

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2) 2346/00-01
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of Meeting
held on Monday, 23 April 2001 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP

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

Members Absent : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

Public Officers : Items II to IV

Attending

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

Miss Sarah WU
Deputy Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
(Environmental Hygiene)

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

Item V

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

Dr Gloria TAM
Assistant Director (Food Surveillance and Control)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Leslie SIMS
Assistant Director (Agriculture, Quarantine & Inspection)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Item VI

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

Dr Leslie SIMS
Assistant Director (Agriculture, Quarantine & Inspection)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

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

Staff in Attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)2

I. Confirmation of minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2001
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1328/00-01)

The minutes of the meeting were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1330/00-01(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 28 May 2001 -

- (a) Rental policy for public market stalls;
- (b) Contracting out of services by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD); and
- (c) Labelling system for genetically modified food.

3. On item (b) above, members also agreed that the Panel on Manpower should be invited to attend discussion of the item.

4. Mr LAU Kong-wah said that FEHD had recently publicized risk assessment results on aflatoxin contamination in food and the effects of consuming such contaminated food, such as acute liver damage. He considered such information important to consumers and requested the Administration to provide surveillance results of all the risk assessment studies on food. He suggested that the food surveillance programme of FEHD and the risk assessment studies on food should be discussed by the Panel at future meetings. Members agreed.

III. Information paper(s) issued since last meeting

5. Members noted that no information paper had been received from the Administration since the last meeting.

IV. Policy on Itinerant Hawker Licence (IHL)
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1330/00-01(03))

6. Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene) (DD(EH)) said that since the re-organization of municipal services on 1 January 2000, the policy on IHL as adopted by the two former Municipal Councils had not been changed. The Administration would decide on the future arrangement for IHL after conducting a review.

Action

7. DD(EH) said that the Administration's paper had set out current policies and the factors which the Administration needed to take into account in deliberating the way forward. She said that there were diverse views on the following issues -

- (a) whether the compulsory deletion policy adopted by the former Urban Council should be reinstated and extended to IHLs in the New Territories (NT); or
- (b) IHLs should be phased out by natural attrition.

DD(EH) said that if option (a) was preferred, it was necessary to consider whether a timetable should be set for phasing out all IHLs; and whether the current amount of ex-gratia payment (\$30,000) for surrender of IHLs should be adjusted. She welcomed members' views on these issues.

8. Mr LAU Kong-wah and Mr TAM Yiu-chung considered that there was no need to set a timetable for phasing out all IHLs, as many of them were near retirement age.

9. Mr LAU Kong-wah, Mr Abraham SHEK and Mr SZETO Wah supported standardizing the IHL policies in the urban area and in the NT so that there would be a fair and consistent policy for itinerant hawkers across the territory. These members also expressed support for extending the ex-gratia payment to itinerant hawkers in the NT. They considered that the amount of ex-gratia payment should be increased to encourage more IHL holders to surrender their licences, with a view to reducing the environmental nuisance generated by hawking activities.

10. Mr LAU Kong-wah said that in reviewing the amount of the ex-gratia payment, the Administration should have regard to the fact that an IHL holder relied on his licence to make a living. Mr TAM Yiu-ching, Mr Abraham SHEK and Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the present amount of \$30,000 was insufficient as many IHL holders were rather old and would not be able to find employment after surrendering their licence. These people might then have to rely on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). Mr SHEK also asked about the criteria for setting the current amount of ex-gratia payment and when the Administration would review the amount.

11. DD(EH) said that when the compulsory deletion policy was first introduced by the former UC in the early 1990s, the amount of ex-gratia payment was less than \$30,000. DD(EH) further said that as the amount was adjusted in accordance with the Consumer Price Index (A), it might be increased by a few thousand dollars if the inflation in the past few years was taken into account. The Administration would however welcome members' views in this regard.

12. Mr Abraham SHEK asked whether the Administration had discussed with IHL holders regarding the amount of ex-gratia payment. He was of the view that some IHL holders surrendered their licences because of illness or other reasons rather than

Action

attracted by the ex-gratia payment. DD(EH) said that the Administration had not received any suggestion from IHL holders on the amount of ex-gratia payments. However, the Administration would consider holding discussion with IHL holders on the matter.

