - * Hon IP Kwok-him, JP

Members of Panel on Housing
Hon CHAN Kam-lam (Chairman)
Hon NG Leung-sing
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

(* Also members of the LegCo Panel on Housing)

Member : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Attending

Members : Members of Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Absent

- * Hon David CHU Yu-lin
- Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
- * Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
- Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
- * Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP

Members of Panel on Housing

Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Public Officers : Item II
Attending

Mrs Stella HUNG
Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A)

Mr David LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) 2

Mrs Rita LAU
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Mrs Lessie WEI
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) 1

Mr CHAN Wing-cheong
Chief Housing Manager (Commercial Properties)
Housing Department

Dr P Y LEUNG
Deputy Director (Food and Public Health)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr W H CHEUK
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Item III

Mrs Stella HUNG
Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A)

Mr David LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) 2

Mrs Rita LAU
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Mr W H CHEUK
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr CHAN Wing-cheong
Chief Housing Manager (Commercial Properties)
Housing Department

Clerk in : Mrs Constance LI
Attendance Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 5

Staff in : Miss Irene MAN
Attendance Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 9

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I. Election of Chairman

Mr Fred LI was elected Chairman of the joint Panel meeting.

II. Re-opening of poultry stalls and monitoring measures to prevent recurrence of avian flu

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1852/00-01(01))

2. On the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) (DS(EF)(A)) advised that the sale of live chickens had resumed in

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retail outlets on 16 June 2001. Having reviewed the entire supply flow of live poultry, the Administration had devised a series of improvement measures which were detailed in the Administration's paper. She also drew members' attention to the latest expert findings that, in the 1997 avian flu incidents, viruses carried by waterfowls were mixed with those carried by live quails to form the lethal virus that affected human beings. While requirements for the segregation of waterfowls and live chickens had already been in place, experts recommended that live quails and live chickens should also be segregated to further safeguard public health. She said that the Administration was prepared to amend the legislation as soon as possible to prohibit the sale of the two types of poultry at the same place and to provide for segregation at all other levels.

3. Mrs Selina CHOW said that when the Administration introduced central slaughtering of live ducks and geese in the Western Wholesale Market, the trade had already expressed grave concern about the impact on the trade. There had been a significant reduction in the size of the trade since then. Given the economic downturn and poor trading environment, the trade had serious concern about the proposed rest day for cleansing to be conducted once every month. She requested the Administration to adopt a flexible approach in the matter.

4. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC) advised that ducks and geese were natural carriers of avian flu viruses, and that live ducks and geese were already segregated from the live chickens for sale. However, as the virus also existed in the carcasses and viscera of ducks and geese, legislative amendments would be made to require them to be separately packed for sale at retail outlets. Experts also advised that a rest day should be specified every month for cleansing to be carried out in the wholesale market and retail outlets. She added that experts had insisted that the operation of the market should at least be suspended for 24 hours, because even in a controlled environment such as the laboratory, it would take about four hours to kill the virus. As such, it would take even much longer to kill the virus in the market.

5. DAFC further said that wholesaler traders had proposed two alternatives -

- (a) that ducks and geese would be slaughtered during 8am - 9am of the rest day, and that the new batch of live ducks and geese would arrive at about 6pm - 7pm on the same day;
- (b) that traders who had two stalls could move all the live poultry to one stall while cleansing could take place at the other stall.

6. DAFC advised that the experts did not consider these options practicable. For the first option, the time gap of 12 hours was considered too short to effectively kill the viruses, and there would be practical difficulty because the live geese actually arrived at 2pm the same day. For the second option, experts considered that thorough cleansing could not be carried out if there was live poultry and

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customers around. Moreover, the existing batch might already be infected before the new batch of live poultry arrived.

7. DAFC said that the Administration had explained to the traders concerned. She further said that while a 24-hour suspension of business was necessary, the Administration did not insist that the rest day had to be on the 25th of each month.

8. Mrs Selina CHOW maintained the view that the rest day proposal would further threaten the business of the ducks and geese traders. She requested the Administration to consider the trade's views and handle the matter in a flexible manner.

9. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that there were presently over 10,000 live chickens in the wholesale markets and this would give rise to hygiene problems. He asked the Administration to improve the control over the import quantity of chickens and asked about the present position of such control.

