

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)336/00-01
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/HS

LegCo Panel on Health Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 16 October 2000 at 9:00 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members Present : Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung

Members Absent : Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon Bernard CHAN
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum

Public Officers Attending : Mr Paul TANG, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A)

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

Mrs Rita LAU, JP
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

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

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

Ms Rhonda LO
Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Operations) 3

Dr K K LIU
Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
(Agriculture, Quarantine and Inspection)

Dr S P MAK, JP
Acting Deputy Director of Health

Dr L Y TSE
Consultant (Community Medicine), Department of Health

Mr David TONG Hin-yeung
Acting Deputy Commissioner of Customs and Excise

Clerk in Attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 4

Staff in Attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 8

I. Meeting with the Administration on present control measures on clenbuterol poisoning
(*LC Paper No. CB(2) 57/00-01(01)*)

Members noted the Administration's paper which detailed the present control system regarding the feeding of clenbuterol to pigs, the present situation regarding the recent clenbuterol food poisoning cases and the actions taken by the Government.

2. Mr Fred LI said that due to the fact that there was no specific legislation to

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regulate the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals at present, the Administration could only make prosecutions against retailers of pork and pig offal containing clenbuterol and not the farmers who fed their pigs with clenbuterol. This was extremely unfair to the former who had purchased the problematic pig products from approved wholesalers in good faith. Referring members to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper which stated that the unsatisfactory rates for local and imported pig urine samples collected at slaughterhouses in 1999 were 1.09% and 0.21% respectively whereas that from January 2000 to early this month was 0.87% and 0.049% respectively, Mr LI expressed dissatisfaction that the Administration had not stepped up monitoring of the local pig farms despite the fact that clenbuterol residues were found in some pig urine samples and that the occurrence of clenbuterol residues in local pig urine samples over that of imported pig samples had increased greatly over the past two years. Mr LI further said that although it was stated in the Administration's paper that a new regulation to control the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals would be introduced into the Legislative Council shortly, he nevertheless expressed disappointment at the long time taken by the Administration to produce the necessary legislation. He asked the Administration about the actions it had been taken to ensure food safety and safeguard public health since the first case of clenbuterol food poisoning appeared in August 1998.

3. Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Agriculture, Quarantine and Inspection) (AD(AFC)) responded that since the first case of clenbuterol food poisoning appeared in August 1998, a series of measures had been taken by the Administration to tackle the problem. For instance, the then Agriculture and Fisheries Department (AFD) and the Department of Health (DH) regularly conducted joint inspections to local pig farms to examine whether pigs had been fed with clenbuterol. Pig urine samples were collected at the farms for laboratory tests of clenbuterol residues. If clenbuterol residues were found in the samples, the farmers concerned would be advised against the use of clenbuterol. Apart from this, farmers had been advised on the proper use of animal feeds and the then AFD had established a working group with farmers on clenbuterol testing and the tattoo system.

4. As there was currently no specific legislation to regulate the feeding of clenbuterol to pigs, prosecutions could only be made against the farmers for illegal possession of clenbuterol under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance. AD(AFC) conceded that the lack of a specific legislation to regulate the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals was unsatisfactory. To rectify such deficiency, the Administration would shortly introduce a new regulation under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance to control the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals. In the proposed new regulation, the initial list of prohibited chemicals covered clenbuterol and related compounds, artificial hormones that were known to cause cancer and antibiotics that should be reserved for fighting serious diseases. It would also specify the "Maximum Residue Limit" in meat and tissues in line with international practice for 37 antibiotics.

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5. Responding to Mr LI's comments about the unfairness of prosecuting sellers of pork and pig offal containing clenbuterol who had purchased the pig products from licensed wholesalers and other approved sources, Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) said that according to sections 52 and 54 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, it was an offence to sell food which was unfit for human consumption, or not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser. As food sellers and restaurant owners were at the frontline for the provision of food to the public, it was of paramount importance that they should exercise due diligence in sourcing meat and other food products to ensure that the food they sold was fit for human consumption. As such, procuring pig products from licensed wholesalers and other approved sources which were later found to be problematic should not be an excuse for exonerating the retailers and restaurant owners from the responsibility.