13. The Chairman said that he was a member of the previous Urban Council in the 1990s and had participated in the formulation of the policy on the ex-gratia payment for surrender of IHLs. He added that the amount of \$30,000 was attractive in 1996 and many IHL holders in the urban area had opted to surrender their licences at that time in order to receive the ex-gratia payment. However, he agreed that the amount had become less attractive because of the change in economic situation.

14. Mr SIN Chung-kai agreed that it was easier for IHL holders to find other employment after surrendering their licence in 1996, therefore many IHL holders surrendered their licence for the ex-gratia payment. However, given the high employment rate at present days, he did not consider that increasing the amount of ex-gratia payment would help significantly to reduce the number of IHLs. He was worried that many of them might turn to illegal hawking or apply for CSSA after surrendering their licence. He considered that there was no urgency to delete all IHLs which could be phased out by natural attrition.

15. Mr LAU Kong-wah asked about the extent of the problem of IHL holders "renting out" their licences to unlicensed hawkers and "standing in" for them during raiding operations. DD(EH) said that IHLs were not transferable and the "renting out" or "standing in" arrangements were unlawful. She said that there were several cases under investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. She added that there were difficulties for FEHD staff to find out these cases, and no statistics were maintained on unauthorised transfer of licences. However, she stressed that the problem was not serious.

16. Mr SIN Chung-kai considered that the licence should be revoked if the holder was found to have rented out his licence or "standing in" for unlicensed hawkers. The Chairman added that the Administration should also take action against those IHL holders who had been re-sited to vacant market stalls but rented out their market stalls to other persons to take advantage of the rental difference.

17. DD(EH) said that the licence could be revoked in the cases cited by Mr SIN. She added that the tenancy agreement could be terminated if there was evidence that the stall lessees had rented out their stalls to other persons for profit. Licensees and stall lessees could appeal against the decision of revocation of licence or termination of stall tenancy.

18. DD(EH) further said that following the discovery of "standing in" incidents, FEHD had conducted internal reviews with a view to providing clearer enforcement guidelines for frontline staff to deal with cases where IHL holders were suspected to

Action

have rented out their licence or stood in for unlicensed hawkers. FEHD had also explained to the Hong Kong Vegetables, Food and Grocery Hawkers' Welfare and Fraternity Association Limited that IHL holders were not allowed to transfer their licences.

19. Referring to Annex C of the Administration's paper, Mr Abraham SHEK said that many IHL holders were quite old and they might need their family members to assist them in their daily hawking activities. DD(EH) responded that both the two former Municipal Councils did not allow IHL holders to hire assistants, as the policy was to control the number of IHLs through measures such as prohibiting the transfer of existing licences. She explained that it would create loopholes and pose enforcement difficulties if IHL holders were allowed to hire assistants.

20. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that while he supported standardizing the policies on IHL holders in the urban area and the NT, he was worried that IHL holders in the NT might be allowed to hawk in the urban area after the standardisation. DD(EH) said that IHL holders who had been issued licences by the former Regional Council were allowed to trade only in the NT. She agreed that the hawking problem in the urban area would be aggravated if the 547 existing IHL holders in the NT were allowed to trade in the urban area.

21. Mr SZETO Wah expressed concern about the illegal hawking problem and requested the Administration to step up enforcement. He suggested that the Administration could consider restricting hawking activities to designated areas in order to reduce the environmental nuisance caused by hawking in crowded areas. DD(EH) said that enforcement against illegal hawking was relatively easier than that against IHLs. She added that the Administration had studied the feasibility of "designated hawking areas" and discussed with District Councils measures to tackle the hawking problem. She said that Yan Oi Wai was an example of popular hawking sites. She stressed that the Administration would have to consider the circumstances in each case and obtain district support in identifying suitable sites for hawking activities.

22. In reply to Mr Tommy CHEUNG, DD(EH) said that it was the established policy that no new IHL would be issued. However, the 16 existing IHLs (Mobile Van) might be allowed to continue their business.