10. DAFC stated that it was the Administration's policy that there should not be too many live chickens being kept in the wholesale and retail markets. She said that even before the avian flu incident, if there was a large number of live chickens remaining unsold in the wholesale market, the importer would be alerted of the situation and reminded to adjust the import quantity. The traders had been reminded again before the recent resumption of sale of live chickens that they should carefully adjust the quantity of live chickens with regard to the demand and supply situation.

11. DAFC reported the supply and stock situation during the first few days of resumption of sale of live chickens. She said that on the first day, there were some 166 000 live chickens in the wholesale market, comprising 128 000 imported and 38 000 from local farms. About 600 live chickens were left unsold at the wholesale market at the end of the first day. As the price for chickens on the first day was higher than that before the avian flu incident, about 13 000 plus chickens were unsold at the wholesale market on the second day. The situation was reflected to the importer, and the import quantity on the third day was reduced to 71 000 and the local quantity to 12 000. Adding the unsold quantity, there were a total of 97 000 live chickens in the wholesale markets on the third day. DAFC further said that she had visited the wholesale markets before this meeting and found that only about 6 000 chickens remained unsold. The importer had indicated that they would continue to reduce the import quantity.

12. On the live quail trade, Mr WONG Yung-kan questioned why the Administration prohibited the sale of live quails in markets on the one hand, but allowed the import of live quails from the Mainland on the other. He asked whether the quail operators should be allowed to continue their business pending legislative amendments on the segregation of waterfowls and live chickens for sale at retail outlets.

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13. DAFC advised that at present there were three quail farms in Hong Kong with two selling quail eggs and one selling about 200,000 live quails a year. She clarified that the Administration had only informed the trade in advance of the plan to introduce legislation requiring segregation of live quails from live chickens. She said that the Administration had not asked the trade to cease selling live quails.

14. Regarding the import of live quails, Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) added that the Administration had informed the Mainland authority the proposed segregation of live quails and live chickens. She said that the Mainland authority would cooperate with Hong Kong in introducing control measures on the export of live quails.

15. Mr WONG Yung-kan pointed out that the number of quail farms in Hong Kong had been significantly reduced from 100 before the avian flu incident in 1997 to only three at present. He requested the Administration to render as much assistance as possible to the three remaining traders so that they could stay in business.

16. Mr Andrew CHENG was of the view that the proposed rest day for cleansing would affect the trade to a great extent. As compensation was offered to the trade after the avian flu incidents, he asked whether the Administration would consider any rental waiver or other assistance schemes to alleviate the pressure of loss of business on the rest day.

17. DFEH said that she understood the stall tenants' difficulty. However, she said that the stall tenants so far had reacted positively to the rest day proposal. The stall tenants had impressed her with their cooperative attitude and willingness to contribute to the protection of public health. She further said that, as far as she was aware, the stall tenants had not raised any proposal for rental waiver or reduction in this regard. Chief Housing Manager (Commercial Properties) of the Housing Department (CHM(CP)) added that HD worked closely with FEHD and other departments concerned in enhancing public health and public confidence after the avian flu incident. He stated that HD also had not received any request from poultry stall tenants about rental reduction on account of the rest day proposal.

18. Mr Andrew CHENG said that he had received requests from stall tenants that they hoped to have rental reduction to ease their operational difficulty. He asked the Administration to consider their request. The Chairman pointed out that the stall tenants of Tai Shing Street Public Market had also informed him about the difficulties in implementing the rest day proposal. They were worried that while all unsold live chickens would have to be scalded and frozen before the rest day, they would be difficult to be sold the following day, when live chickens would be supplied again.

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19. DFEH said that she understood and had sympathy for the operation difficulty of the market stalls under the present economic situation. However, as far as the rest day proposal was concerned, stall tenants had not requested FEHD for rental reduction to compensate for the loss of business, although the proposal of rental reduction was discussed by the Panel previously in the context of assisting stall holders in the present economic situation. DEFH further said that so far the stall operators had given her the impression that they were very positive to the rest day proposal and were supportive of the measures to safeguard public health.

20. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he had been making efforts to help the trade understand the need for designating a rest day for cleansing. However, he considered that Government should also make efforts to address the problems faced by stall tenants by means, such as improving the ventilation and management of public markets. He expressed support for Mrs Selina CHOW's view that the Administration should be flexible in implementing the rest day proposal in the ducks and geese market. He said that the Administration should listen to the views of the industry and devise practicable measures to solve the problem. For example, arrangement could be made for the new batch of live geese and ducks to arrive at 7pm. instead of 2pm on the rest day. Mr CHEUNG also expressed worries that large quantities of live chickens would be kept at the retail outlets before the rest days of the wholesale markets, and this might increase the risk of spreading the avian flu. He asked the Administration to review the need for wholesale markets to have three rest days each month.

21. In reply to the Chairman and Mr Tommy CHEUNG, DAFC clarified that the live chicken wholesalers themselves had adopted 5th, 15th and 25th of each month as rest days well before the occurrence of the avian flu incident in 1997. The three rest days were effective in breaking the virus cycle by thorough cleansing and disinfection. She said that the retail markets had chosen the 25th to be the rest day because it was also the rest day of the wholesale market. She reiterated that the Administration had no objection if the trade in the ducks and geese wholesale market wished to propose another day as the rest day. She said that the Administration had reminded the wholesale and import traders that they should avoid over-importing or keeping a large number of live poultry before the rest day(s).

22. DFEH added that the trade had proposed the 25th of each month (except if the rest day fell on a festival) as the rest day having regard to the operation of the wholesale markets and after consultation with traders. She said that the rest days for the period July to December 2001 had already been agreed to by the trade. For the first rest day scheduled for 25 July 2001, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) would remind the trade and the public nearer the time, so that the intake quantity of live chickens would be adjusted to minimize loss to the traders.

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23. Dr LO Wing-lok enquired how the Administration could ensure that the new hygiene guidelines and the avian flu surveillance system would be implemented effectively, and whether additional Health Inspectors would be deployed to increase inspection and surveillance of the markets. He also asked the Administration to provide information on the amount of public funds to be spent in this respect.

24. DFEH advised that the new hygiene guidelines would be applied to the market stalls managed by FEHD and the Housing Authority as well as private fresh provision stores. She said that FEHD would work closely with HD and adopt the same standards in implementing the hygiene guidelines. She emphasized, however, that effective implementation would depend on concerted efforts of the Administration and the trade. She said that she did not want to rely on strict enforcement actions such as suspension or revocation of licence to compel the trade to comply with the guidelines. She appealed to the cooperation and self-regulation of the trade to achieve the common objective of safeguarding public health.

25. DFEH further said that the trade had been consulted in the course of devising the new hygiene guidelines. For example, FEHD had accepted the trade's views that it would be inconvenient to wear gloves in scalding chickens, and had only requested stall operators to wear gloves when they picked up the chickens for selection by customers. She said that these guidelines were not only to safeguard public health but also the health of the members of the trade. She added that Health Inspectors would remind the stall operators to follow the hygiene guidelines, and health seminars would also be organized for the trade. She stressed that the stall tenants had reacted positively to the new guidelines.

Admin 26. As regards the amount of public funds put into the implementation of the new hygiene measures, DS(EF)(A) agreed to provide the information after the meeting. She said that it would not be a small amount and she hoped that the trade would cooperate to make the new schemes successful; otherwise the Administration might have to explore other long-term solutions to prevent the recurrence of avian flu.

27. On the avian flu surveillance system, Deputy Director (Food and Public Health) of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said that FEHD would increase the number of blood samples taken from chickens at the border and in the wholesale market, and would also take samples from dead chickens at both the wholesale and retail markets on a regular basis. The improvements would enable FEHD to react promptly to any possible outbreak of avian flu incidents. He said that with the development of research studies and knowledge about avian flu viruses, FEHD would be able to further improve the surveillance system and take early control actions.

28. Mr Albert HO said that if the proposed hygiene measures could already effectively improve the situation, it might not be necessary to introduce the rest day

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proposal for the trade as it would affect their business. He asked whether the rest day proposal could be implemented on a district basis instead.

29. DFEH explained that although daily cleansing was carried out in markets, the rest day was necessary to enable thorough cleansing and disinfection to be carried out. She further said that as Hong Kong was a small and densely populated place, and that avian flu virus could be transmitted by air and footwear, it was not practicable to implement the rest day proposal only on a district basis.