6. Noting that owners of two meat stalls had recently been prosecuted for selling pork and pig offal containing clenbuterol, Mr Fred LI enquired whether farmers responsible for the problematic pigs would also be prosecuted. DFED replied that she could not give an answer to Mr LI's question as court proceedings had already commenced in the two cases concerned. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the matter might be pursued by the court if the defendants could provide information on the origin of the problematic pig products.

7. Referring to the working group mentioned by AD(AFC) in paragraph 3 above, Mr WONG Yung-kan enquired about the degree of cooperation between the pig farmers and the Administration on clenbuterol testing and the tattoo system. AD(AFC) replied that the pig farmers and the Administration had established a close working relationship, as evidenced by the fact that the working group had met 15 times since the issue flared up in 1998 and that its operation had been smooth.

8. Mr WONG further enquired about the measures adopted by the Administration in screening out pigs containing clenbuterol at the three licensed slaughterhouses. Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Food Surveillance and Control) (AD(FSC)) replied that before pigs were slaughtered for human consumption, they were subject to ante-mortem inspections by veterinary officers. Ante-mortem inspections aimed to screen out pigs with manifest lesions or disease conditions for isolation slaughter. This would prevent, as far as possible, the spread of diseases among the pigs awaiting slaughter and avoid the infections carried by the sick animals from getting into the meat production process to contaminate the slaughter hall, plant, equipment, personnel, pig carcasses and parts. Urine samples would then be randomly taken from pigs which passed the ante-mortem inspections for screening test on clenbuterol residues. The time required to obtain the test results was normally four hours. If clenbuterol residues were found in the samples, the entire consignment of pigs with the same tattoo number would be withheld from slaughtering and kept in the

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waiting lairages for two to three days to allow time for the pigs to excrete the clenbuterol residues from their bodies. Upon the expiry of the withholding period, another round of urine samples would be collected from the same consignment of pigs to see whether clenbuterol residues still appeared in the samples. If clenbuterol residues were not found in the samples, the consignment of pigs would be given the clearance for slaughtering; otherwise, they would be destroyed. AD(FSC) however pointed out that if the amount of clenbuterol residues appeared in the samples was minuscule, the consignment of pigs would still be slaughtered although the pig offal would be destroyed. This was because according to local and overseas experiences, pork would not be contaminated by clenbuterol in 99% of the cases if the amount of clenbuterol residues appeared in the pig urine was minuscule.

9. AD(AFC) supplemented that if the consignment of pigs was found to be contaminated by clenbuterol, inspection would be made to the farm concerned. If the farmers concerned were found to be in possession of clenbuterol, prosecution would be made against them.

10. Referring to the recent clenbuterol food poisoning cases, Dr TANG Siu-tong asked the Administration to inform members of the number of cases caused by imported pigs and pigs from local farms respectively. As pork sold at meat stalls was very often skinned, Dr TANG queried how health inspectors could tell whether the pork came from approved sources when the skin of the pig carcasses bearing the "Government Inspected" stamp had been removed. Dr TANG further said that at a Yuen Long District Council (DC) meeting held the week before, a government official told the DC members that the reason why illegal slaughtering activities still existed in Yuen Long was because FEHD staff would not take enforcement actions against illegal slaughterhouses after office hours.

11. Responding to the last point made by Dr TANG, DFEH said that there was no question of such a situation as the special teams set up by FEHD to combat illegal slaughtering activities were tasked to carry out enforcement actions at all hours. Nevertheless, she would investigate whether and if so why such a statement had been made to the Yuen Long DC. DFEH assured members that the Administration attached great importance to safeguarding food safety by closely monitoring every critical point along the food chain. For instance, after the pigs were slaughtered at the licensed slaughterhouses, health inspectors would spot check the delivery vehicles approved for transportation of fresh meat to see whether they observed the hygiene conditions, such as setting the temperature of the vehicle compartment at a certain level to maintain the freshness of the meat and not placing carcasses and offal on the floor of the vehicle compartment.