23. Mr Tommy CHEUNG commented that the present amount of ex-gratia payment would not be attractive to the IHL (Mobile Van) holders because the amount could not even cover the cost of the mobile van. He said that if the Administration wanted to phase out the existing IHLs (Mobile Van), it would need to offer more favourable terms to these IHL holders. DD(EH) said that as the Mobile Vans selling soft ice-cream currently did not cause much environmental nuisance, they might not need to be phased out as the other IHLs. These cases could be dealt with separately.

Action

24. The Chairman said that a working group had been set up under the former Provisional Urban Council and had made eight recommendations on the IHLs in 1999. Some of these recommendations had the support of DCs. He asked whether the Administration had followed up on these recommendations. DD(EH) undertook to provide information after the meeting.

Admin

25. In summing up the discussion, the Chairman said that the Panel supported that -

- (a) there should be a consistent policy for IHLs in the urban areas and in the NT;
- (b) the amount of ex-gratia payment for surrender of IHL should be increased; and
- (c) it was not necessary to set a time-table for phasing out all IHL holders.

Admin

The Chairman requested the Administration to take note of members' views in formulating its policy on IHL.

V. Control of local and imported food and live food animals
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1330/00-01(04))

26. Mr WONG Yung-kan noted that the Administration had strengthened the monitoring and control of imported food and live food animals/poultry, especially after the outbreak of avian flu in 1997. Mr WONG however expressed concern about the pig tattoo system and the control of pigs imported from the Mainland. He also asked about the percentages of sampling applied to local pigs and pigs imported from the Mainland. He said that according to the trade, the ratio for inspecting local pigs at slaughterhouses was 1/8 while those from the Mainland 1/10.

27. Assistant Director (Food Surveillance and Control) of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (AD(FSC)) said that importation of live food animals was subject to stringent control which was in line with international standards. Live food animals imported from the Mainland or from other places were subject to the same control system. The system was essentially a source-based control system and the exporting country was required to put in place a comprehensive monitoring system starting from the feeding stage to exportation, in order to ensure the health and hygiene standards of the live food animals. All consignments had to be accompanied by official health certificates.

28. AD(FSC) further explained that when the consignments arrived at the entry points (usually at Man Kam To), FEHD would verify the animal health certificates and the identification number, and would inspect the animals for any clinical signs of

Action

diseases, before they were sent to slaughterhouses. Before actual slaughtering took place, the pigs would have to go through the urine surveillance scheme which was introduced after the series of clenbuterol food poisoning cases in early 1998.

29. AD(FSC) stressed that the number of urine samples to be taken from pigs was based on the degree of risk rather than the place where the pigs came from. When the scheme started in August 1998, pigs from local and Mainland farms were subject to the same amount of sampling. However, after some time, a much higher percentage of local pigs (0.72%) was found to have problems than the Mainland pigs (0.06%). More samples were therefore taken from local pigs.

30. Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AD/AFCD) said that following the series of clenbuterol food poisoning cases in 1998, a voluntary pig tattoo system was introduced to enable tracing back to the farms of origin if pigs were found to have clenbuterol. The Administration aimed to formalise the pig tattoo system by introducing legislation.

31. Mr WONG Yung-kan was of the view that pigs from local farms and pigs imported from the Mainland should be subject to the same degree of sampling and inspection. AD(FSC) assured members that a fair and consistent sampling system was applied to all pigs irrespective of their places of origin. If the performance of pigs from Mainland was found to have deteriorated, FEHD would increase the inspection ratio for these pigs as well.

32. Mr LAU Kong-wah said that the former Municipal Councils published for general information periodical reports on food surveillance studies and the control of such food. He suggested that the Administration should also make available similar reports to the Legislative Council and the public for reference on a regular basis.

33. AD(FSC) said that after the establishment of FEHD in January 2000, reports on food sampling results were released for public information through the media every six months. The information was also put on the department's web site and published in the form of pamphlets and notices. FEHD had also introduced a new practice to carry out special investigations on certain food. The types of food chosen for investigation were based on the degree of risk and interest to the public. The investigation reports were made available for viewing on the department's web site. AD(FSC) emphasized that it was impractical to expect zero risk in food. However, the food safety standard in Hong Kong was comparable to international standard, and the percentage of food poisoning cases in Hong Kong was much lower than that of other advanced countries such as England and the United States.