30. Mr Albert HO enquired whether the Administration had made reference to overseas experience in the control of avian flu. In response, DFEH said that not many countries permitted the sale of live chickens at retail outlets, and even Singapore had prohibited the sale of live chickens recently. She pointed out that in the Mainland and Thailand, live chickens were sold in open markets. She said that Hong Kong's situation was unique because live chickens were sold indoor.

31. To alleviate the pressure on the trade caused by loss of business on the rest day, Mr TAM suggested that Government might consider reducing the licence fees or stall rentals. He also said that Government should be practical and flexible in implementing the new hygiene guidelines. DEFH noted Mr TAM's views. She clarified that licence fees were charged on HD tenants and the fresh provision stores, while stall tenants in FEHD markets had to pay stall rental. She further said that FEHD would adopt a pragmatic approach in enforcing the new hygiene guidelines, and that the trade's cooperation was essential.

32. Miss CHAN Yuen-han expressed reservation about placing too much emphasis on the trade's cooperation in preventing another outbreak of avian flu. She considered that Government had the responsibility to promote a culture of enhancing the hygiene conditions of the wholesale and retail poultry markets. She asked Government to increase communication with the trade, in particular about the rest day proposal for the ducks and geese wholesale market.

33. DS(EF)(A) reiterated that the Administration had sought expert opinion which found the two options proposed by the trade not feasible. She assured members that the Administration would maintain close contact with the trade to jointly explore ways to solve the problem.

34. DFEH advised that the Administration would allow a grace period of two weeks, after which FEHD would strictly enforce the new hygiene measures. She agreed with Miss CHAN Yuen-han that Government had the responsibility to promote a culture of enhancing the hygiene conditions in markets. However, she pointed out that the trade also played an important role in this respect.

35. Miss CHAN Yuen-han said that she supported strict enforcement of the new hygiene measures after the two weeks' grace period, and stressed that Government should further discuss with the trade the implementation details.

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36. Mr TAM Yiu-chung commented that while the rest day would enable thorough cleansing to be carried out in markets, the Administration and the trade should not neglect the hygiene conditions during other days. He considered that the fundamental issue was to improve the environment of markets. He pointed out that the design and ventilation of some old markets were so poor that there was hardly any fresh air. He said that it was useless to install exhaust fans in these markets, and the high temperature and cramped conditions of the stalls therein had significantly increased the risk of spreading the avian flu. He urged the Administration to expedite actions to provide independent ventilation systems for the poultry stalls in public markets.

37. The Chairman advised that the improvements to the ventilation systems of public markets would be discussed under item III.

38. In reply to the Chairman's enquiry that cages used in the wholesale markets did not have bottom plates to contain chicken faeces, DAFC said that the design was to facilitate cleansing and to provide for ventilation during transportation.

39. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that members generally supported the implementation of the new hygiene measures but hoped that Government could consider providing some assistance to the trade to compensate for the loss of business on the rest day. In this connection, he requested the Administration to consider members' suggestion of reducing the licence fees or stall rental. The Administration noted the views.

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III. Upgrading the ventilation systems in public markets and improving market management

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1852/00-01(02))

40. In view of the poor design, congested environment and poor ventilation of the stalls in public markets managed by FEHD and HD markets, Mr Albert CHAN urged the Administration to conduct overall improvements to these markets to improve their hygiene conditions. He asked whether the Administration would consider providing ex-gratia payments to the affected stall tenants if an overhaul or re-structuring of stalls was required.

41. DFEH advised that the problem was largely a legacy of the past, because previous by the policy of the former municipal councils was to re-locate as many on-street hawkers as possible to indoor markets, and only a small area was allowed for each stall due to space constraints. However, independent air-conditioning and ventilation system was now provided for poultry stalls in new markets. DFEH agreed that the environment of some old markets was unsatisfactory and an overall review was necessary. However, she stressed that any reconstruction or overhaul could only be implemented by phases, because not all the stalls concerned would

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accept relocation. She said that the Administration would continue to carry out maintenance and improvements to existing markets wherever possible in a cost-effective manner. For markets where it was technically not feasible to install independent ventilation or air-conditioning systems, FEHD would see whether the number of stall could be reduced. For example, if a stall next to a poultry stall became vacant, FESH would not re-let the vacant stall so that more space could be provided for the poultry stall. She informed members that the projects for improving the ventilation systems of public markets were currently being monitored by a LegCo subcommittee.