12. On the question concerning how health inspectors could tell whether the pork sold at meat stalls came from approved sources, Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Operations) 3 (AD(O)) said that health inspectors would

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examine "Government Inspected" stamps on pig carcasses and invoices to see whether the pork and offal on sale were from approved sources. In respect of the latter, the health inspectors would also examine whether the amount of pork on sale corresponded with that indicated on the invoices. AD(O) pointed out that during the past 10 months, more than 9 000 surprise inspections had been conducted to meat stalls. Surprise inspections were conducted at different time periods throughout the day. For example, inspections would sometimes be conducted around 4 to 5 am when the pig carcasses arrived at the meat stalls, which was considered the most opportune time to examine whether pig carcasses came from approved sources. AD(O) further said that from the beginning of 2000 to the present day, prosecutions had been made against eight meat stalls selling pork and offal from unapproved source, out of which three had been concluded and successful, with the remaining five still pending in the court. Since the occurrence of the recent clenbuterol food poisoning cases, FEHD had stepped up surprise inspections to all meat stalls with 1 500 inspections conducted to date, and had been working relentlessly day and night to check suspected illegal slaughterhouses.

13. In regard to Dr TANG's question on the origin of the pork and pig offal containing clenbuterol, DFEH said that following receipt of the first report of suspected clenbuterol food poisoning case on 6 October 2000, a joint investigation was immediately launched by DH and FEHD. Prosecutions were subsequently made against meat stalls found to be selling the problematic pig products which had caused clenbuterol food poisoning. To raise public awareness not to buy pork and pig offal from unlicensed outlets, such prosecutions were publicized on 13 October 2000. Apart from tracing the origin of the pork and pig offal containing clenbuterol at the retail end, enforcement actions had been taken by FEHD against illegal slaughtering activities. DFEH pointed out that such enforcement actions were effective in tackling the problem at source, as evidenced by the fact that large-scale illegal slaughtering activities had largely ceased and small-scale illegal slaughterhouses operating in more secluded locations in the New Territories had taken their place. In this regard, she commended the assistance rendered by the Heung Yee Kuk, the Rural Committees and the DCs concerned in encouraging villagers to report any suspected illegal slaughtering activities to the Administration through FEHD's hotline. FEHD also worked closely with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) to combat illegal import of pigs. DFEH further said that to deter sale of problematic meat products and operation of illegal slaughtering activities, appeals had been made for the court to hand down heavier sentence on the offenders.

14. Mr Andrew CHENG disagreed that illegal slaughtering activities were under control, having regard to the fact that only a handful of persons had been arrested. He considered that one of the main reasons why some people ran the risk of carrying out illegal slaughtering activities was because the existing penalties for doing so were not severe enough. As FEHD was the department with the largest number of Voluntary Retirement (VR) Scheme-takers, Mr CHENG suspected that it had

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adversely affected staff morale which in turn had resulted in the small number of people arrested for operating illegal slaughtering activities. Mr CHENG also said that according to his knowledge, many meat stall operators were not aware of the FEHD's hotline. He hoped that there would be more publicity in this regard.

15. Responding to the last point made by Mr CHENG, DFEH said that the FEHD's hotline, i.e. 2868 0000, was well publicized as it appeared in all FEHD's documents, posters and even on apparatus such as litter containers. On the question of low staff morale caused by the VR Scheme, DFEH said that there was no question of such a situation as officers undertaking duties relating to food safety did not belong to the 59 grades designated under the VR Scheme. She assured members that the morale of staff tasked to operate raids on illegal slaughterhouses and "siu mei" factories remained very high. She knew it through her personal contacts with the staff members concerned. DFEH added that the Administration had to consider and make appropriate arrangements to process all VR applications, including that from FEHD. The relevant Panel would be briefed on the staffing and service implications on FEHD in due course.

16. AD(O) said that due to the intensified operations against illegal slaughtering activities launched by FEHD and other relevant departments, the existing illegal slaughtering activities were mostly of a very small-scale. They usually operated inside a shed or even a container and lasted for one to two hours only. She further said that sentences given by the courts to the operators of illegal slaughtering activities and retailers selling meat not fit for human consumption were not light. For example, the four persons arrested for operating illegal slaughtering activities during the first nine months of 2000 were all sentenced to seven days' imprisonment with one of them under a three years' probation. As regards retailers selling meat not fit for human consumption, AD(O) said that a recent court case sentenced the offender to a fine of \$5,000 and three months' imprisonment under a 18-month probation.

17. Mr Andrew CHENG further enquired about the existing arrangements with the relevant Mainland authorities to ensure that pigs imported from the Mainland to Hong Kong were fit for human consumption, and the actions taken to combat illegal import of pigs.