34. As regards the hygiene and safety standards of local farms, AD/AFCD said that if a particular food commodity was found contaminated under the tracing programme, the Administration would work with the farmers concerned to identify the cause of contamination and to solve the problem. The Administration also helped the farmers

Action

understand what chemicals should not be used, and the proper ways of using agriculture and veterinary chemicals.

35. Mrs Selina CHOW said that she was not a member of the Panel, and she was concerned about the problem of illegal importation of food, especially frozen meat and poultry. She asked about the Administration's plans to combat these smuggling activities. She pointed out that as the illegally imported food was not subject to the food surveillance system, they might pose a hazard to public health. This had also created unfair competition to the trade.

36. AD(FSC) responded that the Administration had discussed with the trade measures to combat the smuggling activities. She explained that FEHD and Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) had different powers under the legislation in dealing with illegal importation of frozen meat and poultry. FEHD was responsible for enforcing the legal requirements for importation of meat and poultry, while C&ED was tasked to prevent the loss of Government revenue. AD(FSC) added that after the Mainland had resumed exporting live chickens to Hong Kong from February 1998, it had not allowed frozen chickens to be exported to Hong Kong. In view of the recent smuggling activities, the Administration had recently requested the trade authorities in the Mainland to consider relaxing the exportation of frozen poultry to Hong Kong.

37. Mrs Selina CHOW stressed that the trade was very concerned that an effective mechanism should be put in place as soon as possible to combat the illegal importation of frozen meat and poultry. She said that despite the anti-smuggling efforts of C&ED, the problem of illegal importation of frozen meat and poultry was still very serious. AD(FSC) said that anti-smuggling activities could only be combated effectively at source. The concern about illegal importation of frozen meat and poultry was on the agenda of the regular meetings with Mainland authorities.

38. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern about the frozen meat imported from overseas countries. He asked how FEHD could ascertain that prohibited chemicals had not been used as the urine surveillance scheme could not be applied to frozen meat. He also expressed doubt on the reliability of the health certificates issued by some countries, and asked if Hong Kong could require the exporting countries to prove that the prohibited chemicals had not been used to feed their food animals.

39. AD(FSC) explained that other sampling tests could still be conducted on the frozen meat imported. She said that no serious problem had been detected in the past years, except problems were found in two cases involving frozen pork imported from Thailand. The Administration had followed up the two cases with the Thailand authorities. AD(FSC) added that the import of frozen meat and poultry was governed by the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance. Exporting countries were required to prove that their food could meet the seven conditions stipulated in the Regulations for importation to Hong Kong on a trial basis. These conditions included the health condition of the

Action

food animals, the veterinary control, the training received by inspectors, the hygiene conditions of slaughterhouses and food factories, and whether there was legislation on food control in the home countries. During the trial period, 100% of the food imported from these countries would be inspected. AD(FSC) advised that FEHD did not rely only on the health certificates issued overseas in assessing the safety of imported food.

40. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the Administration would alert those countries exporting meat and poultry to Hong Kong that seven chemicals were prohibited for use in food animals. AD(FSC) advised that it was the practice of Hong Kong to notify other countries, through their consulates, of any legislative proposal on food control and the prohibition of use of chemicals in food animals. Moreover, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Hong Kong was obliged to notify the some 100 member countries of WTO any change in policy through the WTO Secretariat.

41. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed concern about the possibility of chilled/frozen pork being sold as fresh pork at retail outlets. He said that pig farmers had raised serious concern about the chilled pork imported from Thailand during their recent meeting with the Administration. He asked whether the hygiene and safety standard of the imported pork from Thailand could be maintained after the trial period.

42. AD(FSC) said that the Administration would provide a paper at a later stage on the proposals to further strengthen the control of frozen meat sold at retail outlets. She further said that frozen pork from Thailand was still undergoing the trial period and was subject to 100% check. AD(FSC) added that the only difference after the trial period was that Thailand would not need to notify the FEHD before the consignment reached Hong Kong. She said that after the trial period, such imported meat would still be subject to inspections at checkpoints, and the frequency of inspections would be adjusted according to the risk and past performance of the food. She said that Hong Kong could prohibit the import of those food which was found to perform poorly.