42. As regards the position of HD markets, CHM(CP) advised that they encountered the same problems as FEHD markets. He said that since 1997, new markets were air-conditioned, and the size of poultry stalls was much bigger with each stall provided with its own scalding area and independent ventilation system. For the old markets, exhaust fans were now installed to improve the ventilation. He said that it was not possible for HD to withdraw all the stalls in the old markets for reconstruction or expansion. He advised that there was an on-going programme to improve the ventilation systems of these markets. He added that 28 out of the 130 HD markets were already air-conditioned, and air-conditioning would be installed for about four markets each year.

43. Mr Albert CHAN said that while he appreciated the problems and efforts made by Government in improving the conditions of old markets, he considered that Government should not just wait passively for the stall tenants to surrender their stalls as a means to alleviate the congestion in old markets. He suggested that Government should consider “buying-back” the licence from stall tenants to reduce the number of stalls in the congested markets. He considered that while this would involve public expenditure, this would be worth pursuing because recurrence of avian flu would cause great economic loss. DEFH undertook to consider Mr CHAN’s suggestion.

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44. Mr LAU Kong-wah said that he observed that the new hygiene guidelines were not complied with by the stall operators during his recent visit to three public markets. He commented that it was impractical to require operators to wear protective aprons when scalding chickens because the markets were very hot. He pointed out that the recent outbreak of avian flu viruses took place in markets which were not air-conditioned. Mr LAU expressed dissatisfaction about the slow progress in improving the ventilation of these markets, as 93 out of the 105 FEHD markets and 98 out of the 130 HD markets were still not air-conditioned. He suggested that the Administration might consider closing those markets where improvement works were technically not feasible.

45. DFEH responded that the LegCo subcommittee set up to follow up on the outstanding capital works projects of the former Provisional Municipal Councils (PMCs) had recently discussed the Administration’s proposed criteria to retro-fit air-conditioning to some 19 FEHD markets and cooked food centres. She advised

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that technical feasibility studies had to be carried out for each of these projects, after which FEHD would consult the District Councils and stall tenants concerned on the priority of these projects and the recurrent costs. She said that these projects would need to compete for government resources before they could be taken forward.

46. Responding to Mr LAU Kong-wah, CHM(CP) clarified that HD aimed at improving five markets every year; but air-conditioning might be installed in individual HD shopping arcades including the markets upon special request of the district managers. He said that HD faced similar problems as FEHD in that retro-fitting of air-conditioning was not possible in some old markets due to design or structural constraints. For example, the ceiling was too low or there was no space in some markets for installation of the air-conditioning facilities. However, he pointed out that some markets built in the 60s to 70s, such as those in Oi Man Estate and Ping Shek Estate, were of the open-design and did not require air-conditioning at all. He further said that in redeveloping the old housing estates, the markets would be rebuilt and air-conditioned, and there would be individual scalding space for poultry stalls. HD would continue to explore means to speed up the installation of air-conditioning in the existing markets.

47. Mr LAU Kong-wah commented that given HD's current pace of installing air-conditioning in its markets, it would take over nine years to complete the improvement works in all markets. He considered that HD should carry out the improvement works in all markets at the same time if they were found technically feasible. As regards the electricity cost for air-conditioning, he said that it was understandable that the stall tenants would not agree to bear the costs which were very expensive. He suggested that the Financial Secretary (FS) should allocate resources to alleviate the burden of the stall tenants.

48. CHM(CP) clarified that among the 98 markets without air-conditioning, half of them were either of the open design which did not require air-conditioning, or retrofitting works were technically not feasible due to design constraints. He said that for the remaining markets, it would not need to take nine years to complete the improvement works. He reiterated that old markets would be re-constructed along with the redevelopment of the housing estates.

49. Miss CHAN Yuen-han expressed support for Mr LAU's suggestion that Government should provide resources to expedite the retro-fitting projects in all public markets. With regard to the cleanliness of markets, she asked how the Administration would monitor the performance of the cleansing contractors to sustain Grade A cleanliness in the markets.

50. On the monitoring of the cleansing services of contractors, DFEH advised that clear and comprehensive standards were now specified in the new contracts. FEHD would also step up the training for the frontline staff in monitoring the contractors' performance. She said that at present the FEHD foremen might not

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have the necessary experience or ability in supervising the contractors' performance, and that FEHD was now considering introducing pilot schemes of appointing market managers to strengthen the management of public markets. Departmental guidelines would also be issued to frontline staff to ensure consistency in the monitoring standards.