18. Responding to the first question raised by Mr CHENG, DFEH said that since its set up on 1 January 2000, FEHD had assumed responsibilities for maintaining and fostering a close liaison with its Mainland counterpart in ensuring food imported from the Mainland to Hong Kong was fit for human consumption. Notably, the Secretary for the Environment and Food led a five-member delegation to pay a visit to its counterpart in Beijing in May 2000 to exchange views on improving cooperation between the two sides in ensuring food safety. To this end, an exchange of minutes was agreed and signed in September 2000. FEHD had also established close ties with its counterparts in Shenzhen and the Guangdong Province. For examples,

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enquiries and exchange of intelligence were frequently made over the telephone, and expert teams and representatives from both sides met regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern.

19. On the second question raised by Mr CHENG, Acting Deputy Commissioner of Customs and Excise (DCCE(Ag)) said that C&ED worked closely with FEHD and the Police to combat illegal import of pigs and meat on land, at sea and by air. Apart from daily enforcement actions, C&ED had launched 59 operations, 42 of which were jointly with FEHD, to combat the illegal import of live pigs and meat at land boundary control points in the first nine months of 2000. Some 33 900 kg of pork was seized. At sea, Customs officers had searched 13 167 vessels in their daily actions with a total seizure of 213 730 kg of pork. DCCE(Ag) pointed out that due to the stepping up of maritime patrols by C&ED and the Police, no live pig had been found to be smuggling into Hong Kong by vessels since July 1998. In recent years, amongst the meat found to be carried by people entering Hong Kong at the Lo Wu and Sha Tau Kok immigration control points, no pig offal was present. In the first nine months of this year, several thousand people entering Hong Kong via Lo Wu immigration control point had been checked for carrying food items and 2 200 of them had been found to be bringing in pork. The seized pork was sent to FEHD and AFCD for the necessary follow-up action. Since the recent occurrence of clenbuterol food poisoning incidents, C&ED had stepped up on the checking of container vehicles going through the land boundary control points. DCCE(Ag) further said that the effectiveness of the enforcement actions taken by C&ED to combat illegal import of live pigs and meat was greatly enhanced by the intelligence provided by traders, importers and the Guangdong authorities concerned. In the first nine months of this year, more than 10 anti-smuggling operations of live pigs and meat had been made possible because of intelligence provided by informants. For example, due to the intelligence provided, C&ED had successfully intercepted two huge consignments of illegal imported meat in March and May 2000.

20. Dr LO Wing-lok said that it appeared that the Mainland had a more stringent system than Hong Kong in ensuring pigs were not fed with clenbuterol, i.e. before pigs from registered farms could be exported, they had to be accompanied by Animal Health Certificates issued by the State Administration for Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China. Dr LO enquired whether consideration would be given to adopting such certification in Hong Kong; and if so, whether the existing legislation needed to be amended to enable implementation of such system. Dr LO further enquired whether the Administration could give a guarantee that pigs slaughtered at licensed slaughterhouses were fit for human consumption.

21. Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (DSEF) responded that as there had not been an upsurge in the unsatisfactory rate of pig urine samples collected at slaughterhouses and having regard to the effective enforcement actions taken by

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C&ED to combat illegal import of meat and pork, the Administration suspected that the recent clenbuterol food poisoning incidents involved local pigs slaughtered at illegal slaughterhouses. He pointed out that since the implementation of a series of measures to ensure food safety in August 1998, the percentage of food samples found to contain clenbuterol had decreased drastically from 12.5% (before August 1998) to 1.1% in 1999 and continued dropping. The testing of pig urine samples collected at slaughterhouses also showed that the number of problematic pigs was small. Amongst 55 600 samples tested in 1999, only 500 (representing 0.98%) were unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory rates for local and imported pig urine samples were 1.09% and 0.21% respectively. From January to early October 2000, some 44 000 urine samples were taken and amongst them 314 (0.17%) showed unsatisfactory results (11 of the unsatisfactory samples were found in October). The satisfactory rates for local and imported pig urine samples were 0.87% and 0.049% respectively.