43. Mr TAM Yiu-chung asked about the duration of the trial period and whether government officers had actually visited the exporting countries to observe the process prior to the exportation of meat. AD(FSC) clarified that a quantity of imported food, rather than a period, was set for the trial. The trial would be considered completed if the imported food reached the prescribed quantity and if its performance throughout the period was satisfactory. AD(FSC) added that some government officers had actually visited Thailand in 1999 to observe the whole process from feeding in farms to exportation.

44. Mr SIN Chung-kai asked whether the Administration had any plans to enhance the hygiene standard of local farms, as the performance of local pigs lagged behind those imported from the Mainland. He suggested that a compliance officer scheme

Action

might be introduced to improve the management of local farms and to educate local farmers on the proper ways of raising pigs.

45. AD/AFCD agreed that there was a loophole in the current control system in the use of chemicals in food animals and a legislative proposal was being introduced to tighten control in this respect. He said that as most local farms were run by sole proprietors, no quality managers were employed in these farms. Under the proposed regulation to strengthen control of the use of chemicals in food animals, farmers would be provided training on how to use agricultural chemicals properly. The Administration would work with the industry to improve the control system and resolve any problem encountered in the compliance of the legislative requirements, such as maintaining records for the use of chemicals and labelling those animals which had been treated with chemicals.

46. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that the Administration should consider introducing a quality assurance scheme for local farm produce and require the farm operator to receive training. If the operator did not receive the training himself, he would have to employ a quality manager. The Administration noted the suggestion.

47. Mr WONG Yung-kan informed members that according to the statistics from Thailand, only 800 tons of frozen pork had been exported last year. However, the C&ED statistics showed that Hong Kong had received 5,000 tons of frozen pork from Thailand last year. He enquired about the reason for the difference in the export quantities and whether illegal import activities were involved.

48. AD(FSC) explained that the different export statistics might have been obtained from different sources. As far as she knew, the figure of 800 tons of exported frozen pork was obtained by the trade from the web site of the customs department of Thailand. She pointed out that the C&ED statistics that 8 000 tons of frozen pork were received from Thailand tallied with the figures provided by the export department of Thailand which was responsible for issuing official health certificates for the consignments of pork exported to Hong Kong. AD(FSC) said that it was possible that a lower export quantity was registered with the customs department of Thailand as the department was responsible for the revenue of the country.

VI. Strengthening control on pesticides
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1330/00-01(05))

49. AD/AFCD gave a powerpoint presentation on the proposals to strengthen control on pesticides. He briefed members on the background of the proposal, the problems with the current system and details of the legislative proposals.

Action

50. AD/AFCD said that there was presently no specific control over the use of pesticides and the Administration proposed to introduce a registration system based on the "product" approach rather than the present "active ingredient" approach. The existing pesticides would be re-classified into four categories to reflect differences in toxicity, persistence, use pattern and the environmental and health hazards. Under the proposal, the more hazardous pesticide products should only be available for use by qualified and trained users. For this purpose, the Administration proposed to license the pest control service providers. A registration system was also proposed for pesticide applicators who would be required to complete a training course provided by recognised training institutes. The registration was renewable every five years, based on the applicator's performance record.

51. AD/AFCD further said that local farmers would be required to undergo training before they were allowed to use the concentrated products for agricultural production. The training would be offered by AFCD as part of the normal extension programme.

52. On enforcement, AD/AFCD said that it was proposed that AFCD inspectors should be empowered to enter and search any place, and seize and detain chemicals and documents if they had reason to suspect that an offence had been committed. The maximum fine would also be increased in line with the inflation since the last revision.

53. AD/AFCD added that the retail of Category A pesticides, which were for domestic use, would be de-regulated since they were low concentration pesticides. He said that this was in line with the practice in other places, such as Canada, UK and USA. AFCD would however continue to prohibit the sale of unregistered or improperly labelled pesticide products. AFCD would also issue guidelines to retailers concerning the display and storage of such products.