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51. In response to Miss CHAN Yuen-han, DFEH agreed to provide supplementary information and diagrams on the monitoring plan for members' reference.

52. Mr CHAN Kam-lam queried why FEHD had to commission a consultancy study on the management of public markets. He asked whether it was due to manpower shortage or lack of management experience in FEHD. DFEH said that the existing manpower deployment for public market management was based on the policy of the former PMCs, and that each market was allocated one foreman in each shift, plus some overseers who were responsible for the management of a number of markets. She said that most foremen did not possess the necessary experience and qualifications required of modern market management. She said that market management was not just about keeping order in the market, viability was also a key issue. She conceded that Government was not good at running business, hence a consultancy study was commissioned to advise Government on how to enhance the viability of public markets and what mode of management should be pursued.

53. Mr CHAN Kam-kam disagreed that Government still needed consultancy advice on market management as the same Government officers had managed public markets for several decades. He asked whether the problem could be solved simply by increasing the management staff for public markets.

54. DFEH responded that enhancing viability involved the promotion of sale, determination of product prices, sale quantity, etc, which were all market decisions for which Government had no hands on. As foremen were not trained to undertake modern market management, it was proposed that a market manager with the necessary professional qualifications could be appointed on a pilot basis to oversee the order and hygiene conditions in public markets, as well as to promote the business and operation environment. She said that Government was still examining what qualifications should be required of a market manager.

55. Mrs Selina CHOW said that she was sympathetic to FEHD which only inherited the problems of the former PMCs. She agreed with DFEH that Government did not have sufficient knowledge about business operations, and that there should be an overall review on market management. She stressed, however, that it was also important to carry out improvements to existing markets, especially the ventilation of the old markets. She considered that if any of these old markets were to be reconstructed, the costs should not be passed on to the stall operators. She also requested that there should be adequate water supply in public markets to

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ensure their cleanliness.

56. Mr Andrew CHENG asked whether FEHD had any plans to increase the manpower for market management other than the proposed market manager scheme. He was concerned that the large number of staff joining the voluntary retirement scheme in FEHD would adversely affect the operation of the department and staff morale. He also suggested that the Panel should pass a motion to urge Government to expedite the retrofitting of air-conditioning projects in all public markets.

57. Mr Tommy CHEUNG shared the concern of speeding up the improvement works in public markets. He also expressed support for Mr Albert CHAN's suggestion of "buying back" the licence from stall tenants to reduce the number of stalls in public markets in order to improve the congestion. He said that for those markets where retrofitting works were not possible due to design constraints, the poultry stalls in these markets should be moved to a location with better ventilation.

58. Mr IP Kwok-him considered that the Administration should provide favourable business environment for public market operators so that they could compete on equal footing with the large private superstores. He suggested that Government should consider rental reduction for stall tenants to alleviate their pressure.

59. Mr WONG Yung-kan suggested that HD should follow the practice of FEHD and set up market management consultative committees for effective management of markets.

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60. DFEH undertook to consider members' views. She pointed out that the voluntary retirement scheme of FEHD provided an opportunity for the department to review its staffing structure for market management, including appointing suitable personnel to replace some of the foremen and overseers to meet the present-day requirements.

61. CHM(CP) noted members' views. He said that HD had to strike a balance of the interests of tenants and stall operators in providing a fair competition environment for private superstores and public markets. He said that various measures had been taken to enhance the competitiveness of public markets. For example, the food stalls had been moved near the public market in Phase II of Wah Fu Estate, and the market would be air-conditioned and provided with enlarged stalls.

Clerk

62. In view of members' grave concern about the slow progress of the Administration in improving the ventilation and design of the public markets, the Chairman sought member' views as to whether the Panels should write to FS and the Chairman of Housing Authority urging them to allocate resources for and to expedite the improvement projects for these markets. Members expressed support

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for the Chairman's proposal. The Chairman advised that he would write to FS and the Chairman of Housing Authority on behalf of the joint meeting of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene and the Panel on Housing.

63. The meeting ended at 11:20 a.m.

Legislative Council Secretariat
9 November 2001