22. On the question of adopting a certification system in Hong Kong, AD(AFC) said that there was no need for such as imported pigs and pigs from local farms all had to be subjected to the same stringent food safety control procedures. He pointed out that local and imported pigs would have to bear distinct assigned tattoo numbers before they were slaughtered so that their origins could be traced. Before slaughtering could take place, pig urine samples would be taken for testing of clenbuterol. If clenbuterol residues were found in the samples, the entire batch of pigs would be withheld from slaughtering. Moreover, prosecution could be made against the local farms concerned under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance for illegal possession of clenbuterol where possible.

23. Mr Tommy CHEUNG opined that to prevent the occurrence of clenbuterol food poisoning incidents, the most effective way was to tackle the problem at source. To this end, he enquired whether local farms had been inspected to examine whether clenbuterol was used in the feeding of pigs. Referring to paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper which stated that from 1999 to the present day 19 prosecutions made against the sale of pork or pig offal containing clenbuterol had been concluded and successful, Mr CHEUNG enquired whether the reason the prosecutions were successful was because the operators concerned procured the pig products from unapproved sources regardless of whether they knew the products were contaminated by clenbuterol. In his view, it was extremely unfair that meat stall and restaurant operators should be penalized if they procured from licensed wholesalers and other approved sources which unfortunately turned out to be problematic. Moreover, the existing urine sampling method was not 100% fool-proof that all pigs slaughtered at licensed slaughterhouses were fit for human consumption.

24. On the first question raised by Mr CHEUNG, AD(AFC) said that in the first nine months of 2000, inspections had been made to 68 pig farms to examine whether clenbuterol was used in pig feeding. If the farms were found to be using clenbuterol, a warning would be issued. These farms would be closely monitored when they sent

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pigs for slaughtering and more pig urine samples would be taken from their consignment of pigs.

25. As to Mr CHEUNG's comments regarding the unfairness of prosecuting meat stall and restaurant operators, DFEH reiterated that these operators had the responsibility to sell safe food. This however did not mean that the responsibility for ensuring food safety lied solely on retailers and restaurant operators. She pointed out that food safety control was a shared responsibility among three key parties, i.e. the Government, the trade and the consumers. Specifically, the Government was responsible for ensuring compliance of all food safety related rules and regulations by the trade on one hand, and providing adequate information to consumers on the other. The trade had to take responsibility and exercise due diligence to ensure that their products were safe for consumption. Consumers had to watch out and be aware of the risk when making purchase choices and to observe safe food practices at home. DFEH conceded that the existing urine sampling method was not 100% fool-proof. Nevertheless, such method was the best one under the circumstances. In view of the great demand for fresh pork by the public, it would not be feasible to subject every pig to urine test before slaughtering as this would impose enormous strain on space, manpower and laboratory resources. DFEH however pointed out that the food surveillance programme targeted on clenbuterol in pork and pig also aimed to ensure pork and pig offal were fit for human consumption. She said that if food samples were found to contain clenbuterol, FEHD would immediately inform the public and take enforcement actions against the retailers concerned. This would have deterrent effect to curb the sale of pork and offal containing clenbuterol.

26. AD(FSC) supplemented that upon the implementation of the targeted food surveillance programme on clenbuterol in pork and pig offal in 1998, 200 samples were subject to chemical tests every week. As the percentage of samples found to contain clenbuterol decreased drastically, the number of samples taken was reduced to 90 every week (more would be taken during festive days) in 1999. In view of the recent clenbuterol food poisoning incidents, the number of samples taken had increased to 120 about week.

27. Mr CHEUNG further enquired whether the Mainland authorities also conducted inspections to farms to examine whether clenbuterol was used in pig feeding. DFEH responded that Mainland pigs allowed to be exported to Hong Kong all came from registered farms. In order to be registered, farms had to meet the requisite requirements set out by the authorities concerned. She further said that the pig tattooing and tracing system and urine sampling of pigs for testing of clenbuterol were also applicable to Mainland pigs. To her knowledge, some pig farms in the Mainland had been ordered to close down by the authorities when their pigs failed the urine test conducted in Hong Kong.

28. Mr LAW Chi-kwong enquired whether any successful prosecutions had been

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made against farmer feeding clenbuterol to pigs in the past, and whether any local pig farms had been ordered to close down if they were found to feed pigs with clenbuterol. Mr LAW further enquired whether consideration would be given to prohibiting those farms whose pigs had failed the urine test collected at the slaughterhouses to send their pigs for slaughtering in future.