54. AD/AFCD said that the Administration proposed to charge separately for the specific activities each dealer undertook, instead of charging a licence fee to cover all the four activities, namely, the manufacture, the import, the sale and the supply of pesticides. For those involved in only one activity, the proposal would reduce the cost of operation.

55. AD/AFCD further said a transitional period of two years was proposed to allow for registration of pesticide products under the new system, to license pest control service providers, to register pesticide applicators and to train the farmers before the new control system came into effect.

56. AD/AFCD informed members that the Administration was conducting a public consultation on the proposals. So far over 3,000 parties had been consulted, and these included farmers' associations, pesticide and pest control trade associations, existing pesticide licensees, green groups, public utilities and also the Advisory Council of Environment and Hygiene.

Action

(Post-meeting note: The presentation materials were circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1365/00-01 on 24 April 2001.)

57. Referring to paragraph 5(c) and (d) of the Administration's paper, Mr IP Kwok-him sought clarification on the seriousness of the problems and the potential risks in the current control system. He asked whether any medical incidents or confusion had occurred due to the lack of control over the names and the use of pesticides.

58. AD/AFCD advised that certain pesticide products contained toxic chemicals, and could cause serious damage if they were used incorrectly. Currently, many such products did not provide information on their ingredients, or instructions on proper use. The Administration therefore proposed to re-structure the classification of pesticide products to cover both active and inert ingredients of each product. This was to ensure that only safe products would be available to the public, and that all risks could be identified and controlled. AD/AFCD further said that currently products with similar names might have completely different active ingredients, and this could cause problems to health professionals in the event of medical emergencies. To avoid confusion, no two products should have similar names under the proposed registration system.

59. Mr IP Kwok-him asked whether those pesticide products which contained toxic chemicals and could cause explosion were to be used by licensed/authorised users or by any member of the public. AD/AFCD said that at present, this kind of products were available on the market and accessible to the public because the active ingredients had been registered. Under the new registration system, all ingredients in the product, active or inert, would be assessed to ensure that they were safe for use by the public, or required to be labelled clearly to spell out the potential danger it might cause.

60. In response to Mr IP's enquiry about the requirement for pesticide applicators to renew their registration every five years, AD/AFCD said that the Administration had to balance between over-regulating and providing some degree of control over the applicators. The five-year renewal arrangement would enable the Administration to re-assess the applicators and the need for introducing any necessary changes on a regular basis. He added that applicators who had a good track record of applying the chemicals safely would not have problems in renewing their registration. However, an applicator who had committed an offence under the Pesticides Ordinance might not be allowed for registration again. In reply to Mr IP, AD/AFCD said that there were about two to three thousand pesticide applicators in operation.

61. The Chairman asked whether the five-year registration period was justified on the basis of the pace of development or changes in the pesticide technology. AD/AFCD responded that the five-year period was reasonable as there had not been massive changes in the range of pesticide products on the market.

Action

62. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed support for the proposed policy which was to enhance protection of public health.

63. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that he supported the legislative proposal in principle. However, he was worried that the two-year transitional period might not be sufficient to train up all farmers on the use of pesticides. He asked whether training would be provided for farmers, such as the use of new products, after the two-year period. AD/AFCD assured members that training was a vital part of the Administration's programme to ensure proper use of pesticides in order to protect public health.

64. The Chairman said that the proposed regulatory system was in the right direction. He asked whether the label of a pesticide product would also show the category it belonged to, and why de-regulation would only apply to Category A but not Category B products.

65. AD/AFCD advised that the category of a pesticide product would be shown on its label in future. As regards the control of Category B products, he explained that these products also contained some concentrated chemicals which should be regulated and labelled. However, Category A referred to those domestic ready-to-use products of low concentration, and they were already properly packed and labelled in the registration process. He said that the proposal was in line with international practice.

66. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that the Panel generally supported the proposed amendments to the Pesticides Ordinance.

VII. Any other business

67. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:30 a.m.

Legislative Council Secretariat
28 September 2001