29. DSEF responded that as there was currently no specific legislation to regulate the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals, it was very difficult to successfully prosecute a farmer for using clenbuterol in the feeding of pigs. This was because the pig farmers could claim that they were not aware of the fact that the animal feeds they bought from the suppliers contained clenbuterol. To remedy the situation, a new regulation to control the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals would be introduced into the Legislative Council shortly. Acting Deputy Director of Health (DDH(Ag)) supplemented that the main ambit of the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance and the Antibiotics Ordinance was to regulate the possession, supply and sale, etc. of pharmaceutical products, including registration of drugs and licensing of drug premises and wholesalers, etc. for the purpose of treatment and prevention of diseases. As such, the only way that successful prosecutions could be made against farmers using clenbuterol was that there must be substantial evidence to prove that the farmers concerned did knowingly procure and possess the unregistered drug. She further pointed out that even if the farmers were successfully prosecuted under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, there was no provision in the Ordinance allowing the court to revoke the farm licenses as the latter were not licensed under the Ordinance. DDH(Ag) further said that although the Administration had attempted to bring prosecutions against farmers who were found to be using clenbuterol in feeding pigs which had led to the clenbuterol food poisoning incidents in 1998, no prosecutions had been made because of insufficient evidence.

30. In regard to the suggestion of prohibiting those farms whose pigs had failed the urine test collected at the slaughterhouses to send their pigs for slaughtering in future, Deputy Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Food and Public Health) said that at present the legislation did not empower the Administration to do so but would be provided for in the proposed new regulation to control the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals whereby the Authority might order a period of suspension to prevent farmers from supplying contaminated food animals. DFEH also said that to ensure pigs were fit for human consumption, FEHD would increase the number of pig urine samples from the consignment pigs coming from the farms which had the previous records of failing the urine test.

31. Mr Michael MAK enquired how the public could tell whether the meat stalls were reputable; how to identify that the pork came from licensed slaughterhouses if the pork was skinned, and under what circumstances the Administration would ban the sale of pork and offal.

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32. DFEH responded that the public should purchase pork and pig offal from licensed meat stalls and fresh provisions shops. Under the licensing system, the health inspectors would conduct regular and surprise inspections to meat stalls and fresh provisions shops to ensure that they complied with the hygiene conditions and that the pork and pig offal came from approved sources. DFEH conceded that the existing arrangement of stamping several marks on the pork carcasses was not ideal. To this end, the Administration was exploring the feasibility of marking the pork carcasses with stripes which was practised in some overseas countries. On the question of banning the sale of pork and pig offal, DFEH said that given the financial and legal implications of such a decision, this would only be taken unless public health was at risk. She said that the Administration had no intention of adopting this option at present, as no case of clenbuterol food poisoning had been reported since 9 October 2000.

33. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the amount of illegal pork seized was still very significant. He noted that since early this year, 42 cases of illegally imported meat were intercepted at the Shek Chung Au Police Checkpoint. 28 persons were arrested and 13 300 kg of pork was seized. In the light of this, Mr WONG was of the view that the Administration should step up the checking of goods/container vehicles at land boundary control points and raised the penalty for people involved in the illegal import of pork.

34. DFEH responded that FEHD, C&ED and the Police would continue to launch joint operations to combat illegal import of meat and pork at land boundary control points. She pointed out that as a result of such collaborative efforts, no live pigs and pig offal were seized in recent years. In regard to the question of penalty, DCCE(Ag) said that under the existing Import and Export Ordinance, people convicted of importing meat and pork illegally could face a maximum of seven years' imprisonment and a fine of \$2 million. DFEH also said that under the Public Health and Municipal Services, offenders could face up to a maximum of \$50,000 fine and imprisonment of six months.

35. Dr LO Wing-lok enquired whether the communications between FEHD and AFCD had improved now that both departments came under the Environment and Food Bureau. Dr LO further enquired about the role of DH in managing the recent clenbuterol food poisoning incidents.

36. DSEF assured members that FEHD and AFCD had been working well under the new administrative structure. DDH(Ag) said that upon receipt of the first report of clenbuterol food poisoning case, DH had informed FEHD in the first instance so that the necessary follow-up actions could be taken.

37. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:53 am.

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Legislative Council Secretariat
22 November 2000